

WORLD RELIGIONS

Reaching People in False Religions for Christ pt. 2

Lesson #25

In our last lesson we considered a variety of people we might encounter in the world who need Jesus Christ as their Savior. We asked the question, “Do we need to have a different approach for each person, religion, culture, or ethnic group in order to share the gospel with them effectively?” We also considered what our method or approach should be in evangelizing those in false religions. Should we first seek to argue that God exists, then argue that the Bible is God’s Word, and then try to convince them that their religion is false? If we are able to do these things first, does it mean we are then able to share the gospel with them? The above approach has been tried and promoted by many but with little or no success. While it seems to be a logical approach and one that should work, it does not. It is not the approach the Bible teaches or models for us, nor is it the approach that has proven to be effective throughout church history. The reason why it does not work is that it fails to consider two important doctrines. First, the effects of sin upon mankind and man’s inability to understand spiritual things, and secondly, the power of the gospel over the wisdom of man to convert sinners.

Where should we get our approach to evangelizing those in false religions? You probably might guess – the Bible! One of the necessary disciplines of the Christian life is to constantly ask oneself, “What does the Word of God say?” This is especially necessary when making any spiritual decision or inquiry. The Bible is God’s all-sufficient Word and He tells us in His Word certain truths about those who do not know Christ and how they may be won to Christ.

Hunters and fishermen will study up on their prey in order to increase their chances of success. Once they understand the uniqueness of their quarry, they then adapt their hunting or fishing methods to improve their catch rate. We are taking this same approach, but rather than observing people, we are going to observe what the Word of God tells us is true about unbelievers. Once we receive God’s inspired commentary on man, we will better understand why He tells us to evangelize people the way He does. This should give us understanding and confidence in the biblical approach to evangelism.

I. **REVIEWING LESSON #24**

- A. **We learned that every belief system presupposes certain truths, believing them by faith without scientific evidence.** For the Christian there are two presuppositions that must be believed by faith: **1)** That God exists and **2)** that the Bible is the Word of God. These two beliefs create the foundation for biblical approaches to evangelism.

B. **We learned that faith, not evidences or human reason, is the path God has chosen to reveal the truth to people.** Christians do not use circular reasoning, as some suppose, nor do they try to prove God exists or the Bible is God's Word. They believe these things by faith. Saving faith is not only intellectual, but volitional, causing the Christian to act upon what is believed.

1. **Rom. 3:28** For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.
2. **Eph. 2:8** For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.
3. **Heb. 11:6** And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

C. **We learned that the Bible teaches us that people must first believe the gospel in order to know the truth, for the Bible can only be understood with the assistance of the Holy Spirit.** The Bible does not tell us to first convince people of the truth so that they will believe the gospel and be saved, but to call them to believe the gospel and be saved, in order that they might know and be convinced of the truth. Unbelievers cannot access the truth necessary for salvation any more than a person with an AM radio can dial in FM signals. They need salvation so that they can experience the life-changing truths of God's Word.

II. **MORE FACTS ABOUT UNBELIEVERS THAT ARE HELPFUL TO KNOW BEFORE EVANGELIZING**

A. **You Should Know That Christians Cannot by Logic or Reason Prove to an Unbeliever That God Exists or Argue Them to Salvation.** This is a simple but profound truth that needs to be understood before trying to win people to Christ. Many, *already having come to Christ*, have reasoned to themselves that if they can get people to believe in the existence of God, half the battle will be over to winning them to Christ. Yet the fact is you can't "prove" God exists. Yes, you can argue that He exists and give reasonable and logical arguments, but the fact is that men do not want to believe God exists. Remember, God is spirit, invisible, and transcendent.

We cannot access God with our senses or the scientific method. The Bible says, “*the fool has said in his heart there is no God*” (**Psa. 14:1; 53:1**), but never tries to argue for the existence of God.

Consider how many countless hours people have spent trying to prove that which cannot be proven – the existence of God! And as they try to prove the unprovable, they never get around to saying what needs to be said so that an unbelieving person can come to Christ. Even if the arguments of the Christian are greater and more convincing, and they are able to refute the unbeliever's arguments, still, the unbeliever will not come to the Lord because people don't get saved by worldly arguments or man's reason.

Thus many Christians, in a desire to see people rescued from judgment, have wasted time and effort to accomplish the impossible. They fail to understand the hopeless state of the unbeliever and the means God has chosen to save sinners and why. We must trust in God's ways rather than rely on our own. Paul tells us about the futility of man's wisdom in seeking to reach people for Christ when he says:

I Cor. 1:20-21 Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

Notice that man's wisdom is not able to lead people to Christ. It can't do it. In fact to try is foolishness. The world through its wisdom “*did not come to know God.*” Therefore, let us not adopt worldly methods of evangelism that are a waste of time and energy. Instead, let us assume that God knows what is best and do what the Bible says to do, trusting God for the results.

- B. You Should Know That All Unbelievers Know There Is a God.** This is the corollary to what is said above. Not only is it impossible to prove the existence of God, everyone already knows there is a God, so it doesn't need to be proven! You may be thinking of the atheist or agnostic who denies there is a God. It is true that foolish people do say there is no God, but remember, they are “foolish.” Not only that, though they may deny that God exists, they know there is a God. How can I say this? Because God

says so! Consider **Rom. 1:18-32**. I have bolded key phrases for emphasis and put some of my comments into the text italicized in brackets:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of **men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness**, [*Notice men who are ungodly and unrighteous suppress the truth. They have the truth, but they will not acknowledge it.*]

19 because **that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them**. [*Notice that the truth unbelievers suppress is the knowledge of God, made known to them by God Himself. This means everyone knows there is a God!*]

20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, **have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse**. [*Notice that the knowledge of God which is implanted into all men by God, but suppressed by unbelievers, is also supported by creation. It can be clearly seen and understood that God exists by looking at creation. This makes all men without excuse for all men have two witnesses to the existence of God, one internal and the other external.*]

21 **For even though they knew God**, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but **they became futile in their speculations**, and **their foolish heart was darkened**. 22 **Professing to be wise, they became fools**, 23 and **exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures**. [*See that very important truth at the beginning of vs. 21 "they knew God." And notice they moved away from the knowledge of God when they turned to their own futile speculations and foolish hearts – man's wisdom. They thought they were being wise, but were fools and exchanged the truth of God and instead give glory to created things instead of the Creator.*]

24 **Therefore God gave them over** in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. 25 **For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie**, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. [*Here we see the judgment of God giving them over*

to sin. Thus they plunge themselves into immorality and exchange the truth of God for a lie.]

26 For this reason **God gave them over** to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. 28 And just as **they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over** to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, 29 **being filled with** all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; 32 and although **they know the ordinance of God**, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them. *[In this last section we see that for the second and third times “God gave those who suppress the truth in unrighteousness over” to worse forms of sinful behavior. The progression is from immorality, to homosexuality, to being filled with evil. They know the ordinances of God, for Paul goes on to say that God put His law in their hearts (2:12-16), but they practice evil anyway, rebelling against what they know is right.]*

Thus we can see from Paul’s words that men know God exists for several reasons: **1)** God makes Himself known to everyone *from within*, **2)** God makes Himself known to everyone *from without*. God instills in every person the truth that He exists and also puts His law within man and gives man a conscience that accuses or defends his actions. From outside us we have creation that tells us God exists. This is why it is futile and a waste of time to try to argue with people about the existence of God. Everyone already knows God exists, even if they say they don’t believe in God. This one truth will save us much time in evangelism.

- C. **You Should Know That Unbelievers Can’t Objectively Weigh Supernatural or Empirical Evidence.** Miracles and evidences can be used to point someone to the object of faith, Jesus Christ, but they do not compel anyone to believe the gospel. We must ever keep this in mind as we share the gospel with people, evidences and miracles do not save any more than a sign pointing to the location of a hospital saves. Yes, the sign

is helpful in showing us where we can get medical help in an emergency, but the sign itself has no power or ability to fix the problem. So it is with evidences and miracles. You might think they would be compelling, but the Bible and history prove otherwise. Consider the texts below and what they teach us about the weakness of miracles and evidences.

1. **John 12:37** But though He [Jesus] had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him.
2. **Luke 16:27-31** “And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father’s house— 28 for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ 29 “But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ 30 “But he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’ 31 “But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’”
3. **Eph. 4:17-19** So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; 19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.
4. **Titus 1:15** To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.
5. **Heb. 3:9, 16-17, 19** Where your fathers tried Me by testing Me, And saw My works for forty years. . . 16 For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? 17 And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? . . . 19 So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

In the five texts above we see that though Jesus performed many miracles during His earthly ministry *people still did not believe (Jn. 12:37)*. You would think “*many miracles*” would be compelling, especially when performed by Jesus, but they were not.

In **Lk. 16** we read the story of the rich man and Lazarus. When the rich man died and went to Hades he, like many Christians today, mistakenly assumed that a miracle would be compelling, and commanded Abraham to send Lazarus back to warn his brothers, believing that if they saw someone who had risen from the dead they would repent and believe. Yet Abraham twice tells the rich man he is mistaken and affirms the power of the gospel over miracles to save sinners.

In **Eph. 4:17-19** we learn some other important things about unbelievers. **First** Paul says they live in the “*futility of their mind*,” **second** that they are “*darkened in their understanding*,” **third** that they are “*excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them*,” **fourth** they have “*hard hearts*,” **fifth**, “*have callous hearts*,” and **sixth and finally**, they “*have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness*.” We can see from this text that unbelievers are not able to make objective, rational evaluations concerning spiritual truth. We also see why it would be a waste of time to try and argue or reason with someone to believe the truth when the Bible says they can’t think or reason straight about spiritual things.

Tit. 1:15 sums up a universal attribute of all unbelievers, “*both their mind and conscience is defiled*.”

Finally, in the fifth text (**Heb. 3**) we are reminded that the people of Israel who left Egypt, saw the ten plagues, saw miracles every day for forty years, and yet that *entire generation dropped dead in the wilderness because of unbelief!* Therefore, when we evangelize we must not be deceived into thinking that miracles or evidences have the power to save anyone or compel them to believe the gospel. They can be used as signs to point to Jesus or the messenger who proclaims Jesus, but they themselves have no saving power. People are *not* saved or compelled to believe by miracles, evidences, or rational arguments, but by the gospel being preached. We will develop this thought later, but let’s continue to consider what we can learn about unbelievers from the Word of God.

- D. **You Should Know That All Men Are Totally Depraved.** Total depravity does not mean that all men are as sinful as they can be. What it does mean is that sin and the fall have affected every person in every part of their being. In other words, the totality of man’s being is affected or corrupted by sin. The *Moody Handbook of Theology* and the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* comments on total depravity are summarized below:

Total depravity is the scriptural teaching that mankind is totally, thoroughly, and completely corrupted by sin in all parts of his being. Total depravity means that man is unable to please God on his own or earn any saving merit from God. It is also helpful to understand what total depravity does not mean. 1) It does not mean that people cannot do things which are relatively good in the sight of other men. 2) It does not mean that all men are as sinful as they can be or become. 3) It does not mean that men have no concept of good and evil. 4) It does not mean that men, because of their depravity, will indulge in every sin to every degree.¹

Consider what the Scriptures below teach us about the depravity of man and how sin has affected all men.

1. **Gen. 6:5** Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.
2. **Gen. 8:21** The Lord smelled the soothing aroma; and the Lord said to Himself, "I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done.
3. **Psa. 51:5** Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.
4. **Psa. 58:3** The wicked are estranged from the womb; These who speak lies go astray from birth.
5. **Isa. 53:6** All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.
6. **Jer. 17:9** "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?"
7. **Mk. 7:21-23** "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, 22 deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy,

¹Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 312; Paul Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), 482.

slander, pride and foolishness. 23 “All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.”

8. **Rom. 3:23** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
9. **I Jn. 1:8** If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

We see from the texts above that all unbelievers are thoroughly corrupted by sin and cannot be “reasoned” or “argued” to Christ. Sin has corrupted them so that they are unable and unwilling to come to salvation. This can be confusing for believers for every believer thinks back to a time when they wanted to come to salvation. So how does that work? First, let’s establish the inability and unwillingness of man to come to Christ.

E. You Should Know That All Unbelievers Are Unable and Unwilling to Come to Jesus Christ for Salvation Apart from the Grace of God. I know a statement like this makes people think to themselves, “*That can’t be right, I remember when I sought the Lord and found Christ.*” It is true that all who are now saved, at a point in their life, saw the light, believed, and were saved. But did they do this “apart from the grace of God” or *because of the grace of God?* We can’t address every objection and concern at once, but let’s consider a few texts that prove the point, then in another lesson we will answer the objection just raised.

1. **Jer. 5:31** The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule on their own authority; And My people love it so! But what will you do at the end of it?
2. **Lk. 22:67-70** “If You are the Christ, tell us.” But He said to them, “If I tell you, you will not believe; 68 and if I ask a question, you will not answer. 69 “But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God.” 70 And they all said, “Are You the Son of God, then?” And He said to them, “Yes, I am.” 71 Then they said, “What further need do we have of testimony? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth.”
3. **Jn. 1:5, 9-10** The Light shines in the darkness, and **the darkness did not comprehend it.** . . . 9 There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and **the world did not know Him.**

4. **Jn. 3:19-21** “This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and **men loved the darkness rather than the Light**, for their deeds were evil. 20 “For **everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light** for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 “But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.”

5. **Rom. 3:10-18** as it is written,
 - a. “There is none righteous, not even one;
 - b. 11 There is none who understands,
 - c. There is none who seeks for God;
 - d. 12 All have turned aside,
 - e. together they have become useless;
 - f. There is none who does good, There is not even one.”
 - g. 13 “Their throat is an open grave,
 - h. With their tongues they keep deceiving,”
 - i. “The poison of asps is under their lips”;
 - j. 14 “Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness”;
 - k. 15 “Their feet are swift to shed blood,
 - l. 16 Destruction and misery are in their paths,
 - m. 17 And the path of peace they have not known.”
 - n. 18 “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

At this point we are getting a pretty good picture of our quarry. It seems pretty hopeless. In fact, it is worse than hopeless, except for the grace of God, which we will examine in the next lesson.