

A New Mind (Phil 2:5-11)

Introduction: *Are all religions basically the same?*

Are all religions basically the same? I'm about to tell you what Christians believe, but I'd like to begin by telling you one thing that Christians don't believe. If you're a Christian you don't have to believe that all other religions are completely wrong. We believe that there is a God, and we think that that much is obvious to everyone, because people are created in his likeness. And the heavens declare the glory of God to everyone (Ps 19:1). Similarly, the Bible says that he's set eternity in our hearts, and written his law upon our hearts, and so on. We're not at all troubled by the fact that people in the remotest part of the world have been discovered believing these things too. That's what we expect. And so we don't believe that all other religions are completely wrong.

Of course, if you're an atheist, you do have to believe that the main point of every religion in the whole world is one enormous mistake. You do have to condemn everyone. But if you're a Christian, you understand why all religions contain at least some the truth.

C. S. Lewis put it this way, "When I was an atheist I had to try to persuade myself that most of the human race have always been wrong about the question that mattered to them most; when I became a Christian I was able to take a more liberal view. But, of course, being a Christian *does* mean thinking that where Christianity differs from other religions, Christianity is right and they are wrong. As in arithmetic—there is only one right answer to a sum, and all other answers are wrong: but some of the wrong answers are much nearer being right than others" (*Mere Christianity*, 2.1).

Our passage takes us to the very heart of Christianity. And at its heart there is something, or rather someone utterly wonderful and unique. There's a lot of "faith" talk in America and some people like to lump together "people of faith" and speak about "faith-based initiatives," and so forth, as though all faiths were basically the same thing or at least had much in common. I understand why people might want that to be true. But, although we agree on many things with other religions, Christianity is not Islam or Judaism or Hinduism. And I want to make it clear why.

1. We have at the center of our faith a human being (v. 5-6)

We believe in one God, the big word for that is monotheism. Well, you say, so do Islam and the Sikh religion and Aristotle and a great many more. That's true. But what Christians believe is utterly unprecedented in the history of the world and a great scandal and offense to other religions. We believe that God became man, joining together forever in himself the divine and the human. We believe Christ Jesus is and now forever 100% God who does now and always has upheld all things by his powerful word. Jesus is the image of the invisible God, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being and all these attributes. And in the womb of Mary, this one who had always existed in the form or nature of God became man, taking the full nature of our humanity with all its weaknesses and limitations: a human body, a human mind, a human soul, and so forth. He was made like us in every way, yet without sin. Jesus is now and forever will be 100% God and 100% man in one person, Christ Jesus.

And so Christians worship a man. We find the meaning of life and the source of eternal life in that man. The fact that we call ourselves *Christians* is proof that this one single person is the key to our understanding of everything. We are the followers, the disciples, the worshipers, and the servants of Jesus Christ. You remember, for example, how the disciples and others came and worshipped him, it says over and over. Thomas says, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:29).

Mohammed in Islam is not like Jesus in Christianity, nor is Buddha. Mohammed is a prophet, not God, and Muslims certainly do not worship him. Buddha was a teacher of the way; he is not the way, the truth, and the life as Jesus is.

Christians worship Jesus of Nazareth because, although he was born a baby and lived as a genuine human being like us, that child born of Mary is our maker and our sustainer. He has life in himself, as we read earlier, and so has the power to grant eternal life to those who trust in him. A human being has this power!

You remember how this was such a scandal to the people at the synagogue. Jesus forgave people their sins. "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" they complained. That's the very point.

Now this is why people today sometimes take offense at Christians. They say there are many ways to God. Why do you Christians insist on only one way to God? But Jesus is God. He's God incarnate. People misunderstand who Jesus is and lump all religions together in their mind, and they get very upset if Christ and Christians don't fit onto their way of thinking.

This is why there's a preoccupation with Jesus at the heart of our faith: our exclusive concentration on his life, his death, his resurrection, his presence with us now by his Spirit, and his coming again. And there is nothing remotely like this anywhere else in the religious life of the world.

And this is why we say he's the only savior. Jesus is the Maker of heaven and earth, who's come to suffer and die for us that death of the cross. Who else could possibly rival him as the Savior of the world? What equal could he have? When we say he's the only savior, we're saying he's the only God incarnate.

And when we say that Christ alone saves, and that our good works or bad contribute nothing, you see why. It took nothing less than God becoming man and dying on a cross to deliver us from our sins – so black and so great as they are. But what can you possibly add to that. He does his part, and you do yours? Now you see why that's blasphemous, why salvation would have to be all of Christ, and all of grace, and not by us. The Bible says he saves us to the uttermost. And even our good deeds in response are foreordained for us to do.

2. Christ shapes our life and salvation in every way (v. 1-5)

For example, it says, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5). We are saved to be like him. We live the Christian life by *having his mind in us*. We die *in the Lord*, or as Paul said earlier, we depart to be with Christ. And we face death in the confidence we will share in his resurrection and eternal life. He not only redeemed us from the guilt and power of

sin by his death on the cross, Christ Jesus went before us, the Bible says. He opened the way for us to follow and leads us onward. No wonder they call us Christians!

So what is salvation? It God's work by which fallen human beings, who are chosen in Christ, are raised to eternal life by Christ and conformed to the image of Christ. That's why we don't believe in 40 virgins in Paradise; or absorption into the world's soul. Salvation is to be with him and like him. Christ is our savior and our salvation, for salvation is of the Lord.

And this has everything to do with our lives now: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5). How would the mighty God enter human history? Would he appear in a blaze of light? Would he come as a conqueror like Caesar marching into Rome when he crossed the Rubicon? There is no display of glory. He takes the form of a bondservant.

The creator stooped to become a creature. But God becoming a man is not the end of Christ's journey downward. He must go lower still. God became a man not to prove that he could do it, nor to have some mythic adventure that would be the stuff of tales for ever after, nor to interfere in the affairs of men as the Greek and Roman gods and goddesses were supposed to do. God became a man to suffer and to die for men because nothing less than that would reconcile sinful men to a holy God.

In the language of Philippians 2:3–4, He was doing nothing from selfishness, but was regarding others as more important than Himself. He was looking to the interests of others. How many religions have a God who serves anyone, especially sinful, rebellious, unworthy people?

Jesus tells his disciples more than once, "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Matt 18:4, 23:12). He lived that text. His own life is the greatest example of the principle. And he died not for good men but for bad; not for his friends but for his enemies; not for the man crying out to live but for the one bent on hellish self-destruction.

It would have been amazing enough for the eternal God to come among us as a mighty king. It was even more amazing that He came as a humble servant. But it's almost beyond comprehension that He would even go lower and die the death of the cross, the horrible, ignoble death of a common criminal, one accursed of God (Deut. 21:23).

And this is why, verse 6, "though [Christ Jesus] was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited" (Phil 2:6, NRSV). I never understood till this week that this was speaking about his humanity. And I won't have time to prove it to you now. But as God incarnate, he did not serve himself but emptied himself, making himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, a slave.

Though all analogies fall far short, Mark Twain's novel, *The Prince and the Pauper* may help to illustrate here. *The Prince and the Pauper* is a story about Edward, the son of King Henry VIII, who temporarily exchanged places with Tom, a poor boy in London. The boys switch clothes. Tom goes to the royal court, and Prince Edward goes to Tom's house and seeks to deal with Tom's drunken and abusive father, along with the other miseries of life as a pauper. But during

that time, he was still the Prince of Wales, and could have exercised his power as such at any moment he wished. But he chose to submit himself to life as a beggar. In the same way, Jesus did not give up anything of his divine nature, but took our human nature and life to serve us and die for us on the cross.

John Calvin sums it up well: “Since, then, the Son of God descended from so great a height, how unreasonable that we, who are nothing, should be lifted up with pride!” (Calvin’s Commentaries, p. 55).

The cross was the last place one would look for salvation for the world! But Paul says that he knew nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified, and preached “the message of the cross.” The cross is how we get salvation and what we are to do with it once we have it! Here is the key to the true philosophy of life, the true understanding of our place in the world, and the meaning of our lives. Christ came for us on the cross bearing our sins and opening our entrance into eternal life. And our life then, in turn, is a matter of taking up our cross also and following him, a life of self-denial, taking the form of a servant, considering others’ interests and regarding them above ourselves, devoting ourselves, our time, our talents, our energy, our love to the life that Christ has lived for us. Our second point, Christ shapes our life and salvation in every way. Third...

3. Christ’s incarnation invests every aspect of our life with the power of God’s love (2:2-4

Why did Jesus do this? What motivated him? Christ’s incarnation in the form of a bondservant to go to the cross was motivated by an indescribably great love. At the very center of our faith lies the love of God for his unworthy people and the great sacrifice of Christ’s humiliation, to be scorned, rejected and finally murdered by his own creatures.

Love is a virtue in some other religions and human philosophies, but it is far more for us. It is the very heart of our faith and the cause of the whole drama of our salvation. Other religions may teach us to love God, but none other makes God’s love for us the explanation of everything. No other religion makes our love for God a direct reply to his love for us. No other religion dares to say, “We love him because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). But Christ came into the world because God so loved the world; Christ went to the cross because he had come into the world on an errand of love. The entire Christian life can be summarized as simply love for God and love for man because the Christian life is having the mind of Jesus Christ who is the incarnation of God’s mighty and indescribably beautiful love. Which is why we’re called in verse 2 to be “like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord” (Phil 2:2). No wonder Paul should so sharply write, “A curse on all those who do not love our Lord Jesus Christ.” How can we not love the one who loved us in such a way? Love is the very principle of our faith and life.

You can’t rejoice in Christ’s merciful love for you and be unloving and unmerciful toward others. It’s impossible! It’s a fundamental contradiction! It’s a betrayal of the very things that are most important of all.

This almighty love cannot be answered by hate; infinite mercy to the unworthy cannot be honored by vanity and selfishness. So it says we are to “look out to the interests of others....” Some Greek experts recommend a stronger translation like “fix your gaze” or “look attentively”

at the interest of others. Fix your gaze on the interests of others. Concentrate on the interests of others.

While it's possible to find many examples of Christians not following Christ, there's something else you need to see also. The great Yale historian Ken Scott Latourette writes this, "Across the centuries Christianity has been the means of reducing more languages to writing than have all other factors combined. It has created more schools, more theories of education, and more systems than has any other one force. More than any other power in history it has impelled men to fight suffering, whether that suffering has come from disease, war or natural disasters. It has built thousands of hospitals, inspired the emergence of the nursing and medical professions, and furthered movement for public health and the relief and prevention of famine. Wars have often been waged in the name of Christianity. ... Yet from no other source have there come as many and as strong movements to eliminate or regulate war and to ease the suffering brought by war. ... It includes many another humanitarian projects and movements, ideals in government, the reform of prisons and the emergence of criminology, great art and architecture, and outstanding literature" (*A History of Christianity*, 2.1470-1). Our third point, Christ's incarnation invests every aspect of our life with the power of God's love.

4. The Christ's incarnation makes Christianity a missionary faith.

No religion produces a missionary compulsion as Christianity always has and does still today. And this is because Christ himself was a missionary. He left his home and went to the world—for what reason? To bring it the salvation it needed. And he placed his followers under the solemn obligation to do the same: to go into the world, into all nations, and make disciples. It is the sort of thing that Christians know almost by instinct. If he did this for us and our salvation, must we not do this for others?

I realize that some people don't like the evangelistic or missionary impulse of Christianity, but without it, it wouldn't be Christianity. And this is why Christianity must be different. Our religion is the outworking of this sublime fact: in Jesus Christ the living God became man for us and our salvation. At the center of our faith lies this most surprising supernatural event, a miracle: a child was born to Mary who was Emmanuel, God with us.

And I should point out that there have been many efforts, especially in the modern period, to separate Christian theology from Christian ethics, as if it might be possible to keep the high and noble ethics of the Bible while getting rid of the idea that Jesus was God incarnate. People talk about *practical Christianity*, as if somehow we could have *that* without having to believe in miracles, in Christ's incarnation and resurrection and so forth. But in the Bible there is and there can never be such a separation between the two. The life comes from the belief, the love from the faith, the ethics from the theology. Practical Christianity draws its strength and meaning from Christian theology and has none without it (see Moule, p. 63).

Without the miracle of God becoming man we have nothing left to believe. Christianity is transformed into little more than another form of human effort; certainly nothing life-changing. It does become much like every other religion. But our faith as Christians is precisely the result of a great miracle, of an extraordinary event that occurred in human history, God became man.

Conclusion: *Sundar Singh*

In conclusion, I've told you before about the Indian Christian Sundar Singh. He was born in 1899 into a well-off Sikh family and grew up to hate Christianity as a foreign religion. Once he publicly burned a copy of the Gospel. But shortly thereafter, at fifteen years of age, he suddenly and utterly unexpectedly became a Christian himself. And he felt that the Lord was calling him to be a wandering preacher, a *sadhu*. For the rest of his life he traveled through India, Nepal, and Tibet facing every kind of hardship and danger to preach the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

At one point, Sundar Singh visited a Hindu college where he was asked by one of the professors what he had found in Christianity that he hadn't in Hinduism. Singh replied, "I have Christ." "Yes, I know," the lecturer replied impatiently, "but what particular principle or doctrine have you found that you did not have before?" "The particular thing I have found," replied Sundar, "is Christ" (Stott, *The Incomparable Christ*, p. 16). And he spent his life telling others of this Christ whom he'd found, or, better, who'd found him.

So now you see, that to know Christ is, and must be, to know all things. If he is life, then obviously life is to be found in him and in him alone. He has no rivals because he is the God man. He has no successors for the same reason. He strides across history because human history, the history of the world, is his own divine plan and purpose that are unfolding. He draws near to us to care for us in our needs and love us though we are still in sin because he is God and God is love. To know him, to be in him, is eternal life.