



# **Apologetics 101**

**Exclusivity of Christ & Pluralism**  
**Week 7**

**Pastor Scott Kramer**



# Class Objectives

After completing this class, you will understand:

- the theological foundations for ***Christian Particularism***  
(*the view that only some, but not all human beings, will partake of God's salvation*)
  - 'The Fall' of man
  - the sinfulness of man
  - the meaning of salvation
  - the deity of Christ
  - the exclusivity of Christ
- Pluralism
  - the basics of pluralism and its prevalence in the world
  - the most famous theory of pluralism, John Hick's 'The Real,' and its fatal flaws
  - fallacious arguments for pluralism, and their flaws
- the implications of Christian Particularism
  - the key terms pertaining to the Doctrine of Salvation
  - how to address the question of the unevangelized



# Theological Foundations

## 'The Fall' of Man

### What Went Wrong? Let's Backtrack a Bit

- Remember the 'Days of Creation'? God said 'it was Good' and 'it was very good' (Gen. 1:31)
- We were made in His Image!! We carry the Imago Dei – the image of God.
- He created us to be Free Moral Agents. Moral Autonomy. The Freedom to CHOOSE
- God gave Adam freedom to enjoy ALL that was made, except for one item: fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A means of affirming man's free will choice to obey His commands.
- Unfortunately, mankind (Adam & Eve) opted to ignore God's command and instead listen to the voice of the Tempter. They taste-tested the forbidden fruit, and as a result, experienced separation from God.
- The '**Fall of Man**' in Gen. 3 records this entrance of sin. They were initially given the right to partake in the Tree of Life, but were subsequently banned from it after choosing independence from their Creator.
- Thus, all human offspring would now be born into this separation, inheriting their first parents' sin problem.
- EVERY person is born into a broken (cursed) world, themselves carrying a brokenness within their own spirit.

*"Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." -Joh 3:18 NIV*



# Theological Foundations

## The Sinfulness of Man

### What Went Wrong? **SIN!**

- Simply put, sin is rebellion against God. It had its beginning when Lucifer rebelled in heaven. (Rev. 12:9, John 8:44, 1 John 3:8). This was the first 'Fall' in creation.
  - The 2<sup>nd</sup> 'Fall' occurred in the Garden of Eden, when Adam & Eve opted for their own way, giving in to the voice of the Tempter rather than heeding the Voice of their Creator. (Gen. 3:6-7)

#### Old Testament Terms for sin:

- **Chatta'th** – (Hbrw) missing the mark (Judg.20:16)
- **'Awon** – (Hbrw) iniquity, crooked, twisted (Is.43:24)
- **'Avar** – (Hbrw) crossing a boundary (Num.14:41)
- **Resha'** – (Hbrw) wrong, injustice (Prv.28:3-4)

#### New Testament Terms for sin:

- **Hamartia** – (Grk) carries the generic concept of sin in the NT. Refers both to specific sins as well as to sin as a force. (Mark 1:5)
- **Anomia** – (Grk) lawlessness, iniquity (Rom. 2:12)
- **Adikia** – (Grk) unrighteousness, both small and great (Rom. 1:29)
- **Parabasis** – (Grk) overstepping, transgression, breaking a standard (Rom. 5:14)
- **Asebeia** – (Grk) ungodliness (1 Peter 4:18)



# Theological Foundations

## The Sinfulness of Man

### What Went Wrong? **SIN!**

There are 2 aspects of SIN that must be dealt with in understanding our Brokenness:

- **The Sin Nature** – the part of man that has been corrupted by the curse, as a result of the Fall
- **The Acts of Sin** – individual ‘sins’ - sinful thoughts, words, actions
- Rom. 7:14-25 – Paul describes the hopelessness of our problem with sin, contrasting it with what is planted into a person after receiving Christ as Lord.
- Both Sin and Sins separate us from our Heavenly Father
- Sin renders us completely helpless and broken spiritually, with no means of fixing our own brokenness.
- But God has made a way!! By sending his Son as an atoning sacrifice, dying vicariously in our place, paying the penalty for sin and satisfying the wrath of God (Rom. 8:1-4), thus making it possible for us to be reconciled to God through faith in Christ Jesus.



# Theological Foundations

## The Meaning of Salvation

### REPENTANCE & FAITH

- Repentance begins our journey towards reconciliation – simply acknowledging our brokenness/need.
- Faith can be understood in terms of **trust** – when we place our faith in something, we are placing our trust in that thing. Found in the NT word *pisteuo*, 'I believe, trust,' and the noun *pistis*, 'faith'. Indicates a trust in, obedience to, and dependence on God.
- **Eph. 2:8-10** "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not of yourselves. It is the gift of God.

### REGENERATION

- The decisive and instantaneous action of the Holy Spirit in which He re-creates the inner nature of a person. (Titus 3:5)
- The OT gives the image of having our heart of stone removed and replaced with a heart of flesh. (Ez.11:19, 36:25-27)
- This concept of regeneration is most often pictured as a 'new birth' in the NT. (John 3:3, 2 Cor. 5:17, 1 Peter 1:3) – these are great verses to underline and memorize!



# Theological Foundations

## The Meaning of Salvation

### JUSTIFICATION

- As regeneration changes our nature, Justification changes our **status** with God.
- This is the act whereby God, in light of Christ's payment on the cross, declares condemned sinners to be free from all **guilt** of sin and its eternal consequences, and at the same time declaring them to be fully righteous.
  - Note that we do not have our own righteousness, but rather Jesus' righteousness is 'imputed' to us, as in a judicial sense. (2 Cor. 5:17-21)
  - Justified – *"Just as if I'd never sinned"*

### ADOPTION

- The next step in the process of salvation is that we become adopted into the family of God. We receive all the rights, privileges and obligations of sonship.
- We have been 'predestined' to be adopted as sons. (and daughters) – Eph. 1:4-5
- We have received a 'spirit of sonship' that enables us to identify with God in a whole new way. (Rom. 8:15)



# Theological Foundations

## The Meaning of Salvation

### PERSEVERANCE

- Do not mistake this concept for the Calvinistic view of *'once saved always saved'*!
- Biblically, perseverance refers to the ongoing operation of the Holy Spirit through which the work of God begun in our hearts will be carried on to completion. (Phil.1:6)
- The most common sense of 'believing' in the NT is *here and now*. Present tense belief.
- Consider for now 1 Cor. 15:1-2 and John 15.

According to the Apostle Paul, no amount of 'religious' living can make a person right with God and fix the internal brokenness issue. Consider his remarks in Galatians chapters 2-3 on this issue.

*"<sup>15</sup> We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles <sup>16</sup> know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified."* - Gal. 2:15-16 NIV

*"For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law."*  
- Gal. 3:21 NIV

### **Video 1: Groothuis: The Gospel in About One Minute<sup>1</sup> (1:25)**

1. Douglas Groothuis, "The Gospel in About a Minute with Dr. Douglas Groothuis" Capturing Christianity, November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2018, <https://youtu.be/wxaNr-hAlys>.





# Theological Foundations

## The Deity of Christ

### The Deity of Christ

- *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* -Joh 1:1,14 NIV
- *“Very truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!”* At this, they picked up stones to stone him,” -Joh 8:58-59 NIV
  - The Jews were completely clear on what Jesus was claiming. They immediately tried to stone him!
  - Jesus was referring to himself as the very name God claimed for himself in the OT when instructing Moses how to tell the Israelites He was sending him to them:
    - “Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?” God said to Moses, **“I am who I am.** This is what you are to say to the Israelites: **‘I am has sent me to you.’”** -Exo 3:13-14 NIV
- *“For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,”* -Col 2:9 NIV



# Theological Foundations

## The Deity of Christ

### The Deity of Christ *(continued...)*

- The Book of Revelation provides further support for the deity of Christ
  - *“I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore,”* -Rev 1:17-18 ESV
    - Christ’s identification of himself here as “the first and the last” affirms his deity  
This is another specific title God used to identify himself in the OT (Isa 44:6, 48:12)  
*“Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts:  
“I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.”* -Isa 44:6 ESV
  - When John describes Christ in his vision in Rev 1:9-20 he uses characteristics attributed to God in the OT
    - *“The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow.”* -Rev 1:14 ESV  
same used to describe the “Ancient of Days” in Daniel 7:9 (may symbolize dignity, wisdom, or purity)
    - *“voice was like the roar of many waters”* (Rev 1:15).  
same used to describe the sound of God Almighty in Eze 1:24 and the coming of His glory in Eze 43:2
    - *“The ascription of the titles and attributes of God to Christ is an indication of the exalted Christology of the Apocalypse.”<sup>1</sup>* -Robert Mounce

1. Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998), 72.



# Theological Foundations

## The Deity of Christ

### The Deity of Christ *(continued...)*

#### Jesus' Self Claims:

- John 1:1 – Was God in the Beginning
- John 6:35 – I am the bread of Life
- John 8:12 – I am the Light of the World
- John 8:58 – Before Abraham was, I AM
- John 10:7,9 – I am the gate/door of the sheep
- John 10:11,14 – I am the Good Shepherd
- John 11:25 – I am the resurrection and the life
- John 14:6 – I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life
- John 15:1, 5 – I am the true vine
- Phil. 2:5-7 – emptied of his majesty in heaven

***Jesus and other NT writers didn't leave much room for confusion about who they believed Jesus to be, and their writings also leave little room for who Jesus believed himself to be!***



# Theological Foundations

## The Exclusivity of Christ

### The Exclusivity of Christ

#### The Exclusivity of Christ as demonstrated explicitly in Scripture:

- *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” -Joh 14:6 ESV*
- *“For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people.” -1 Tim 2:5-6 NIV*
- *“...there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” -Act 4:12 ESV*
- *“Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. -Joh 10:8-9 NIV*
- *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” -Joh 3:16 NIV*



# Theological Foundations

## The Exclusivity of Christ

### The Exclusivity of Christ *(continued...)*

#### The Exclusivity of Christ as demonstrated throughout the New Testament:

- *“The New Testament, from the ministry of Jesus to the Pauline letters, to the Apocalypse of John, does not offer any encouragement or endorsement of the Christless theocentrism of religious pluralism. When Jesus Christ encountered people from the surrounding nations, His call was to believe in Him and then to affirm the faith of individuals when it was directed at Him (Matt 8:5–13; 15:21–28; Mark 5:1–20). Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, boldly proclaimed the gospel to communities and societies that did not know the living God and worshipped other deities and idols. . . .When Paul addressed the church in Colossae that was facing the temptation of syncretism (Col 2:4–23), he proclaimed the uniqueness and unrivaled supremacy of Jesus Christ (Col 1:15–23). . . . In the face of pluralist calls to see the essential sameness in the great world religions, the Christian faith makes no such affirmations of equality. Jesus Christ did not offer Himself as one path among many, nor did He claim to be the best path. Christianity is not the fulfillment of other religious quests, nor is it based upon twenty-first-century sensibilities and judgments. The essence of Christianity is grounded in the reality that the God of grace is reaching out to those who have rebelled against Him, and He has done so uniquely and emphatically through Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup> -Todd Miles*

1. Todd Miles, *A God of Many Understandings?: The Gospel and a Theology of Religions* (Nashville TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010) 179-180.



# Pluralism

## The Basics and Prevalence of Pluralism

### Definition of Pluralism

[Video 2: RF/Craig: How Can Jesus be the Only Way?¹ \(5:19\)](#)

**Pluralism:** the view that people actually appropriate God's salvation through a multiplicity of conditions and means in various religions<sup>2</sup>

- Generally speaking, pluralism is also understood as the view that all major religions can be affirmed as equally valid or true
- *"The different religions are beautiful flowers from the same garden, or they are branches of the same majestic tree. . . . The root of all religions is one and is pure and all of them have sprung from the same source, hence all are equal."*<sup>3</sup> -Mahatma Gandhi
- In other words, all major religions provide equally legitimate ways to respond to the divine reality, and *no single one can claim to be true and normative for all people in all cultures at all times*<sup>4</sup>

1. Craig, "How Can Jesus Be the Only Way?," Reasonable Faith, November 19, 2019, <https://youtu.be/RRyq6RwzLEM>.

2. Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 630.

3. Mahatma Gandhi quoted in Harold A. Netland, *Christianity & Religious Diversity: Clarifying Christian Commitments in a Globalizing Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 141.

4. Netland, *Christianity & Religious Diversity*, 141.



# Pluralism

## The Basics and Prevalence of Pluralism

### The Prevalence of Pluralism

**Pluralism is held by the vast majority of people today, and it was also held by many in the ancient world**

- 8 in 10 members of mainline Protestant churches and Catholics believe many religions can lead to eternal life<sup>1</sup>
- 6 in 10 of those who are members of evangelical and historically black churches believe the same<sup>1</sup>
- 7 in 10 Americans with any religious affiliation whatsoever agree<sup>1</sup>
- 3 out of 5 young Christians (18-29 year olds) drop out of church after attending regularly, and a primary reason for this is the exclusive nature of Christianity<sup>2</sup> (*recall from Week 1*)
- The exclusivity of Christ is not only scandalous in our modern pluralistic culture, it was also scandalous in the ancient polytheistic culture! *Pluralism is not new.* Some may know of the 'Pantheon' in Rome!
- In Europe, Christianity began to dominate the landscape through the Holy Roman Empire. Succeeding this, however, during three centuries of exploration (1450-1750) it was discovered that much of the rest of the world was untouched by the gospel of Jesus Christ. It became difficult for some to embrace the exclusive claims of Christ when whole civilizations were being encountered who had never heard the name Jesus. What would be the fate of those who lived in the absence of Christ's name?<sup>3</sup>
- In a world of many religions, each one giving some respect to the other, hostility becomes inevitable toward any who make seemingly narrow and intolerant claims that theirs is the right way, as well as the **only** way!

1. "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey: Religious Beliefs and Practices," The Pew Forum, 2008, 58, <https://www.pewforum.org/2008/06/01/u-s-religious-landscape-survey-religious-beliefs-and-practices/>, quoted in Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, USA, 2011), 567.

2. David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me.: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church . . . and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 92-93.

3. Craig, *On Guard*, 267-268.



# Pluralism

## The Basics and Prevalence of Pluralism

### Conflicting Truth Claims Among World Religions

**It is simply not possible for all religions to be true in all they claim at the same time. For example:**

- Christianity claims God is triune, Christ is God, and Christ was crucified to pay the penalty for the sins of the world. In contrast, Islam vehemently rejects the Trinity, the deity of Christ, and the crucifixion of Christ. Islam teaches Jesus was just a prophet of Allah (though Muhammad was the 'Seal of the Prophets'), and therefore it is unthinkable Allah would allow one of his messengers to die in shame and torture.<sup>1</sup>
- Christianity teaches that humans have one lifetime to attain salvation in Christ, whereas Vedantic Hinduism teaches that one has multiple lifetimes to attain moksha (the release from the cycle of samsara, or reincarnation) and become one with the divine reality (Atman-Brahman)<sup>2</sup>
- In Christianity, ultimate reality consists of an all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-good Personal Creator, who is distinct from his creation. In Vedantic Hinduism, ultimate reality is Brahman, which is a pantheistic, impersonal, all-pervading divine reality. The individual self, or soul, (Atman) is part of Brahman, and not distinct from it. (In this doctrine, one attains *moksha* by becoming aware of their atman's oneness with Brahman.
- *Glossing over the differences between religions is potentially offensive and not productive! It is better to acknowledge them and take others' sincerely held religious beliefs seriously.*

1. Winfried Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions*, 2 ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 115-116.

2. *Ibid.*, 281.





# Pluralism

## The Basics and Prevalence of Pluralism

### So How Can Pluralism be Logically Viable and Coherent?

- The only way to affirm pluralism as a logically viable and coherent religious view is *to concede that certain teachings, traditions, and events attested to by the worlds' religions are false, or treat portions of the sacred texts of the worlds' religions as figurative rather than literal. We must stretch our conception of religious truth.*

#### Below would be a paradigm for religious pluralism:<sup>1</sup>

1. All major forms of religion are likewise equal in respect of making common reference to a single, transcendent sacred reality
2. All major forms of religion are likewise equal in respect of offering some means or other to human salvation
3. All religious traditions are to be seen as containing revisable, limited accounts of the nature of the sacred: none is certain enough in its particular dogmatic formulations to provide the norm for interpreting the others
4. Religious pluralism cannot privilege the perspectives of any single religion or of theistic, pantheistic, or non-theistic forms of religion. *\*(#4 is an addition to paradigm from Netland)*

1. Peter Byrne, "It is Not Reasonable to Believe that Only One Religion is True," in *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Michael L. Peterson and Raymond J. VanArragon (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 215 quoted in Netland, *Christianity & Religious Diversity*, 142.



# Pluralism

## Fallacious Arguments for Pluralism

### Argument Ad-Hominem: It is arrogant to say your religion is the only true religion<sup>1</sup>

- it is arrogant, even immoral, to say your way is right, and thus assume that everyone else is wrong
- an *'argument ad hominem'* – tries to invalidate the truthfulness of a position by attacking the character of the one who holds it
  - This is a fallacious argument because, *“the truth of an argument is independent of the moral character of those who believe it.”* -Craig
- **(ILL)** If someone were to discover a vaccine for AIDS, would that person’s character matter at all?
  - It’s also a double-edged sword, since the opponent who says that we are wrong for holding our view is himself arrogant for calling us wrong and himself right!
- *“Many people say it is ethnocentric to claim that our religion is superior to others. Yet isn’t that very statement ethnocentric? Most non-Western cultures have no problem saying their culture and religion is best. The idea that it is wrong to do so is deeply rooted in Western traditions of self-criticism and individualism.”*<sup>2</sup> –Tim Keller

1. Craig, *On Guard*, 269.

2. Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2018), 12.



# Pluralism

## Fallacious Arguments for Pluralism

### Genetic Fallacy: You only believe in Christianity because you were raised in your culture<sup>1</sup>

- While this may be largely true, how one comes to believe in something has nothing to do with its truthfulness
- (ILL) Does it matter what the name of the teacher was who taught you mathematics?
  - “Well, you only believe that  $2 + 2 = 4$  because your Grade School Teacher taught you that!” This is a fallacious argument because  $2 + 2 = 4$  is an objective truth regardless of how one comes to learn of it.
- (ILL) If you grew up a few centuries ago, you likely would have believed the earth was at the center of our solar system, but would it have been true?
- Likewise, the objective truthfulness of Christianity as a belief system has nothing to do with when, where, or how a person learns of it. *The belief system must be evaluated on the plausibility of its claims alone*
- “If something is true, the source doesn’t matter!” -Scott Kramer ☺ (ILL) Remember Balaam & the Donkey? (Num 22)
- “Suppose we concede that if I had been born of Muslim parents in Morocco rather than Christian parents in Michigan, my beliefs would have been quite different. [But] the same goes for the pluralist. . . . If the pluralist had been born in [Morocco] he probably wouldn’t be a pluralist. Does it follow that . . . his pluralist beliefs are produced in him by an unreliable belief-producing process?” -Alvin Plantinga

1. Craig, *On Guard*, 270.

2. Alvin Plantinga, “A Defense of Religious Exclusivism,” in *The Analytic Theist*, ed. James F. Sennet (Eerdmans, 1998), p. 205, quoted in Keller, *The Reason for God*, 11.



# Pluralism

## Fallacious Arguments for Pluralism

### The Elephant & the Blind Men: Every religion has part of the truth, but no one religion has the entire truth

- This image represents the viewpoint that all religions contain some piece of the overall puzzle of God
- **(ILL)** Imagine a group of blind men each touching an elephant:
  - One describes the creature as a thick cylinder (has just the leg!)
  - One describes it as flat and floppy (has just the ear!)
  - One describes it as long and skinny with hair on the end (has just the tail!)
  - Another describes it as long, narrow, curly and strong, with 2 holes on the end (has just the trunk and snout!)
  - *In the same way, each world religion, based on what it is able to perceive, has only a part of the whole truth about spiritual reality. None can claim to have a comprehensive vision of it.*
- This is fallacious because the story is told from someone **who is not** blind and **can** see the entire elephant!

*“How could you possibly know that no religion can see the whole truth unless you yourself have the superior, comprehensive knowledge of spiritual reality you just claimed that none of the religions have?”<sup>1</sup> –Keller*

1. Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2018), 8-9.



# Implications of Christian Particularism

**The Heart of the Issue with Christian Particularism** [Video 3: Turek: What about those who never hear about Jesus?](#)<sup>1</sup>

**It seems the real problem Pluralism takes with Christian Particularism is the fate of unbelievers** (6:21)

- *Christian Particularism implies that some will not attain salvation.*

Given this implication, some difficult questions arise related to:

- 1. The Unevangelized:** What about those who never hear the gospel? How will they be judged?
- 2. The Creation:** If God knew so many people would freely reject Christ and be lost, why did He still freely choose to create the world? Wouldn't it have been better to simply refrain from this? Alternatively, why didn't God create a world in which the only people who existed were those who would freely receive Christ?  
*(Next Week – Problem of Evil, Suffering, and Hell)*
- 3. Hell:** Does the punishment of Hell fit the crime? What is the proper conception of Hell?  
*(Next Week – Problem of Evil, Suffering, and Hell)*

1. Turek, "What about those who never hear about Jesus?" Cross Examined, September 5, 2019, <https://youtu.be/Lc7nec1JOKE>.



# Implications of Christian Particularism

## Key Definitions

### Key Definitions – A Closer Look at the Doctrine of Salvation

**Universalism:**

every human being will partake of God's salvation<sup>1</sup>

**Particularism:**

only some, but not all human beings will partake of God's salvation<sup>1</sup>

**Exclusivism:**

people actually appropriate God's salvation only on the basis of Christ's work *and through explicit faith in him*<sup>1</sup>

**Christian Restrictivism:**

salvation is available only through an appropriate response to God's special revelation concerning Christ, *which requires a faith response to the message of the gospel*<sup>1</sup>

**Inclusivism:**

people actually appropriate God's salvation only on the basis of Christ's work *but not always through explicit faith in him*<sup>1</sup>

**Christian Accessibilism:**

for those who have not had the benefit of special revelation, *salvation is available through their appropriate response to God's general revelation in nature and conscience*<sup>1</sup>

**General Revelation:**

the knowledge of God's *existence, character, and moral law* only, which comes to all humanity through nature and conscience<sup>2</sup>

**Special Revelation:**

a more complete and specific knowledge of Christianity, including Christ and the gospel, which comes through Scripture, the words of God or his messengers, etc...<sup>2</sup>

1. Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 629-630.

2. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 122-123.



# Implications of Christian Particularism

## The Unevangelized

### What we can *Affirm* (Non-Negotiables)<sup>1</sup>

1. All people, of all cultures and religions, throughout all time, are sinners and justly condemned before God, and are in need of salvation (Rom 3:9-23), which cannot be attained through good works (Rom 3:20; Gal 2:16,21)

*NOTE: Recall that man's core need is repair of brokenness **in the inner man**.*

*The spirit of a man is separated from God because of the curse of sin.*

2. This salvation is **only** made possible through the sacrifice and atonement of Jesus Christ, the one and only eternal Son of God. (Heb 9:11-22; Joh 14:6; Act 4:12; 1 Tim 2:5)
3. Those who place their faith in Christ and his atoning work will be saved as a result of God's grace (Rom 3:21-16; Eph 2:8-9; Tit 3:4-7)
4. There will be some who never attain salvation and are eternally lost (Dan 12:2; Mat 25:31-46)  
*This rules out universalism*
5. God is perfect and just in all his ways (Deu 32:4; Psa 18:30), and His desire is that no person would be lost (2 Pet 3:9)

1. Points drawn from both Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 587-590 and Netland, "One Lord & Savior for All?," pg. 36



# Implications of Christian Particularism

## The Unevangelized

### What we can *Consider* (Various Views on the Unevangelized)

#### 1. Christian Accessibilism: (Inclusivism)

Those who sincerely seek God or respond to His general revelation in nature and conscience *will be judged according to the light God has given them, and can attain salvation without special revelation, or an explicit faith response to the gospel* (e.g. Job & Melchizedek in the OT, *who were not a part of the Jews as God's covenant people*)

- “He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life;” -Rom 2:6-7
- The question that follows is: “if someone can be saved apart from hearing the gospel, *what must they do?*<sup>1</sup>
  - Some inclusivists say a person's response to God's general revelation must include his realization of his sinfulness and condemnation before God, and that neither he himself, nor anything else, can save him. This person must realize their need for God and throw himself at God's mercy.
  - Liberal inclusivists would go as far as to say that even those who are sincere seekers of God in non-Christian religions *may* be saved

*\*Though Scripture leaves the possibility for Christian Accessibilism open, it does not explicitly teach and emphasize it. Rather, Scripture unanimously attests to an explicit belief in Jesus Christ for a saving faith, rather than a general belief in God.*

1. Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 591-592.





# Implications of Christian Particularism

## The Unevangelized

### What we can *Consider* (Various Views on the Unevangelized)

#### 2. Christian Restrictivism and God's Providence (stated one way): (Exclusivism)

Those who sincerely seek God or respond to His general revelation in nature and conscience *will be given more light*, such that they do receive special revelation of Christ and the gospel (perhaps through missionaries, a dream, vision, etc.) In other words, *God will ensure that anyone who would freely respond in faith to the gospel will be exposed to it. No one will be lost due to historical or geographic accident.*

- This view finds support in the story of Cornelius, who was a righteous Gentile that feared God. Cornelius was visited by an angel who instructed him to send for Peter, and when Peter came to meet with him along with his friends and relatives, the Holy Spirit fell upon them all (Act 10)<sup>1</sup> **Also the Ethiopian Eunuch.**

#### 3. Christian Restrictivism and God's Providence (stated another way): (Exclusivism)

God has providentially ordered the world so that *any person who never hears the gospel would have rejected it anyway*<sup>2</sup> (finds a foundation on theological view of Molinism)

- *“And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us,”* -Act 17:26-27

1. Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 593-594.

2. Craig, *On Guard*, 280.



# Implications of Christian Particularism

## The Unevangelized

### Christian Restrictivism Finds Much More Scriptural Support

- *Scripture unanimously attests to an explicit belief in Jesus Christ for a saving faith, rather than a general belief in God*<sup>1</sup>
  - “if you confess with your mouth *that Jesus is Lord* and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. . . . “everyone who calls *on the name of the Lord* will be saved.”” –Rom 10:9,13 ESV
  - “*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved,*” -Act 16:31 ESV
- We are commissioned to go out into the world and make disciples of all nations!
  - “*Christianity’s veins pump pure and strong with the lifeblood of world evangelization. The church has been commissioned by its Lord to take the gospel to all nations (Mat 28:18-20; Luk 24:44-47; Act 1:8).*”<sup>2</sup>
  - “*How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? . . . faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*” – Rom 10:14-15,17
- Paul’s following comment to the Ephesians does not bode well for the idea that those who haven’t received the gospel have been redeemed by general revelation<sup>3</sup>
  - “*remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*” –Eph 2:12 ESV

1. Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 591.

2. *Ibid.*, 587

3. *Ibid.*, 591.



# Implications of Christian Particularism

## The Unevangelized

### Important Reminders When Considering the Unevangelized, Hell, and the Problem of Evil

**One should never consider these matters in a vacuum**

- Remember, we have spent the previous six weeks crafting a powerful cumulative case for Christianity!
  - the unviability of atheism, *(no objective moral values and duties, no hope, justice, knowledge, or free will)*
  - evidence for a Personal Creator, *(Cosmological, Fine-Tuning, & Moral Arguments)*
  - the compatibility of Christianity & science, *(various orthodox views on Creation account, Christian foundation for science)*
  - the reliability of Scripture, *(bibliographic, internal & external evidence tests, archaeological record, Scribes)*
  - the historical evidence for the resurrection. *(Jesus' death by crucifixion, the empty tomb, transformation of disciples, etc.)*

***You've worked hard to follow along on this journey, leverage what you've learned!***

- Not only is there a compelling case for the veracity of Christianity from one's personal experience and testimony, there is also a compelling case for it from an intellectual standpoint!
- The main idea is that if we have an abundance of compelling reasons, or a **cumulative case**, to believe in the God of Scripture, *we can trust, per his character, that His answers to such matters, even if ultimately unknown to us, are moral and just!*



# Implications of Christian Particularism

## The Unevangelized

### Important Reminders When Considering the Unevangelized, Hell, and the Problem of Evil

- **What might this look like applied?** Suppose someone made the following argument, as worded by Groothuis:<sup>1</sup>
  1. If Christianity is true, then those who have not had the opportunity to respond to God's saving revelation (either during the old covenant or during the new covenant) cannot be redeemed.
  2. It would ill befit a God of love and justice to punish people so severely for what they could not have known.
  3. Therefore, Christianity is not true, since it teaches that (a) God is loving and just, and that (b) most people are damned.
- Before attempting to provide a specific answer to this argument addressing specifically the question of the unevangelized, one can disarm, or soften its force by flipping it on its head. This would look like below:
  1. If there is good reason to believe that Christianity is true (considering the cumulative case argument here and elsewhere), then *however* God relates to his creatures who did not have access to covenantal revelation, God will demonstrate his just, holy and loving character.
  2. There is good reason to believe that Christianity is true given the manifold evidence in its favor.
  3. Therefore, the fate of those outside of the covenantal revelation is in the hands of a just and loving God, however God works this out.
- *This approach of leveraging the cumulative case for Christianity serves, at minimum, as an excellent starting point for answering the question of the unevangelized, Hell, and the problem of evil.*

1. Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 586.



# Implications of Christian Particularism

## The Unevangelized

### Important Reminders When Considering the Unevangelized, Hell, and the Problem of Evil

#### Consider John 6

29: Jesus answered, *"The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."*

35: Then Jesus declared, *"I am the bread of life."*

53: Jesus said to them, *"I tell you the truth, unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood..."*

60: On hearing this, many of his disciples said, *"This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it."*

66: From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

67: *"You do not want leave too, do you?"* Jesus asked the Twelve.

68: Simon Peter answered him, *'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.'*

*Some degree of mystery doesn't discount what we KNOW to be TRUE!!*

*Clear truth isn't negated by small levels of uncertainty.*

Remember: *"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law."* -Deu 29:29 NIV

*Our faith in Christ CANNOT be a house of cards! We should strive to develop a robust web (or structure) of beliefs for our faith. When individual parts come together into a complete whole, they take on structural strength!*



# Implications of Christian Particularism

## The Unevangelized

### In Conclusion: A Reasonable Response to the Problem of the Unevangelized

*“Jesus Christ is the only Saviour, and that salvation is by God’s grace alone, on the ground of Christ’s cross alone, and by faith alone. The only question, therefore, is how much knowledge and understanding of the gospel people need before they can cry out to God for mercy and be saved. In the Old Testament, people were “justified by faith” even though they had little knowledge or expectation of Christ. Perhaps there are others today in a similar position, who know that they are guilty before God and that they cannot do anything to win his favour, but who in self-despair call upon the God they dimly perceive to save them. If God saves such, as many evangelical Christians believe, their salvation is still only through Christ, only by faith.”<sup>1</sup> –John Stott*

*“Perhaps the wisest response to the issue is to acknowledge the possibility that some who never hear the gospel might nonetheless, through God’s grace, respond to what they know of God through general revelation and turn to him in faith for forgiveness. But to speculate about how many, if any, are saved in this manner is to go beyond what the Scriptures affirm. Millard Erickson observes, “There are no unambiguous instances in Scripture of persons who became true believers through responding to general revelation alone. Scripture does not indicate how many, if any, come to salvation that way.” The pattern in the New Testament is for people to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ and then to respond by God’s grace to the gospel in saving faith.”<sup>2</sup> –Netland*

1. John Stott, *The Authentic Jesus* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1985), 83 quoted in Netland, “One Lord & Savior for All?,” 37.

2. Netland, “One Lord & Savior for All?,” 37.



**Thanks for Coming!!!  
See You Next Week!!!**



# Pluralism

## The theory of 'The Real'

### What Might Such a Theory of Religious Pluralism Look Like?

#### John Hick's 'The Real': Proposed

- The previous paradigm lays the foundation on which John Hick builds his famous theory of pluralism: **"The Real"**  
Three claims are at the center of his model:<sup>1</sup>
  1. There is a religious ultimate reality ("the Real") to which the major religions are all legitimate responses
  2. The various religions are historically and culturally conditioned interpretations of this divine reality
  3. Salvation/enlightenment/liberation is to be understood as the moral transformation of people from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness, and it is occurring roughly to the same extent across the major religions
- Recall: a valid theory of pluralism cannot privilege the perspectives of any single religion! (theistic, pantheistic, etc.)
  - **How could you satisfy this requirement?** Hick states that 'The Real' is ineffable, unknowable, and ontologically transcends human perception: *"we cannot apply to the Real an sich [thing-in-itself] the characteristics encountered in its personae and impersonae. Thus it cannot be said to be one or many, person or thing, conscious or unconscious, purposive or non-purposive, substance or process, good or evil, loving or hating. None of the descriptive terms that apply within the realm of human experience can apply literally to the unexperienceable reality that underlies that realm."*

1. Harold A. Netland, "One Lord & Savior for All?: Jesus Christ and Religious Diversity," Christ on Campus Initiative, 2008, pg. 9, <http://www.christoncampuscci.org/religious-diversity/>.

2. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004 [1989]), 350, quoted in Netland, *Christianity & Religious Diversity*, 145.





# Pluralism

## The theory of 'The Real'

### What Might Such a Theory of Religious Pluralism Look Like?

#### John Hick's 'The Real': Proposed (continued...)

- At bottom, humans cannot directly worship *the Real* since they cannot perceive or experience it. They can only worship manifestations of it which *they can* perceive and experience
  - *“While the Real itself is never the direct object of religious experience, human beings can experience any of a number of symbolic “manifestations” or conceptual images of the Real. Thus those in some religious traditions characteristically experience and think of the Real in personal terms as Yahweh, Allah, Krishna, or Jesus Christ; people in other traditions experience the Real in nonpersonal terms as the Dao, Nirguna Brahman, sunyata, or the dharmakaya. The personal manifestations of the Real are called divine personae, and the nonpersonal manifestations are divine impersonae of the Real. Whereas the particular religions regard the relevant personae or impersonae as the religious ultimate, Hick maintains that they actually are penultimate conceptual symbols through which people in various religions think about and respond to what is truly ultimate: the Real.”<sup>1</sup>*
- Has Hick really proposed a valid mechanism to affirm all religions as true? *Not so fast...*

1. Netland, *Christianity & Religious Diversity*, 144-145



# Pluralism

## The theory of 'The Real'

### What Might Such a Theory of Religious Pluralism Look Like?

#### John Hick's 'The Real' Critiqued

- Groothuis demonstrates Hick's theory has fatal flaws:<sup>1</sup>
  1. If 'The Real' is ineffable and unknowable, *trying to identify and explain it is ultimately self-defeating*, and hence does not solve anything: *"if the Real is unknowable, it cannot adequately explain the nature of the world's religions, since knowledge is required for explanation."* Further, if the Real can't be understood, why should it be trusted as the source for all religions? The Real is mute and meaningless.
  2. *'The Real' is an incoherent and internally logically inconsistent concept.* Recall Hick's proposed characteristics of 'The Real': *neither one nor many, person nor thing, conscious nor unconscious, purposive nor non-purposive, substance nor process, good nor evil, neither loving nor hating*
    - *these characteristics describe an utterly implausible, incoherent, and unintelligible concept, which cannot exist per the laws of logic.* Such attributes would certainly define an entity outside of human experience, just as 'The Real' is suggested to be, but it seems there is a double standard here: Hick is drawing on characteristics which are perceivable and understandable within human experience to explain something outside of human experience.

1. Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 581-583.



# Pluralism

## The theory of 'The Real'

### So, What's the Main Point?

**Truth, by definition, is exclusive. There is no way around exclusivity pertaining to religious truth!**

- *No one is off the hook here: any time someone sets out to assert a view on the nature of religious truth, they cannot avoid exclusivity*
- At bottom, Hick ultimately proposes another way to view spiritual truth, which he asserts is correct. If a Christian says that the ultimate divine reality *is knowable, and is a personal Creator*, this contradicts Hick's view that the ultimate divine reality *is unknowable, and neither personal nor impersonal*.
- *"What makes religious pluralism so attractive for many today is the assumption that only pluralism enables us to accept all the major religions as they are, without rejecting the central teachings of some religions as false. An implication of the problem of conflicting truth claims seems to be that millions of sincere, morally respectable, and intelligent religious believers are mistaken in their basic religious commitments, but pluralism seems to offer a way of avoiding this conclusion. Ironically, however, even with pluralism one cannot escape the conclusion that large numbers of religious believers are wrong about their beliefs."*<sup>2</sup>  
-Netland