

Xenos Christian Fellowship
Christian Ministry Unit 3: Moving Into a Ministry Lifestyle
Week 6 – Loving the Lost: Answering Objections

Introduction

In this class we will address some of the common objections to Christianity that you will encounter in our culture.¹ Peter gives us important advice on this area of ministry:

(1 Pet. 3:15*) Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.

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Before we look at these common objections, let's consider how apologetics (the defense of the Christian faith) relates to evangelism (the explanation of the gospel):

- Lead with the gospel, not with apologetics. Let the person raise objections.
- Respond to the objection—but don't over-respond—and try to get back to the gospel.
- Try to respond to the objection in a way that communicates to the gospel. Examples:
 - OBJECTION: “All religions have the same basic beliefs.”
RESPONSE: Highlight the difference between works vs. grace salvation.
 - OBJECTION: “All scriptures are the same.”
RESPONSE: Show Isa. 53 as an example of messianic prophecy (rather than Ezek. 26, etc.).

¹ A fuller response to each of these objections is available in the “Common Objections” Central Teaching series available at the Xenos Study Center and on our website (www.xenos.org).

Today's Cultural Climate

The way it was	The way it is
<p>1. Spiritual background</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nominal Christian experience—most people had some exposure to the Christian world-view. Information such as "The Four Spiritual Laws" provided a compelling reason to receive Christ. While many never heard the gospel, people did believe the basic concepts of a just and loving God, "true moral guilt," and forgiveness. A clear presentation of the Gospel put these concepts together in a way that often made sense to the hearer. 	<p>1. Spiritual background</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little significant exposure to the church Many people mix and blend different faiths to arrive at what they believe (e.g., New Age), and believe that all faiths are equally true. (NOTE: many with an evangelical church background have bought into this.) A consensus that we are not able to call things morally right and wrong, and that assigning true moral guilt to someone or some situation is "intolerant." We should be open to everything. Obviously, the gospel message doesn't fit with this perspective.
<p>2. What the critics thought</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critically-minded skeptics appealed to reason and evidence (especially science). Christians would defend their faith (apologetics) using classical arguments (design of the universe, uniqueness of humans, etc.) or evidence (historical evidence for Jesus' resurrection, for the reliability of the Bible, etc.). Rational critics often found these types of arguments persuasive. 	<p>2. What the critics think</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critically-minded skeptics find the claims and content of Christianity offensive because they are dogmatic and exclusive. Christianity can't possibly be universally true because it excludes other religious voices and traditions. "Hmmm, that's great for you, but you can't impose your truth on me." Truth and reason bounce off many people today. Christians should still make use of classical arguments and evidences, but also need to be able to defend the notion of absolute truth and critique relativism. This requires more patience and "pre-evangelism."

Two views of "truth"

1. *"In here"* (in my mind or in the culture) – truth is something we create.

2. *"Out there"* (revealed by God) – Truth is something we discover.

- It is objective, not merely subjective (Rom. 3:4).
- It is absolute, not relative (Acts 4:12; Jn. 14:6).

- It is antithetical, not synthetic (Matt. 12:30; Ex. 20:1-6).
- It is a gift of God's grace, not my propaganda.

Two definitions of "tolerance"

1. **BIBLICAL:** Personal respect and love for individuals despite deep disagreement with their beliefs.

2. **CONTEMPORARY:** Includes the old view, but adds that we must affirm the validity of all beliefs.

Important Communication Guidelines

1. *Find common ground.*

Why is connecting on common ground important?

Key areas of common ground with the postmodern world:

- Human subjectivity (Romans 1:21,28; Jer. 17:9)
- Inadequacy of reason alone (1 Cor. 2:14)
- The myth of "progress" (Matt. 24:10-12; 2 Tim. 3:1-7; Matt. 24:22).
- Critique of racism and sexism (Gen. 12:1-3; Gal. 3:28)
- Concern for the environment (Gen. 2:15; Rom 8:20,21)

What are the *limitations* of communicating only on common ground?

2. *Pick carefully what to disagree with.*

3. *Be patient. Our culture is biblically illiterate.*

- *It takes people longer to understand and make an informed decision about the gospel.*
- *Be gentle and respectful.*

4. *Seek to understand and tell your story.*

5. *Remember the witness of Christian community.*

OBJECTION 1: “How can you say that Christianity is the only valid religion?”

1. *Many religions are contradictory.* While all religions have superficial similarities, they make contradictory claims about foundational issues.² For example:

	WHAT IS GOD	OUR SPIRITUAL DILEMMA	WHAT IS SALVATION	THE WAY OF SALVATION
CHRISTIANITY	Personal & Trinitarian	Separation from God because of	Conscious, personal fellowship with God for all eternity	Receive the gift of God's forgiveness by faith in Jesus Christ

² “We believe that all religions are basically the same . . . They all believe in love and goodness. They only differ on matters of creation, sin, heaven, hell, God and salvation.” Steve Turner quoted by Ravi Zacharias in his Harvard lecture "Is Atheism Dead? Is God Alive?" November, 1993.

		moral guilt		
JUDAISM	Personal & Unitarian	Separation from God because of moral guilt	Conscious, personal fellowship with God for all eternity	Turn to God & live a moral life
ISLAM	Personal & Unitarian	Separation from God because of moral guilt	Enter Paradise for an eternity of sensual pleasure (<i>bur</i>)	Perform the 5 Pillars of Faith
HINDUISM	Pantheistic or Polytheistic	Ignorance that all is one	Freedom from conscious, individual existence ("moksha")	Better reincarnation by improving karma
BUDDHISM	Pantheistic or Atheistic	Ignorance that all is one	Freedom from conscious, individual existence ("nirvana")	Escape reincarnation by following 4 Noble Truths & 8-Fold Path

Discussing these differences is a great opportunity to emphasize Christianity's salvation by grace versus salvation by works through other religions!

Consider the conclusion of these non-Christian scholars of world religions:

Zaehner (Hindu): "To maintain that all religions are paths leading to the same goal, as is so frequently done today, is to maintain something that is not true . . . (T)he basic principles of East and West . . . simply are not starting from the same premises. The only common ground is that the function of religion is to provide release; there is no agreement at all as to what (we) must be released from. The great religions are talking at cross purposes."³

Panikkar (Pluralist): "(Pluralists must abandon their quest for a common essence because) the incommensurability of ultimate systems is unbridgeable . . . (and any) alleged common denominator is a sheer reductionist abstraction."⁴

2. *Even religious pluralists don't accept all religions as true or valid.* Especially when they prescribe practices that are morally repulsive, even the most thoroughgoing religious relativist will usually admit this.

³ Cited in Colin G. Chapman, *The Case For Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1981) p. 143.

⁴ Raimundo Panikkar, "The Jordan, the Tigris, and the Gangis," In Hick and Kitter, eds., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988) p. 110.

EXAMPLES:

3. *It is condescending to say all religions are the same.* Because most religions make exclusive truth claims, it is disrespectful to refuse to take their claims seriously.

Objection 2: "Why should I regard the Bible as God's unique Word? What about all of the other scriptures?"

In a religiously pluralistic culture, the Bible is seen as one of many scriptures, with none having an exclusive claim to being the uniquely authoritative Word of God.⁵

What makes the Bible unique among all the others?

1. *Most other "scriptures" don't claim to be revelation from God.*

2. *Only the Bible is rooted in history.* Spiritual truth claims cannot be directly verified. How can we directly verify whether God is personal or impersonal? What the afterlife is like? Whether salvation is by works or by grace? If all we had were the assertion of the scriptures, there would be no way to decide. *But if spiritual truth claims in scripture are tied to events in history that can be verified, we have a basis for taking these claims more seriously.*
 - The Bible's historical accuracy has been well documented.⁶ See Christian Ministry 2, Week 7 for examples.
 - Other scriptures are historically inaccurate or do not interface with history at all.

⁵ Other "scriptures" include: Hinduism (*Rig Vedas; Upanishads*); Buddhism (*Pali Canon; Sutras; Tibetan Book of the Dead*); Confucianism (*Analects of Confucius*); Islam (*Quran*); Ba'hai (*Writings of Baha'u'llah*); Mormonism (*Book of Mormon*).

⁶ "Evidence from early Jewish and Gentile writers establishes for those who reject the witness of Christian writings, the historical character of Jesus himself. Some writers may toy with the fancy of a 'Christ-myth', but they do not do so on the ground of historical evidence. The historicity of Christ is as axiomatic for an unbiased historian as the historicity of Julius Caesar. It is not historians who propagate the 'Christ-myth' theories." F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 119.

The eastern scriptures have no interest in history, because according to their world view, this is the world of illusion from which we are to be delivered. **Ancient polytheistic religions** likewise had no interest in history. Their gods acted only in myths, removed as far as possible from real history.

The Koran is almost entirely assertions of Allah. It has very little historical material and when compared to parallel biblical material it often differs. A study of the Koran finds that Mohammed's references to Judaism were drawn from contemporary Jewish folklore.⁷ For example, When the Israelites set up the golden calf in the wilderness they did so at the urging of a Samaritan. But Samaritans did not exist during the time of Moses.⁸

The Book of Mormon makes many historical references, but it is also full of historical anachronisms and geographical inaccuracies.⁹

3. *Only the Bible provides predictive prophecy.* This is a unique means of authenticating its claim to be God's inspired Word. The Bible actually anticipates our need for such unique authentication and provides its own means of authentication via the phenomenon of fulfilled prophecy.

(Isaiah 46:9,10) “Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, ‘My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure.’”

The Old Testament prophets made hundreds of predictions about the coming Messiah, most of which were beyond anyone's power to deliberately fulfill, or beyond anyone's desire to fulfill unless they were the Messiah.

- **Time (Dan. 9:24,25):** Over 500 years in advance, Daniel predicted to the year when the Messiah would be killed.¹⁰
- **Birthplace (Mic. 5:2):** Jesus had no control over his place of birth.

⁷ Josh McDowell, *The Islam Debate*, page 48.

⁸ Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1994) p. 549-552.

⁹ Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1994) pp. 553-556.

¹⁰ See Dennis McCallum, *Christianity: The Faith That Makes Sense* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House, 1997) for clear overview of Daniel's prophecy. For more depth, see Harold Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1978).

- **Rejected by his people (Isa. 53):** This prophecy is so detailed that prior to the Dead Sea Scrolls, many thought it was a Christian forgery.
- **Mode of Execution (Ps. 22:1-18):** This was predicted several centuries before crucifixion was invented.

In the vast majority, there is no prophecy at all or any comparably unique means of self-authentication.

- **Muhammad** acknowledged that the biblical prophets were confirmed by miraculous signs (*Surahs 3:184; 17:103; 23:45*)—including prophecy, but when he was asked for similar confirmation that his message was from God, he refused (*Surahs 2:118; 4:153; 6:8,9,37*) and regarded the request as impious.¹¹
- The predictions of other so-called prophets are unworthy of being compared to the biblical prophets. They usually lack context and the syntax is so general that any specific interpretation is impossible.¹²

Objection #3: "Why should I accept your interpretation of the Bible? Everyone has their own interpretation."

This is addressed in Christian Ministry 2, week 1 (Hermeneutics).

Objection #4: "How can your religion consign people to hell if they have never even heard about Christ?"

There are often two distinct issues in this objection:

God's judgment of *all* people

The fairness of God's judgment

A. Will God condemn all those who have never heard the Gospel?

¹¹ Norman Geisler, in Dean C. Halverson, ed., *The Compact Guide to World Religions* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House, 1996), pp. 265, 266.

¹² Baha'u'llah (the founder of the Baha'i faith) is seen by some as a prophet. He made several predictions that his followers claim have come true. Here's one example: "In the days to come, ye will, verily, behold things of which ye have never heard before. Thus hath it been decreed in the Tablets of God, and none can comprehend it except them whose sight is sharp. In like manner, the moment the word expressing my attribute 'The Omniscient' issueth forth from my mouth, every created thing will, according to its capacity and limitations, be invested with the power to unfold the knowledge of the most marvelous sciences, and will be empowered to manifest them in the course of time at the bidding of Him Who is the Almighty, the All-Knowing." Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings*, p. 142. This prophecy is too general to recognize its fulfillment or to verify that it came true.

While the Bible insists that all people are saved only through Jesus Christ (Jn. 14:6), it does not say that people can only be saved *if* they hear about Jesus Christ.¹³ Consider the following principles:

- The Bible clearly teaches that *God is just*. Abraham rightly asserts:

(Gen. 18:25) “Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

See Rom. 4:15 for one implication of God’s justice.

- The Bible also teaches that *God gives a significant amount of revelation about himself to the person “without the Bible.”* See especially Rom. 1:18-20; 2:14,15. These passages make two important points.

The amount of revelation is considerable. Though the MEANS of man's forgiveness is not revealed through general revelation, the NEED for it is revealed.

These people have been given enough light to be justly condemned. But it would seem to follow (because of God's justice) that this would also be enough light to be saved—if people respond to it properly.

Another biblical fact is relevant to this question.

- *Old Testament believers were saved by their faith before Jesus came.*

Many Old Testament Jews had access to special revelation, but they had no clear understanding of God's plan of salvation (1 Pet. 1:10-12).

Some (like Melchizedek and Job) had little or no access to special revelation.

Another possibility is that

- *God may judge based on his knowledge of how people would have responded had they heard the message.*

Tentative Conclusion: If the “person without the Bible” responds properly, as defined above, to the light God has given him, he (like believers before the time of Christ) can be saved by grace by asking God for mercy. He will be saved only

¹³ “ . . . God has not told us what his arrangements about the other people are. We do know that no person can be saved except through Christ; we do not know that only those who know Him can be saved through Him.” C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, New York: Touchstone, 1996) p. 65.

through the death of Christ, because “no man comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6).¹⁴

QUALIFICATION 1: This does NOT mean that any unevangelized person who is a devout follower of his religion will be saved.

QUALIFICATION 2: If people can be saved apart from hearing the gospel, this does NOT mean that evangelism and missions are unnecessary.

B. Even if someone without access to the Gospel can be saved, how can a loving God judge anyone?

- God doesn't relish judging anyone.

(Ezek. 18:23,32)²³ Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live? . . .³² For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!

- God's judgment is consistent with (not contradictory to) his love.

(Jer. 9:24) “I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,” declares the Lord.

God's sense of justice and the anger he feels towards sin are rooted in his love. Because he loves human beings, God becomes angry when he sees the destructive impact that our sin has on others.¹⁵ God expresses this anger by seeking justice and executing judgment. This involves punishing sinners and unfortunately, we *all* fall in that category.

- A God who is indifferent to sin is unloving.

Is it fair for people to never be called to account for their actions?

¹⁴ For an extensive study of this question, see Don Richardson, *Eternity In Their Hearts*.

¹⁵ “All loving persons are sometimes filled with wrath, not just despite of but because of their love. If you love a person and you see someone ruining them—even they themselves—you get angry.” Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God* (New York, New York: Penguin Group, 2008), p. 73.

If everyone will ultimately be in heaven, why doesn't God skip these terrible scenes of human pain and misery and usher everyone into the final state?

C. Is God's judgment just?

Can we be sure that God will judge fairly? Consider these points:

- Can we trust our ability to judge what is fair for ourselves or others?

- Do we have a moral standard by which we can evaluate whether God's judgment is fair or unfair?

- God's righteousness condemns *all* of us (Rom. 3:23), but God's love provided forgiveness for *all* of us through Jesus—if we humbly entrust ourselves to him (Rom. 3:22).

Memory Verses:

1 Pet. 3:15* - We need to be able to defend our faith in Jesus, and do this with gentleness and respect toward those who object.

Assignment

Carefully read 2 Cor. 8,9 and:

- Identify and describe in your own words several principles of Christian financial giving in this passage. (You should be able to identify at least 6 principles.)

- Explain briefly why each of these principles is important. (i.e., What good things happen if we observe these principles? What problems develop if we neglect them?)