

Chapter 6

The Third Barrier: Non-Christian Religions & Philosophies

LESSON OBJECTIVE

It is important to understand that:

- You cannot be a missionary without a strong conviction of Christ's uniqueness
- Without thorough knowledge of culture and language it is hard to understand local religion
- Even a perfect knowledge of these three cannot replace the display of Godly character
- Spiritual warfare is a key-element in the battle for souls
- Thorough understanding of the local religion is key to relevantly evangelize any people group
- You need to start your missionary career by taking the right steps

LESSON OUTLINE

Topics we discuss in this lesson are:

- General Assumptions
- The Uniqueness of Christ
- Major World Religions
- Other Beliefs
- How Do We Reach Them?

LESSON CONTENTS

Cross-cultural missionaries also have to overcome barriers of religions, foreign to Christianity.

General Assumptions

Firstly, if missionaries are not 100% sure of the *uniqueness of Christ* as the only way of salvation, they cannot be missionaries. They must be rooted in the word of God and be willing to stand for its truth with his or her life.

Secondly, the missionary should learn the local language, because only then will (s)he learn to communicate at a deeper level than would be possible in a language that, at best, would be a second language to his audience. Also, certain levels of cultural and religious understanding will remain hidden to workers who do not master the local vernacular. Learning the local language also shows respect towards the receptor-population.

A *third* important thing is that the missionary not only knows the *culture*, but also the *religion* of the group he tries to reach with the gospel. His knowledge should be thorough enough to discuss it with religious leaders and teachers.

Fourthly, the best advertisement of Christ in any context is the display of love, godly character and works. In other words: being a person of integrity, trustworthiness and high moral standards, who respects his target-people enough to not violate their culture or ridicule their beliefs. People should be given no opportunity to stumble over a missionary's cultural habits, like behavior, words, opinions, or ways of dressing. In all respects (s)he should show him/herself as a person of good will.

Finally, our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the evil spirits in the heavenly realms.¹⁶² Prayer and fasting will be required¹⁶³ to break the spiritual power of non-Christian religions.

162 Eph. 6:12

163 Matt. 17:21

The Uniqueness of Christ

This course is not the best place to defend Christ's uniqueness. His disciples should be able to quote Bible verses that picture Jesus as the only way of salvation. People who want to learn more about defending the Biblical faith are advised to take a course in Christian apologetics.

Not many will argue the historicity of Christ's person. Most see Him as a good man, a great teacher, a revolutionary, etc. The problem arises when Jesus claims to be the Son of God,¹⁶⁴ equal to God, as He actually is.¹⁶⁵

Centuries earlier God revealed Himself to Moses as 'I am Who I am'.¹⁶⁶ This 'I am' echoes through John's gospel often, and provoked the Jews to great anger, because only God revealed Himself with that name. Jesus completes the 'I am' sentence.¹⁶⁷

It was only temporarily that He left heaven's glory where He was from before time began.¹⁶⁸ He took on human flesh,¹⁶⁹ enabling Him to die for the sins that separated us from the holy God, who cannot and will not tolerate sin.

The Son of God also became the Son of Man, the only person who has such dual nature. He was not begotten by a man, but by God's Holy Spirit,¹⁷⁰ and therefore He is the Son of God. He was born from the virgin Mary, and therefore is the Son of Man. His divine life had no beginning. His human life once began on earth, but never ends. With His death and resurrection He did not lose His humanity. He is the first Man, seated on God's throne.

164 John 5:17-19

165 Phil. 2:6

166 Ex. 3:14

167 See John 4:26; 6:35,48,51; 8:12,23,58; 10:7,9,11,14,30,36; 11:25; 12:46; 13:13; 14:6,10; 15:1,5 and mind the tremendous power explosion in 18:6!

168 John 1:1; 17:5

169 Phil. 2:7

170 Luke 1:26-35

These five doctrines: the Trinity, Christ's pre-existence, His deity, His virgin birth and incarnation, are perfectly interwoven and none can be denied unless at the cost of the others. Jesus never sinned. This made Him the only human who could take away the sins of the world and reconcile humanity with God and each other. Since God is almighty, mightier than death, He raised Jesus from the dead, three days after He died.

Christianity is the only religion in which the One worshipped humbled Himself by coming down from His high position to save a sinful and lost humanity. This is what distinguishes Christianity from other religions. In all other religions man has to *do* something to earn salvation through works. With Christ you *believe* with your heart, and *confess* with your mouth and you are saved by *grace*.¹⁷¹

Major World Religions

Whoever wants to learn about foreign religions should take a course on world religions. We can only touch the surface. Here is a historic overview of when the major religions came into existence:¹⁷²

Judaism	±2000 BC	Buddhism	560 BC
Hinduism	±1500 BC	Confucianism	551 BC
Zoroastrianism	±1000 BC	Christianity	6 BC
Shinto	660 BC	Islam	570 AD
Taoism	604 BC	Sikhism	1479 AD
Jainism	599 BC		

We only look at the major religions: Christianity, Judaism and Islam (monotheistic religions), as well as at Hinduism and Buddhism (polytheistic ones). We consider their sacred writings and the key-players of their foundation. Then we look briefly into Traditional Religions, Post-Modernism, Humanism and Atheism.

In the beginning man knew God, but did not glorify Him, and his heart became dark. He changed the glory of God into gods of his own

¹⁷¹ Rom. 10:10,11; Eph. 2:8,9

¹⁷² Heydt, 1967/1989

making and therefore God gave him over to his own lusts.¹⁷³ As a consequence, religion became a degeneration from monotheism to polytheism. Elements of the knowledge of God, once known to man, are found to a certain extent in the religions of the world, although they are often perverted. The light was darkened because the Source of light was abandoned. The elements of truth in these religions can neither save, nor are they acceptable to God. They are like broken bridges, unable to span the chasm between sinful man and a holy God. This applies to Judaism as well since its rejection of Christ; for He alone is the way, the truth and the life and no man comes to the Father except through Him.¹⁷⁴

Biblical Christianity therefore is a missionary movement, because Christians believe that except through Christ there is no salvation. When we see forms of Christianity that do not practice W.E., they probably believe that people from other faiths are not lost; they say that 'all roads lead to Rome'¹⁷⁵. They don't confess Christ's uniqueness and assume that hell does not exist. For them the literal written word of God has become subject to their interpretations of it. Own interpretations many times are based upon selfishness, resulting in lack of passion for those who are lost.

Dispensing of these fundamental biblical truths leads to a liberal theology for whose adherents evangelism or missions mean community-development at best and social indifference at worst.

Judaism

Judaism originated when God called Abraham as father of the chosen people; Jews trace their descent to him. The Hebrew scriptures go back to creation. Judaism is the oldest of all religions. Some see it as the bud of which Christianity became the flower: Judaism is embryonic Christianity and genuine Christianity is Judaism full-grown. The fact that the Christian scriptures embrace all 39 books of the Hebrew sacred canon confirms this.

173 Rom. 1:20-32

174 John 14:6

175 This manner of thought is called 'pluralism'

The name Judaism comes from the Latin word *Judaismus* (Greek; *Ioudaismos*), which means: the religion of the Jews; it occurs only once in the NT.¹⁷⁶ The verb *Ioudaizoo* occurs in the same letter¹⁷⁷ and is translated as 'to live as do the Jews'. Jacob's son Judah became the model from where the names Judea, Jew, and Judaism were derived. The name became a generalization for all Israelites after the Babylonian exile.

Judaism is monotheistic. This is clear from its basic creed 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one'.¹⁷⁸ Apart from the written law, the Tenach, there is also an oral law, called Talmud. Both form the basis for Judaism. Its most known sects are the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes and Herodians.

Christianity

Christianity did not appear as a new religion, neither was it a sectarian 'child' of Judaism. It is Judaism in its truest form, the fulfillment of God's promises to the fathers. Christ stressed that all the scriptures must be fulfilled, and He quoted often from the OT, as did all the apostles. Mainly because the Jewish leaders rejected Jesus as the Messiah, Christianity became distinct and separate from Judaism. Being a missionary faith, it spread rapidly among the Gentiles and the 'Jewish believers scattered abroad'.¹⁷⁹

Over time, the Gentile element grew and the Jewish element diminished. It spread to the West rather than to the East. Part of this historic development was treated in lesson two.

The teaching of the Trinity does not mean that Christianity confesses three gods as some think, but one, eternally existent in three persons. It is as monotheistic a religion as is Judaism. The Bible contains 39 books in the OT and 27 in the NT: 66 altogether.

176 Gal. 1:13,14

177 2:14

178 Deut. 6:4

179 See e.g. James 1:1

Main forms of Christianity are: Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism, in which nowadays Evangelicalism forms a major stream.

Islam

The last of the monotheistic religions is Islam. *Islam* means 'to submit'; a *Muslim* is a 'submitting one'. Their prophet Mohammed, born at Mecca, 570 AD, founded Islam. He felt a call as prophet around 610, after having been disturbed by superstition, ignorance and idolatry of the Arabs for many years. When he and his followers faced persecution they fled to Medina in 622. Here he set up the rule of Allah with himself as dictator. From there the movement grew, and Mecca was defeated in 627. He changed the direction for daily prayers from Jerusalem to Mecca. After the death of his wife Khadija in 620 he became polygamous. He died in 632.

Mohammed claims to have received revelations from the angel Gabriel, whom Muslims equal with the Holy Spirit. The revelations were later written down. The compilation of these formed the Qur'an, mostly spelled as Koran. Their teaching according to the traditions is called *Hadith*. Islamic legislation is called *Sharia*. The two main streams are the Sunnis and the Shiites, the last one mainly in Iran.

Islam knows about 72 sects, of which Sufism is the best known. Islam rests on *five pillars*: confession of faith, ritual prayers, giving of alms, fasting in the month of Ramadan, and the pilgrimage to Mecca. Some add jihad and holy war to these. Islam seeks world dominance; it certainly is a missionary religion.

Hinduism

Hinduism is a polytheistic religion: it knows 330 million gods, of which Brahman is considered as supreme being. Other well-known gods are Krishna and Shiva. After Judaism, Hinduism is the second oldest world religion. The name 'Hindu' comes from *Hind* (India) and represents the native religious and social system of this country. Their sacred writings are the *Vedas* ('knowledge', or 'sacred books'), written between 1500 and 1000 BC. They tend to personify nature, as

in Animism. Later Hinduism developed the *Brahmanas* and the *Upanishads*.

The heart of Hinduism is the caste-system. Officially it is illegal in India, but it still is adhered to by many. One is supposed to follow the hereditary occupation of the caste into which one is born, and to marry and maintain social relationships within the same caste. The four main castes are: 1. The Brahmins: priests and intellectuals; 2. The Kshatriyas: government officials and military people; 3. The Vaisyas: the mercantile and agricultural caste; and 4. The Sudras: the artisan and laboring class. The lowest caste, the Untouchables, are regarded as the scum of society.

Hindus believe in the law of *karma*. It states that people go through endless series of reincarnations: after death one is born again into new flesh, depending on works done in the past life, either in better or in worse circumstances.

Buddhism

Buddhism is an offshoot of Hinduism and came into existence in the 6th century BC. The founder was Prince Siddharta, born into a warrior caste that belonged to the Gautama clan. Unsatisfied with his luxurious life he left his wife, son, and his father's inheritance and exchanged it for a life of asceticism and meditation. At the age of 35, one night during his meditations, he claims to have received enlightenment. Since then the title *Buddha*, 'enlightened one' was given to him. He is referred to as Gautama Buddha.

His enlightenment came by mastering four 'noble truths': 1. All of life is subject to suffering; 2. The desire to live is the cause of repeated existences in which sorrow is inevitable; 3. Only annihilation of desire, that is of yearning, craving, ambition, as distinct from will, can give release; 4. The way of escape is the 'eightfold path' of right belief, right resolve, right word, right act, right life, right effort, right thinking and right meditation.

Buddhism is not actually a religion: Buddha taught that salvation takes place through repeated migrations of the soul, without any religious characteristics, such as worship, ceremony, dogma,

priesthood, or even belief in a deity. It is a godless philosophy. It denies the special virtue of caste, ritualism and asceticism, and insists upon the necessity of pity, kindness and patience for salvation. Buddhism spread to Sri Lanka, Tibet, Myanmar and Thailand, but flourished mostly in China and Japan.

Traditional Religions (TR)

This is a better name than animism, since TR encompass more than the belief that e.g. rocks, rivers and forests are inhabited by spirits. 'Tribalism', another name, is incorrect, as TR are more widespread than tribes only. The religion of traditional societies is at the heart of their cultures. It controls their social systems, is the main source of power and regulates matters relating to land and weather on which most of them depend for survival.¹⁸⁰ TR have many expressions and can hardly be generalized, yet they have things in common.

TR are strong on ancestor-worship: ancestors always form part of life, and are reckoned with when it comes to decision-making, rituals, festivals, sacrifice etc. TR adherents concentrate on the (long) past rather than the (short) future. Charms, sorcery, witchcraft and fetishism form an important part of daily life and are almost exclusively based on fear of evil spirits, or being out of favor with the ancestors. TR are polytheistic in nature.

Elements of TR can also be found in other major religions, especially Hinduism, Buddhism and folk-Islam, as well as in neo-pagan religions, e.g. the revived Germanic and Viking religions, New Age and Satanism.

Other Beliefs

Most people who live in multi-cultural societies will regularly meet adherents of the major world religions, but in a dominant Western context one may also meet other 'faiths' – the adherents of these 'faiths', by the way, do usually not accept any such religious

180 Grebe & Fon, 1997:9

connotation. Their people need to be reached with the gospel as well. What sort of philosophies do we see among them?

Atheism

Someone once said: 'An atheist is someone who believes that he doesn't believe in anything', indicating that even atheists believe in something, although that may not be God. Atheism co-existed with Marxism (also called socialism or communism). It says that no reality exists beyond what can be perceived with the five senses. This way of thinking grew into a worldview called 'Modernism'. It excludes anything invisible, e.g. God, angels, heaven, hell, etc. Atheism is a decreasing entity, as are the TR, under the influence of the spread of Christianity and Islam, New Age and the revival of neo-pagan religions.

Post-Modernism

This philosophy is a reaction against 'Modernism' and has developed into the next global worldview. They reason: 'We tried Christianity. It did not work. We had centuries of bloody religious wars between Christians. It has not solved our social and political problems; it contributed to them, if not caused them'. They believe that absolute truth does not exist and even if it would it could not be known by finite means. Every point of view is true for the individual person who has arrived at it through his or her own experiences and circumstances. What is true for you is not necessarily true for me too. One step further is: believing Satan's old lie¹⁸¹ that divinity can be found in everyone. Hindus and New Age adherents also advocate these lies and find an audience among intellectual post-modernists.¹⁸²

Humanism

Secular or religious humanism do not differ much at their root: both place man at the center of the universe instead of God. When worship of God is being replaced by worship of anything created, whether

181 Gen. 3:5

182 EMQ, Vol. 34 no. 4, pp. 396-398. See also EMQ, Vol. 35 no. 4, pp. 426-437

heavenly bodies, animals, material objects or man himself, the result is idolatry.

Key words among humanists are: growth, self-actualization and self-realization. It is a cult of self-worship. The image of man is positive and evil does not really exist. To be human is to be autonomous and good; man's choices are good and his potential practically unlimited. Man proclaims the 'gospel' of 'no duties, denials, inhibitions or restraints; only rights, privileges and opportunities for change'.¹⁸³

Some humanists have a little Christian perspective in their thinking, which can best be qualified as liberal, and denying the majority of beliefs held dear by Evangelicals.

How Do We Reach Them?

This question cannot be answered satisfactorily in this short course. Dependent on *whom* you want to reach, *you* need to decide what equipment you need. Everyone who wants to reach someone with the gospel does so because (s)he has come to a living faith in the Lord Jesus and wants to share that blessing with others.

But *who* do you want to reach? Your neighbor? A family member? Or did you receive the Lord's calling to bring His message to the ends of the earth? Or anything in between? Full time or part time? As an evangelist, a missionary, or as one who helps to send and support other workers that went out? It is important to seek the Lord's guidance in these things, and not to 'lean on your own understanding'.¹⁸⁴

Become Equipped

Everyone needs to learn to give his testimony, explain the way of salvation and lead sinners to the Lord. Every church should equip

183 Hesselgrave, 1984:159,160, quoting Vitz: Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1997:38

184 Prov. 3:5,6

her saints to do so, or inform them where they can find good courses to learn these things.

Once equipped, believers need to broaden their horizon. The best is to go on short-term mission trips, organized by either a church or a mission-agency. Sufficient time should be spent on briefing before, and debriefing after the trip. Leadership of such outreaches should have ample experience to lead teams.

By the time a team returns, a major shift has taken place: one group now knows for sure that they have not been called to go into missions and another group whose appetite has been whetted enough to want more. Some may even have received a calling from the Lord, while on the field.

The *first* group should become senders and supporters. They understand just enough of W.E. and the workers it requires, to be of good help to them by praying, writing, practically supporting and financing them.

The *second* group must start planning to go to the field as missionaries. It is advisable to go to a Bible school, geared towards world missions. As long as that education goes on, students should keep on travelling to mission fields to learn and find out where the Lord leads them. After studies are over, it is best to apply to a missionary society - or another option of missionary support - as candidate and be sent out to the field via them.

Find Your Way

Do not wait to contact missionary organizations until you are ready to go. Most of them will be happy to help anyone who is interested in W.E., offering advice and to function as consultant.

Each religion and philosophy needs a different approach for sharing the gospel. If you feel called to reach out to Muslims, then study Islam. Do you feel called for Turkish-speaking Muslims? Then learn to speak their language fluently too. Pray for them daily, read about their people, culture, history and politics, searching for bridges to reach them.

Find organizations that minister among them, and see what they can offer you in terms of knowledge, travel reports, short-term outreaches, job-vacancies, etc. So, become an expert to do the best possible job. Think, sleep, dream, rise, eat, and drink missions: become impregnated with it. Make it your 2nd passion in life, after the Lord.

Summing It Up

To become a cross-cultural missionary, you need to

- Know the Lord Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior
- Be informed, pray and seek guidance
- Take every step after having consulted with your church leaders
- Learn how to share the Lord with others in your own culture
- Exercise compassion with the lost to share the gospel with them
- Broaden your horizon; find out what goes on at the mission fields
- Take active steps to pursue your goals
- Be sent out by your local church, via a missionary organization. Get trained in:
 1. Bible, evangelism and church planting;
 2. Apologetics and world religions;
 3. Cross-cultural outreach and language learning;
 4. Relevant practical skills.

For the Senders:

- Be informed
- Pray
- Support practically
- Support financially

RESEARCH

The sites below give you interesting teaching on scientific evidence for the Christian faith:

<https://carm.org/apologetics>

<https://apologetics315.com/2009/11/recommended-apologetics-book-directory/>

MISCELLANEOUS

Recommended books: See Bibliography

Recommended articles:

Evangelical Missions Quarterly, Vol. 34 no. 4, pp. 396-398 also EMQ, Vol. 35 no. 4, pp. 426-437.

Read Dr. Peter Hammond's articles on Animism and on Islam, see <http://www.frontline.org.za/>

Assignments

- List your strengths and weaknesses, as witness of Christ in areas where you cannot use speech as medium, because you do not yet master the local language
- Write an essay on Christology (300-500 words) as a basis on which you build your defense of the uniqueness of Christ as only savior
- Choose one foreign religion or philosophy, mentioned in this chapter, and write an essay (500-1,000 words), containing an approach towards reaching its adherents OR, alternatively, describe how you ever led an adherent of another religion to Christ (less than 500 words)

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are the three major barriers for W.E.?
2. Give three reasons why it is important for a missionary to learn the local language
3. Which five major doctrines, that teach Christ's uniqueness, were mentioned in this lesson?
4. What single fact distinguishes Christianity from all other religions and makes it unique?
5. Define the terms 'monotheistic' and 'polytheistic'
6. Mention three monotheistic and three polytheistic religions (in that order); mention a characteristic of each
7. Give three philosophies that were dealt with in this lesson, and tell a characteristic of each
8. Mention some responsibilities of a sender
9. Describe the way to go to become a cross-cultural missionary