

Bible Special 06-08-29a

This is Tuesday, the 29th of August, 2006. We continue tonight our study of world religions. Why we believe the Bible.

Why we are Christians. We are Bible-thumping, creationist, monotheistic, New Testament believers for a reason. And as you analyze the elements of the alternatives, the reasons and the foundation for our faith become clear.

Let's take a moment as we begin our study to exercise the functions of our individual priesthood as we go to the Lord in prayer. Father, we are grateful that the meaning and the fruit of our lives is not dependent on our own imagination or our own effort, but that through the grace that you have provided through the Lord Jesus Christ, we have a life that is well-defined, that has a goal, has a purpose, has a future, and has a perspective that lends meaning to each moment of each day. We are grateful for the fellowship of believers of like mind.

We ask your blessing on us as we fellowship and study together the unique nature of the truth that you have revealed to us in creation and through your word, and that as we recognize the distinctives and the foundation for our faith, we will proceed with confidence and with understanding as we study your word and seek to integrate it and implement it into our lives. We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

We have seen many different world religions. We have looked at them under their titles, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism. We have looked within the realm of Christianity and the fringes of Christianity to see some of the cults that have arisen as more or less direct offshoots of Christianity, such as the Mormons, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Christian Science crowd.

We have examined most recently the elements of Judaism as it existed in Jesus' day, which was kind of a special feature of our study because we do not so much understand ourselves as Christians in contrast to that as recognizing the environment in which Jesus lived and taught and the difficulty that people had recognizing the forward progress of God's plan when they were enmeshed in Judaism and it became a religion rather than faith in God's word. And this is ever the challenge is to discern that which is a part of our faith and that which becomes a human addition or a human idea that isn't a part of God's plan and purpose for history. There were Jews who got stuck in their dispensation and could not see God's son when he came.

And it's understandable from a certain point of view. They viewed the coming of Jesus and his teaching as a threat and as a corruption and as a deviation from their long-held traditional faith. And this is understandable and it brings to mind the question, How do you know that your faith is in the truth? It seems to me it would be particularly difficult at a time when God's plan is moving forward, when there is a change in the paradigm, there is a change in the scenery, and you have to figure out is this from God or not? It's one thing for us to look around in the world today and see the various alternatives for faith or the alternative of trying to have

no faith at all and saying basically religion is bunk and I'm just going to wait for the scientists to come out with their next issue of Nature magazine to see what I believe.

But it's another thing to be at a transition point. And that's what we have looked at most recently is here you are, you can be an upstanding, God-fearing, Old Testament-thumping Jew, believing in the law of Moses, believing the prophets, believing the writings, and then suddenly here comes a rabbi teaching extraordinary things. And there is talk of miraculous healings and of feeding of 5,000 people with a few scraps of food and so on.

And you go to listen to this individual and you listen to the teaching and he's saying things that you don't hear in the synagogue and you don't hear taught down at the temple. And it would raise a question, a natural and a proper question in people's minds. Is this in fact to be believed or not? What is the criteria that those first century Jews needed to apply to be able to identify truth? What is it that modern-day Jews as they look back to their ancestors who decided that Christ was not the Messiah and that the Messiah had not come and that they should continue in their Old Testament traditions ad infinitum, what is it that they have missed? How should they know not to follow simply the Old Testament and to ignore the coming of Jesus Christ and the apostolic witness? Well, this is a pretty important question and it really goes to the heart of our entire series, our entire study.

How do you know that what you believe is true? Well, we have begun by presupposing our conclusion. And if you don't come back and revisit that at some point, you wind up being guilty of circular reasoning because you assume your conclusion before you begin. We start out assuming, well, we are Christians, so obviously we're right.

Now let's go figure out why everybody else is wrong. Well, they don't believe what we believe, so they're wrong. That's faulty reasoning, isn't it? That just makes the assumption that we're right.

Well, anybody could do that. You could imagine a bunch of Buddhists or a bunch of evolutionists over there somewhere saying, well, we believe in evolution. Here's 27 reasons why the Christians are all wrong.

Is there an objective, reasonable basis for accepting the Bible as God's Word and accepting its teaching that there is a God and He has a particular kind of nature? We're going to look tonight at some definitions and at some worldviews that have other suppositions, that have drawn other conclusions. And those people believe just as fervently, think that they're just as right, some of them, as we do. And yet it's as different as night and day from what we believe.

Well, in the course of our study over these last many weeks, we have looked at some fundamental truths. And some of those come from Scripture. And this is why we sort of began by assuming our conclusion.

You have to have some suppositions just so that you can get your discussion started. You adopt

a premise and then test that premise and see if it's true. You can't always just start with no premise and say, well, what is truth? Here I am, Pilate, washing my hands.

What is truth? Well, you've got to start somewhere and say, well, let's suppose that this is truth. Does it stand up as truth? And does everything else that purports to be the truth fall short? That's kind of what we've had to do. You can't just start from nothing.

So, we start with what Scripture tells us, because we are believers and we walk by faith and not by sight. And there is an element of faith. There is an unprovable, undemonstrable element to our Christianity.

You can't prove it. You certainly can't prove it to anybody else. And you can't prove it to yourself.

There is evidence. There is a witness. There are things that God has put before us to look at.

We analyze those things and then we draw a conclusion. So, this series has never been intended to prove to you that Christianity is true and all other religions are false. All other viewpoints are false.

All other philosophies and assumptions are false. The most that we can do for ourselves is to see that our belief is justified. It is reasonable.

Because, ultimately, your faith is not a matter of analysis and scientific proof. Our faith, God intentionally made it not so. Why? Why didn't God put some scientific proofs out there? Why isn't there a nice square hole in the sky that anybody can look through and see God sitting on His throne, dispatching angels to and fro? Why isn't there a burning bush on Mount Sinai to this day? Why aren't the Ten Commandments, graven in stone, still there? Why can't we find Noah's Ark? Why do we not see God occasionally visiting once a month or so and creating an animal, ex nihilo, or forming some people out of the dust of the ground instead of us giving birth to them naturally? Why aren't all new people created just like Adam? God just walks by and says, Well, got to have 400,000 new people today, so here I am out in the desert scraping the dirt together, blowing the breath of life into their nostrils, so that all it is is a matter of looking and saying, Well, there's the obvious fact.

There you go. Our Christian belief is just that. It is a belief.

It is faith. Jesus said to Thomas, You've stuck your fingers into the holes in my hands and in my side, and you believe that I'm raised from the dead. Blessed are those who will never see that evidence and are going to believe anyway.

There is a blessing. Did you know that you have that blessing no matter what else? Jesus said, Anybody who believes that I'm raised from the dead and never saw the physical evidence is blessed. So you have that blessing no matter what.

If you're down in the dumps, you think everything's dark and dismal, just remember, Jesus says you're blessed if you believe that. We have many other blessings that come on us every day. But here's the point.

Here's the point. Don't expect to prove to yourself, and certainly not to others, on the basis of objective evidence, Well, here's the ironclad, airtight case. Christianity has to be right.

All other religions have to be wrong. God purposely set up the world and the universe to leave the issue in doubt. Why? Why isn't it a certainty? Well, once again, because we are Christians, because we believe the witness of the word of God, we have an answer to that question.

That has already been done. Right? Did God not have a civilization of sentient creatures who observed Him on His throne? As we would say in human terms, daily, however they measure time in the angelic prehistoric time, prehistoric civilization, before man's history, before man was on the scene, the angels were there. Was there an element of faith involved in the angels and their obedience? They beheld the face of the Father just like they do today, back then.

And even with direct observation of God's face on a daily basis, there were those who, it wasn't a matter of believing that He existed, or understanding who He was and what He was capable of, it was a matter of accepting or rejecting His way. Accepting or rejecting His plan and purpose. Satan and a third of the angels said, we don't care for this kind of life.

We don't like being subordinate, subservient to Almighty God. It doesn't suit us. We think we have a better plan.

We would prefer a different situation. No element of faith involved at all. For or against.

This is a matter of accepting or rejecting God. Now, I will submit to you that in the human race, based on the scriptures, where God the Holy Spirit, Jesus tells us, convinces the world, convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, that there is in fact an essential element, first and foremost, of acceptance or rejection of God. There is no one who truly doesn't believe that there is a God.

There are those who do not accept that there is a God, because the knowledge of God has been placed in the heart of every man. This is what scripture says. So, ultimately, faith is more a matter of what you do after you have accepted God.

Do you seek Him? Do you live your life to please Him? Do you subordinate yourself, humble yourself under the mighty hand of God so that He may exalt you in due time? That's why the Bible, over and over and over again, talks about faith as a walk. We walk by faith, not by sight. We walk by faith.

But ultimately, the decision about God, the first decision is not, is there a God? God says, I have put the undeniable truth of Myself in your soul. I have put the undeniable evidence of Myself in creation. I have put the undeniable need to make a decision about Me in your heart through My

Spirit.

The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Those things don't exist without God. God undergirds and presupposes all of those things, or is presupposed by them.

So, the first decision any human being makes relative to God is, do I accept Him or do I reject Him? It's the very same decision that was made by the angels. So, when we talk about faith systems and belief systems, and how are you going to live your life, these are really products. These are what you do after you make that choice.

These are not the means of making that choice. Christianity itself, New Testament church attendance, your walk as a Christian isn't the means of coming to relationship with God. It is what you do after you have decided to accept God and to accept Him by means of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who said, I am the way.

No man comes to the Father but by Me. So, at the point of understanding that there is a God, and at the point of accepting God and seeking God, Jesus Christ is the way to the Father. Now, that's classic Orthodox Christianity.

The person and work of Christ, man's hopeless and lost condition, and the inerrancy and infallibility of the Scriptures, Old and New Testament. As they stand, 66 books of the English Bible, no more, no less, no Gnostic books, no Gospel of Judas, no Prevarications of Peter, whatever else you might find running around in paperback these days. That's Orthodox Christianity.

Has been for 2,000 years. So, let's step back a little bit from our study. Looking at the Hindus, and the Buddhists, and the Muslims, and the Jews, and the various cults that have crept in and around the flaky edges of Christianity.

And let's divide things a slightly different way. This is why I said you'll need some paper and pencil tonight because you'll want to take note of these definitions. Most of them I think you will understand just by looking at them.

But essentially, the thing we're going to talk about tonight is your world view. What is your view of human life in the world? Because this is one of several ways that you can kind of organize your thinking about religion or lack thereof. You wake up one day and you've been doing tasks and getting things accomplished.

And you look at the sky and you watch the clouds float by and you say, is there something more than just my tasks and breathing air and my biological clock ticking away as I get older and I see people being born, I see people living, I see people dying. What's going on in human life? Does it have a meaning? Basically, when you talk about world view, you're talking about what is the meaning of life? If any, does life even have a meaning or is it just kind of a bizarre accident? You might as well sort of enjoy it during your brief moment of consciousness before you wink out. What's going on in human life? Now, this has been called world view.

It's been called your religion or lack thereof. In 1996, a bunch of the humanists kind of got upset because they said, well, when you've got your whole statement of human rights and talking about how people ought to be treated, you know, ethical treatment of humans, that kind of thing, they need to be respected for their beliefs. But the word belief isn't good because you can believe anything.

I can believe that mold is growing in my refrigerator. It has nothing to do with the meaning of life. It's too nebulous.

But if you put prefixes and suffixes on that word, if I say believer, most people associate that with some sort of theistic belief. Belief in God. He's a believer.

Well, that has a religious overtone. Or non-believer. He's an unbeliever.

He's an unbeliever. Non-believer. That has religious overtones.

But to say someone has beliefs, well, you can have beliefs about anything, so it's not specific. So we don't want to talk about someone's beliefs. And worldview is too general and too nebulous.

So they got together, all the people that think about human rights and all that, and they said, this is what we want to call it. This is our new term. Life stance.

It's your life stance. What is your stance on life? It's your life stance. 1996.

They wrote this up, put it in a thing. Everybody voted and agreed. That's what we're going to call it.

Anybody that's big on human rights and international agreements and all that, they said, you know, the French have a good word, the Germans have a good word for it, but English, we don't have a good term, so we're just going to make one up. Life stance. So, you may run across that.

It's been around about 10 years now. What is the worldview or life stance? These break down into broad categories that can be helpful. Our life stance, our religious belief, falls under the broad category of monotheism.

All of these are related to the presence or absence of God, pretty much. So, anything related to theism is going to have something to do with God. Now, there are a double handful of terms that have prefixes for theism.

Monotheism. What does mono mean? One. One God.

Most of the world, most of the western world, I should say, embraces or acknowledges or at least recognizes the three great monotheistic faiths. Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. If you do it chronologically, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

If you do it in terms of who's right, Christianity. Monotheism. This is a broad categorical

distinction.

A second great bucket into which you can throw life stances or worldviews is pantheism. And I'm going to put in here polytheism because they're really two sides of the same coin. What does pan mean? Remember we used to have Pan Am? We used to have Pan American Airlines? What does pan mean? All encompassing.

Pan American means we fly everywhere in America. Pandemic means it's an epidemic that's everywhere. It's a pandemic.

So pantheism is the belief that everything is God. God is all. And all is God.

This fire poker here next to me, that's God. It's in God. God's in it.

It's all part of God. The light switch. The fan blade.

My coffee cup is God. And God is my coffee cup. All is God.

You can't point to something that isn't God and that God is not in. Pantheism. God is everywhere.

God is all. All is God. Polytheism is kind of the flip side of this where you don't necessarily see God as a unified concept that embraces all and is all embracing or is embraced by all.

But God or the God-ness manifests itself in a lot of different ways. So polytheism, there is this divinity and there can be lots of manifestations of it. But they're really all kind of part of the God thing.

So you can lump in pantheism and polytheism. Now, we talked about the monotheistic faiths. What are they? Christianity.

We list ourselves first. We get to do that. Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, right? Monotheism.

What would fall under pantheism or polytheism? Well, depending on how you look at it, Hinduism, where you've got the idea that there are many of these manifestations. The Mormons, although they would never admit it, are polytheists because they basically say our God is a God and as we move up we will become gods like Him. We'll eventually have our own planet.

And that's polytheism. But again, you can see that it's kind of this one from another, all is one. Everything ultimately becomes part of God kind of a thing.

But you've got your animist religions, the Native Americans who thought Brother Bear and Brother Wolf and Brother Eagle and Brother Dancing Squirrel. There are all these little gods and they're all manifestations of the Great Spirit who is all and is in all and this sort of thing. Okay, so we've covered two now of these worldview, life stance, philosophical buckets into which

things can be placed.

The third one, now notice, you either believe that there's one God, one and only, or you believe that everything is God or there are lots of gods that are a part of the bigger sort of God corporation or something. The third big bucket is what we call naturalism. Naturalism basically says there is no God.

Now this is going to be known by some of the other theisms. You have, for example, atheism. The alpha privative, this comes from the Greek, makes the word negative.

If theos is God, then atheos or atheism is no God. No God. Now, in naturalism you have the atheists, but you have lots of other kinds of theists that slice the pie a little bit differently.

For example, you have non-theists. What's the difference between an atheist and a non-theist? An atheist says, I know all about what you're saying about God and there is no God and I define myself in opposition to your God belief. I am an opponent of your God belief.

A non-theist says, who cares about God belief? I totally don't care. It's a non-issue. It's an unimportant question.

Don't even bring it up. You might as well say somebody believes in the sky falling or somebody believes in flying invisible elephants or something. It's absurd to even bring the subject up.

I'm a non-theist. I don't even consider the question to be important. So, don't define me in terms of my non-God belief.

That's like saying I don't believe in Chitty Chitty Bang Bang or I don't believe in Mary Poppins or I don't believe in flubber. It's just absurd. Why even bring it up? There may be people who think that's important, but I'm just totally uninterested in the whole question.

I'm a non-theist. You have agnostics who say, well, I think the question is important, but I don't know how to answer it, so I'm going to define myself in terms that I don't know the answer. Maybe there's a God.

Maybe there's not. Maybe I think it's important. Maybe I don't.

But I recognize that the issue is there and I'm agnostic on that subject. I don't know the answer. And I don't think anybody else does.

And I'm unconvinced by anybody's arguments on either side. I'm just dumb. It's the dummy view.

Don't know. Don't think I have any way of knowing. Well, there are other theisms that we'll talk about as we go along tonight.

For example, there is eutheism and dystheism. Now this is acknowledging that there's a God,

but what kind of a God is it? So what do you think eutheism is? What does eu stand for? As in eureka or euthanasia. Eu means good, right? So eutheism means I believe in God and I believe He's good.

I think He's a good God. He's a benevolent God. He's a merciful and gracious God.

He's the God of the Bible, perhaps. Dystheism, what does the prefix dyst mean? Other than, I don't mean like disrespect. I mean dys as in, as the same general thing.

For example, dysfunctional. Are you from a functional family or a dysfunctional family? Dyst means bad, evil. So dystheism means I think there's a God, but I think He is a real booger.

I think He's a bad guy. I think He's responsible for evil. I think He's messing the universe up.

I think He's like the puppeteer. He's got good God puppet over here and bad God puppet over here. And Satan may not be Satan at all.

That just may be God's bad side. This is sort of your force idea. There's the good side and the dark side of the force.

Dystheism. What you find that's evil, that's God too. Well, we'll talk about some of this after the break.

But these are the three big categories. You're either a monotheist, you're some kind of a pantheist, polytheist, or you're no theist at all. You're a naturalist.

You think everything in the universe came about by some sort of completely scientifically explainable cause, and there's nothing in the unseen realm that has any concern for us. There's a fourth category that people can sometimes talk about, and that's relativism. But as we'll see, this is really going to be a part under the other three.

That's basically kind of you pick and choose the stuff you like. Well, I think everything's natural, but I still think there might be a God. It's kind of inconsistent and irrational.

Well, we're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to see the characteristics of some of these theisms. Is this eutheist and a dystheist? Are they monotheists? Maybe, maybe not.

It's different ways of slicing the pie. You could be a eutheist and a polytheist. You could be a dystheist and a monotheist.

It's different ways. It's like taking God belief or lack of God belief and turning it in different ways. If you want to talk about the number, that's going to be your mono and your poly.

If you're going to talk about the quality of God, that's going to be your eutheist and dystheist. There are atheists and there are anti-atheists who not only say, not only do I not believe in God,

but I am actively and aggressively attacking everybody who thinks there is a God. So I'm anti-theistic.

I stamp out God belief in our lifetime. That's another kind of theism.