

BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW APOLOGETICS – (UNIVERSALISM) - Lesson 7

EXCLUSIVISM – The belief that there is only one way or path to heaven / salvation

This is the traditional, historical view of all world religions ... that in order to be saved, such and such has to be believed and/or such and such has to be practiced / achieved, in order to be “saved” or advance towards salvation after death, in the afterlife.

Most people in the present, postmodern age in which we now live, try very hard to deny exclusivism. Most people nowadays strongly deny the belief that there is only one way of salvation. What they also often fail to realize, however, is the irrationality of their position. Their position is nothing more than an expression of the idea that “absolute truth doesn’t exist.” They are essentially saying that their view of world religions is true, and traditional ones are false ... and by doing so, they themselves are being “exclusivist” in their belief.

INCLUSIVISM – The belief that even though there is one way to salvation, it’s possible for those who adhere to other faiths to also be saved under certain circumstances.

The Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church, for example, makes specific provision for Jews and Muslims to be saved. And also those of other faiths who worship false gods out of “ignorance.” They teach that people of other faiths can still be saved “in Christ” even though they are not Christians (see Quotes from the RC Catechism)

UNIVERSALISM / RELIGIOUS PLURALISM – The belief that “all religions / belief systems lead to salvation” ... All religions are equally true ... all religions are essentially different paths on the same mountain that eventually lead to “god” / salvation

The Blind Men and the Elephant, children’s book, by Lillian Quigley

An ancient fable of six blind men who visit a Rajah (Indian monarch or ruler) and encounter an elephant for the first time in their lives.

First blind man reaches out and touches the side of the elephant ... "How smooth -- the elephant is like a wall."

2nd touches the trunk ... "How round -- the elephant is like a snake."

3rd touches the tusk ... "How sharp -- the elephant is like a spear."

4th touches the leg ... "How tall -- the elephant is like a tree."

5th touches the ear of the elephant and says ... "How wide -- the elephant is like a fan."

The 6th touches the tail ... "How thin! An elephant is like a rope."

At this point, the blind men begin arguing between themselves. Each one believes his view is correct. Now, the Rajah sees them arguing from atop his high balcony and he tells the men to stop fighting. He tells them they are all partially correct, but they’ve missed the fact that because of their blindness they’re not able to see the whole picture. “Each one of you touched a part of the elephant. But to see the entire elephant means you’ve got to put all of the parts together.

This story is often used to try and illustrate 2 ideas:

- 1) **Religious Pluralism:** Differing religions / faiths only represent one part of a larger truth about 'god' and salvation. All religions are only different paths that ultimately lead to the same place.
- 2) **Biased Cultural-Views:** Our own cultural and/or religious bias hopelessly blinds us to a proper understanding of others' views, and the nature of reality in general. Our personal biases blind us from the seeing the greater truth that can be found in other views.

The book *FOLKWAYS*, by anthropologist William Graham Sumner, asserts that morality, for example, is not an objective reality. Any claims to objective truth, including personal beliefs about morality, are false because every person is entrapped within their own cultural view of truth and morality. And each of us are incapable of seeing beyond the limitations of our own biases.

Let's now put this very illustrative story to some logical scrutiny...

A Picture or Illustration Isn't Proof

There is a difference between an illustration and a logical argument. The story is a powerful illustration but proving something is true requires logical justification.

The problem we Bible-believing Christians have with non-biblical worldviews isn't fundamentally our lack of knowledge about other worldviews, but incoherent reasoning when it comes to other worldviews.

Christians don't reject non-biblical, non-Christian views because we're not fully informed or not understanding such religious beliefs. Other religious truth-claims directly conflict with what the Bible teaches about God, the Cosmos, mankind, sin, and salvation.

Judaism, for example, teaches that Jesus wasn't the Messiah. Nor does it teach that Jesus is God. Christianity, on the other hand, teaches that Jesus was the Messiah and is God, the second person of the Trinity, who entered into the human race on this earth in order to pay the price for sin on the cross in order to redeem God's elect. Both views cannot be correct.

Fundamentally differing religious claims can never be harmonized with more information. As a matter of fact, the MORE one learns about the truth-claims made by various religions the more one understands how fundamentally different they are.

When someone tries to harmonize differing religious views by saying, "Well, all religions are basically the same; they teach people need to be kind to one another and care for each other," they aren't fully acknowledging the fundamental beliefs of any given religion.

The Story of the Blind Men & the Elephant Refutes Itself if Used as an Illustration for Universalism

The story of the elephant is self-refuting. How?

The only way someone could "know" all religions ultimately lead to salvation would be to have "exceptional knowledge" or "special revelation" of that truth. But where would such enlightened knowledge come from? Their own personal experience? Or access to some other special revelation that would make such knowledge possible.

Think about it. The story of *the Blind Men & the Elephant* portrays the enlightened, all-seeing Rajah as "more enlightened" than the founders of the world's most influential religions. Any person who says

that all roads ... all religions ... lead to “salvation” or “god” is claiming to know MORE than Jesus, Muhammed, Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha), Confucius, etc. These people ALL taught that what they were teaching was THE truth about salvation.

Religious pluralists, or universalist, claim to have a bigger, more accurate picture of reality than the most influential religious figures in history. Does that sound humble? No. Just the opposite. Imagine, however unintentional, the resulting ego and hubris that actually results from making a universalist claim. How so?

Remember, this story supposedly teaches the direct opposite of this kind of hubris. It supposedly teaches humility ... an understanding that because human knowledge is finite and limited, no one can know absolute truth about religious beliefs because of their own personal or cultural biases. And yet, it ends up making a brand new absolute, objective truth-claim regarding all of the world religions.

So the question must be asked, “What does a universalist use to see, or be enlightened with, in order to possess their understanding of the supposed “universalist truth” of religious pluralism?”

Remember, the Rajah was looking down on the blind men, from his privileged position, high up in the balcony of his palace. He clearly saw what the blind men could not, so he could correct their understanding. But isn't that exactly a viewpoint the story teaches isn't possible for blind people to achieve?

Always ask someone, when talking about this story, “Who do you identify with in this story? Are you one of the blind men? Or are you like the Rajah, who isn't blind, but can see?”

If the person says they're like one of the blind men then they cannot profess to know beyond their own limited understanding of any given religion, and they could never know that all religions lead to salvation. On the other hand, if they say they're like the Rajah then they must explain how they've escaped the blindness that the founders of the world's religions had when teaching exclusive religious beliefs.

The King Has Spoken

We can now use the story to illustrate a great biblical truth. Human beings are indeed blind. We are lost. We are separated from God, and we're lost in sin.

And our great King and Lord, who does in fact, see everything ... who knows everything ... He has not left us human beings in the dark. God, the infinite knower, speaks absolute truth to us in the Bible.

God has spoken to us blind beggars, us sinners, and reveals the truth about Himself, and the salvation He offers to us in Jesus Christ.

Further Critique of other Universalist beliefs

- **How does the Universalist approach “holy books” or “scriptures”?** In other words, ask them how they view so-called holy books: 1) Do they regard them as attempts by human beings to record what they themselves imagine “god” and “salvation” to be? If so, then, of what truthful value are so-called holy books? (After all, they're simply products of the writers' imaginations). 2) Or do they view holy books as actual communications from “god,” who is enlightening readers

of the holy texts by giving them truth? If “god” is doing that, however, why would god inspire different religious writers to portray concepts such as “god” and “salvation” so differently? Why would “god” inspire such confusion upon humanity with such obviously contradicting truth-claims?

- **Universalists typically affirm only select portions of the writings from various religious “holy books”** instead of taking all of the writings seriously. This is their way of trying to minimize the differing truth-claims made by different religions. (Ask them if they realize they’re doing this?)
- **The problem of religious pluralism isn’t a lack of information about differing religions; the problem is that the more one knows about differing religions the more logically difficult it becomes to try and harmonize their differing truth-claims.** Differing worldviews present entirely different truth claims about the nature of reality, including definitions of “God / god,” what actually exists and doesn’t exist, what it means to “be saved,” the way / path to “salvation,” and ethics (the standard for right and wrong - in terms of both what the standard is for right and wrong and what that behavior is required by the standard). The more one knows about world religions the more obvious their differences become.
- **The universalist cannot (if they consistently hold to their worldview) claim to have an objective, superior source of authority or information** (that provides them with MORE INSIGHT than the holy writings of the world’s religions) that enables them know what they claim to know (i.e., that all roads lead to heaven).
- **A Universalist mindset will tend to be driven, in pursuit of the “desired goal” (which is, “salvation for all”).** This why Universalist’s should be pressed to define how they define “sin” and “evil,” and how they justify these definitions.
- **Universalists will typically feign respect for every major world religion, while simultaneously avoiding what they see as “un-appealing” aspects of those religions** (i.e., widow-burning by Hindus, child-sacrifice by pagan religions documented in the Bible, human sacrifice and drinking of blood by ancient Aztecs, etc.) They often avoid hard questions about all worldviews, especially some of the modernly distasteful practices of certain religious groups.
- **Universalists will usually argue that even though the arena of “FAITH” is completely separate from the arena of “REASON.”** In doing so, however, they will still try to rationaly argue for the supposed truth of their Universalist position. **Universalists will argue there is no “one right way” when it comes to world religions,** but then try and affirm their Universalist view is the “correct view” on religious matters. (Such is the inevitable contradiction that results in those who try and deny “absolute truth” -- as a denial of absolute truth is itself a claim of absolute truth).
- **Politely press universalists to try and explain how Christianity teaches Jesus is God in the flesh,** but Jews regard Jesus as a mere human being and false teacher, while Muslims regard him as a prophet of Allah, but neither God nor Messiah? (Go ahead and ask them.)
- **Universalists typically re-interpret selected passages from the Bible (and deviate from historical-grammatical interpretation)** in order to try and push a universalist interpretation into the Bible. This amounts to the hearer of a message redefining the message of the speaker in order to come to a different meaning than intended by the speaker. What right does anyone

have to do that? But such re-definition of a speakers' words is misrepresentation of their words (i.e., lying).