

## Aren't All Religions the Same?

**Jeremiah 2:5-13 HCSB** Here is what the LORD says: What fault did your fathers find in Me that they went so far from Me, followed worthless idols, and became worthless themselves? (6) They stopped asking: Where is the LORD who brought us from the land of Egypt, who led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and ravines, through a land of drought and darkness, a land no one traveled through and where no one lived? (7) I brought you to a fertile land to eat its fruit and bounty, but after you entered, you defiled My land; you made My inheritance detestable. (8) The priests quit asking: Where is the LORD? The experts in the law no longer knew Me, and the rulers rebelled against Me. The prophets prophesied by Baal and followed useless idols. (9) Therefore, I will bring a case against you again. *This is* the LORD's declaration. I will bring a case against your children's children. (10) Cross over to Cyprus and take a look. Send *someone* to Kedar and consider carefully; see if there has ever been anything like this: (11) Has a nation *ever* exchanged its gods? (but they were not gods!) Yet My people have exchanged their Glory for useless idols. (12) Be horrified at this, heavens; be shocked and utterly appalled. *This is* the LORD's declaration. (13) For My people have committed a double evil: They have abandoned Me, the fountain of living water, and dug cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that cannot hold water.

Recently one of the major denominations met in Columbus to debate, of all things, whether or not Jesus Christ is the one true Savior of the world. Is he the universal Savior or might there be several? What about the other world religions and their claims? Some people wonder if perhaps there are not many paths to God? If you asked the average American today what the difference was between the major world religions, they would probably mumble something about all religions being pretty much the same. People assume that all religions have nearly the same moral teachings and ideals. They might have different names for God, but it is the same God. These religions, many people believe, may travel different roads, but they all lead to God. As long as you believe in something, as long as you believe in God, it really doesn't matter what form your belief takes.

The truth is that these religions are all very different and even contradict each other at crucial points. What this means is that we are left with two options: either none of them are true, or one of them is true and the others are not. Having said that, I want to be gracious and treat these religions with respect. However, it is important to understand that there are substantial differences. This morning we will look at the belief systems of the five major world religions: Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity. All religions are not the same, and hopefully you will see that this morning. I hope that you will be a student today and learn as much as possible, because there is the trend in our culture to be pluralistic and politically correct, dismissing the differences, and put all religions into one big melting pot.

### I. BUDDHISM

#### A. Buddhism is atheistic.

Let's begin by taking a look at Buddhism. Buddhism is basically an atheistic religion. That may sound shocking and even contradictory to some, but it is the truth. Most Buddhists oppose the concept of an ultimate God. Buddhism is not about finding God or even finding his will. Buddha himself did not claim to be divine, nor did he claim that his teachings were derived from a divine source. There are about 355 million Buddhists worldwide, and one of them is Dr. Marian Caudron, professor of Eastern religion at Northwestern University. She said in a recent interview,

"God is not the focus or ultimate concern of the Buddhist tradition. Instead, the Buddhist

tradition focuses on the teachings of the historic Buddha.”

### **B. Buddhism primarily teaches detachment.**

Buddha simply means “Enlightened One.” His original name was Siddhartha Gautama. He lived about 483 B.C. and was born on the border between Nepal and India. He was born a prince and had a lavish palace and everything he could want, but he was troubled about the meaning of life. ‘If I have it all, why am I not happy?’ he asked himself. And so as a young man he left his family, and he went seeking the truth. He tried everything from indulgence and strict asceticism, but as he sat under a Bo Tree he discovered that the problem of life was craving. Craving leads to dissatisfaction. You want something, and even when you get it you are dissatisfied with it or you want more. Buddhism teaches that enlightenment is the path to bring an end to craving.

Buddhism’s central teaching is how to arrive at the ideal state where there is no longer any craving, in fact, any kind of desire or feeling. That state is called Nirvana. It is the state of disinterest toward all that is around you. In short, the way to avoid unhappiness and suffering is not to care or feel anything at all. You form no earthly attachments.

### **C. Jesus teaches involvement.**

Contrast this with Jesus’ words that

- he came to give us life and give it to the full (**John 10:10**).
- He said he came that his joy might be in us and that our joy might be complete (**John 15:11**).

Instead of withdrawing from life and any emotional attachment to it, Jesus taught that we are to enter into life in the fullest sense. We are not to escape from life, but to take it on with enthusiasm because, difficult though it may be, he is with us.

- “In this world you will have trouble,” he said. “But take heart! I have overcome the world” (**John 16:33**).

If I lose all attachments I form no attachment of love for others. But Jesus said that

- we are to love others as we love ourselves (**Mark 12:31**).

### **D. Buddhism is essentially narcissistic.**

There are many people who are practical Buddhists. They withdraw and shield themselves from emotion and protect themselves from emotional attachments to others so they will not be hurt. But Jesus taught us to even love our enemies, and do good to those who spitefully use us — the very people who have the power to hurt us most. Buddhism teaches that life and the created world are illusory, and to enter Nirvana is to escape the illusion. Salvation for the Buddhist is not salvation from sin, but salvation from suffering.

## **II. HINDUISM**

### **A. Hinduism teaches that there is no god and that there are thousands.**

Buddhism’s roots are in Hinduism. Certain branches of Hinduism are atheistic, and certain other branches of it can have thousands of gods.

### **B. Hinduism teaches that you can be god.**

And, in fact, if you follow certain rules and practice meditation, you can become a god. Here is where new age religion finds such a close tie with Hinduism. Rather than a belief in one transcendent God whose creation is separate from himself, everything is a god; we can all be a god. So New-Agers are into meditation and getting in touch with their own divinity.

### **C. Hindu gods are violent and erotic.**

Hindu gods like Krishna and Shiva are depicted as violent and erotic. Shiva, usually represented with several arms and legs, his fierce image wears a necklace of skulls, displays sexual imagery, and is surrounded by demons. Hardly the same kind of deity as Jesus Christ.

#### **D. Hinduism teaches that there is no point to life.**

According to Hinduism, the world is illusory and history is cyclical, that is, we just keep repeating exactly what has taken place before over and over. We are caught in this endless and wearisome cycle. History has no point and it is not headed toward any conclusion. Human lives are a part of this cycle and thus go through endless reincarnations. Salvation for the Hindu is to be delivered from this cycle.

#### **E. The logical conclusion of Hinduism is class bigotry and suffering.**

Suffering is seen as a necessary and unavoidable part of the cycle of life. A person's karma is the accumulation of deeds done in the past. All Suffering is repayment for the evil done in a former life. Therefore what happens to a person in life is deserved, and humanitarian concern and compassion are not a part of traditional Hinduism. Hinduism promoted the caste system which said that people were predetermined to live in either luxury or poverty according to their karma, and nothing can change it. In fact, it would be detrimental to ease their suffering. This belief system has held India in poverty and bondage for hundreds of years.

### **III. ISLAM**

#### **A. Islam's beginnings are in Abraham's mistake.**

Islam is the religion practiced largely in the Arab world, along with large portions of Africa. It has its roots in Judaism, since they see their patriarch as Abraham, as do the Jews. The Arab world traces its lineage to the firstborn son of Abraham, Ishmael. The Jews trace their lineage to Isaac, the son of Abraham and Sarah who had been promised by God. The war in the Middle East today can be traced back to this Biblical story of who really is the rightful son of Abraham.

#### **B. Islam does not promote education, learning or challenging the status quo.**

The word Islam, meaning **submission**, says much about the attitude of the followers of Islam. They submit unquestioningly to the teachings of the Koran, the Islamic Bible. The Koran contains divine messages said to be given by the angel Gabriel to Mohammed, a self-proclaimed prophet who lived in the seventh century. There is no room for questions or doubt, only submission.

#### **C. Islam's founder was an illiterate pedophile.**

An interesting note about Mohammed is that he was completely illiterate. He could neither read nor write. He dictated what Gabriel told him and his followers wrote it down. Also, Mohammed was given special permission by Allah to have 13 wives. His last wife was six-years-old when she was betrothed to him, and the marriage was consummated when she was nine.

#### **D. Islam is all about earning your way to heaven.**

Muslims generally are among the most serious and devout people on the earth. Many of them have completely memorized the Koran. They pray at least five times a day. They fast for one month every year. But salvation is something which must be earned. It is not graciously given by Allah.

#### **E. Islam denigrates women.**

Islam does have a high standard of morality called the "straight path," which must be strictly maintained. Women are regarded as possible temptations which would lead men away from the path, so women must be modest to the point of being veiled and wearing clothing that completely covers them.

#### **F. Islam promotes terrorism.**

One sure way of earning salvation is to die as a martyr for the faith. They believe that just as Mohammed was whisked immediately to heaven and given several maidens, so will it be done for those who die for the cause of Islam. Those who attacked the World Trade Center

and engaged in other acts of terrorism were acting in full accord with the tenets of Islam and the teachings of the Koran. The West, the United States in particular, is seen as corrupting the entire world and worthy of death. The U. S. policy of befriending Israel is particularly seen as harmful to the Muslim people and their cause. The principle of Jihad, or “holy war” is taught in the Koran as a viable tool for the cause of Islam. Evangelism is not so much by the word as it is with the sword. The followers of Mohammed have been the most violent people in the history of the world, and continue to be so to this day — a fact well attested to in history.

Jesus taught that we are to love the sinner. Mohammed taught that the infidel must be killed if he refuses to convert.

#### **IV. JUDAISM**

##### **A. Judaism is the closest to Christianity.**

Judaism is, of course, the mother of Christianity. Our God is the same God. Our history is the same history. The Jewish Scriptures are part of our Bible. We have the same moral code and commandments. We see history and the world through the same eyes.

##### **B. The crucial difference is the understanding of the identity of the Messiah.**

The only difference is that whereas the orthodox Jews anticipate the Messiah’s coming, we believe that he has already come in the person of Jesus Christ. Our New Testament is added to the Scriptures of the Jews and contain the story of Jesus and the significance of his presence in the world. The Jews read the prophets, and we see Jesus as the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament. We see the teachings of Jesus as fleshing out the spirit of the Old Testament law.

Some of those in the Jewish faith see Jesus as a legitimate prophet in the Old Testament prophetic tradition. Some, however merely believe that Jesus was a Jewish heretic of the first century. On the other hand, many of the Jewish people have a fascination with the person of Jesus.

#### **V. CHRISTIANITY**

How are the beliefs of Christians different from the ones we have discussed?

**A. We believe in one Creator God.** We believe in a God who is the author of life and created a good world, but who is separate from his creation.

**B. We believe in a self-revealing God.** There are not many gods, there is one who has revealed himself in love to his creation in the person of Jesus Christ.

**C. We believe we cannot earn our way to heaven.** He gave us the law knowing that we could not keep his law, even though it was the way to life in the fullest sense.

**D. We believe Jesus paid our way.** Because of our failure, he provided a way of forgiveness. We deserved to die, but Jesus Christ died in our place that we could be forgiven.

**E. We believe in the resurrection of the dead.** He also overcame death through his resurrection so that we would know that we do not have to fear death. We remember that he said,

- “Because I live, you also will live”. **(John 14:19)**

**F. We believe in miracles.** It is interesting that in the Koran there are no miracles performed by Mohammed or anyone else.

**G. We believe God loves us.** There is not a single mention of the love of Allah for the world or the people in it. There are many, many laws and strict warnings of the penalty of not keeping the laws. The concept of having a relationship with Allah is not found anywhere in the Koran. But Christians understand that Christianity is not about moral laws or religious

practices — it is about a relationship with a living Savior, Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul wrote:

- [Philippians 3:8-11 HCSB](#) (8) More than that, I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of Him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them filth, so that I may gain Christ (9) and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own from the law, but one that is through faith in Christ--the righteousness from God based on faith. (10) *My goal* is to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, (11) assuming that I will somehow reach the resurrection from among the dead.

It is this relationship with Christ that is the center of our faith. We are not trying to appease an angry God; we are learning how to fall in love with our Creator, Redeemer and Friend.

### **Conclusion:**

A recent Associated Press article told the story of Muslims in Oslo, Norway. The article reads: “[They] applied for the right to call worshipers to prayers, calling ‘Allahu akbar’ (‘God is great’) over loudspeakers. The neighborhood council granted the request, to the delight of the World Islamic Mission. A spokesman said the decision is a ‘victory of great symbolic importance. It means our religion is respected on the same lines as other religions.’ But to keep things completely equal, the council also approved a request by The Norwegian Heathen Society to summon members to their meetings by calling out ‘There is no God’ over the loudspeakers.”

There are many voices shouting at us from many different directions today. It is important to know something about them in order to be able to discern one shout from another so that we might be discerning in our search for truth.

Bill Hybels, after interviewing people from the different religions we have talked about today, said:

“You need to know that the law of non-contradiction says that positions that are different from one another cannot be equally true. You’ve got to figure out what you believe and where you’re going to drive that stake in the ground and say, ‘On the evidence, on the search that I’ve done, this is what I believe. This is what I’ll stake my life and my eternity on.’”

That is exactly the point. This is not just a preference of philosophies. It is not an intellectual quest. Your life and eternity are at stake. You need to make a careful decision.