

The Uniqueness Of The Christian Faith

Come on, people, those amens need to be louder! Amen! Be afraid; it's not going to hurt you. In our modern world, it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain our grip on the uniqueness of the Christian faith. We have the problem right here on the home front, where Bible reading and the Lord's Prayer were decades ago banned from the public school system because of a Supreme Court ruling based upon a misunderstanding of the original intent of the US Constitution. How many of you, when you went to school every day, class began with the reading of the Bible over the intercom and the Lord's Prayer? Patty, me, yeah, Erica, yeah, yeah, yeah. Not anymore, huh? So how's that working out?

The notion that one religion is true and the others are false is hardly in keeping with modern views about tolerance and political correctness. According to tolerance and political correctness, all religions are granted legitimacy as an integral part of our culture, except for Christianity. It is no longer considered in good taste to refer to certain cultures as primitive or certain religions as pagan. To do so is to forfeit your intellectual respectability in social circles by making value judgments. Oh, we must make value judgments. Modern man is thought to be too sophisticated to speak in such terms of other peoples and their cultures.

Even within Christendom, the realm of those who think of themselves as Christians culturally, if not behaviorally, the ancient landmarks are rapidly disappearing. In morality, there is no longer such a thing as sin; in theology, there is no longer such a thing as heresy. The only heresy is bigotry. Even the Supreme Court of the United States once declared it impossible to define such terms as pornography or obscenity, so Hollywood movies, the television industry, and internet content are filled with both.

When we move into the supposedly non-Christian world where the missionaries operate, we find that the exclusive claims of Christianity

are vigorously challenged by the non-Christian religions, now undergoing an unprecedented resurgence. It is safe to say that the most offensive aspect of 21st-century Christianity is its claim of exclusiveness, our claim that if you are not a Christian, you're going to go to hell forever when you die. Such a claim does not make sense to the Hindu, to the Buddhist, or to the animist.

Most of the well-known ethnic religions of the world hold certain doctrines in common. Most of them believe in the existence of a Supreme Being, they possess sacred scriptures, they have a well-defined doctrine of salvation, they believe in life after death, they have a system of ethics, they engage in religious rituals, they have human founders for whom they make certain claims, they have a priestly caste and religious orders. But they are not, generally speaking, exclusive, except of course Islam and Christianity. Hinduism is reputed to be the most inclusive religion of them all. Buddhism prides itself on being tolerant of other systems. Only Christianity and Islam make the claim of being exclusive, the latter militantly so at times.

It is only fair to point out that while the non-Christian religions are tolerant in theory, they are not tolerant in practice. There are certain fundamental doctrines in Hinduism that are not open to debate, and there is no doubt in some parts of the world who burned down the 300 church buildings last year. One of those fundamental doctrines is that all matter, including the individual soul, has no objective existence.

Another is that ultimate reality is spiritual and found only in Brahman, the world soul, whatever that is. Hinduism tolerates everything except conversion to the Christian faith, and herein lies its inconsistency. If all religions are equally valid, as the Hindus officially maintain, why should they object when a Hindu becomes a Christian if all religions are of equal value? And yet they do. And tolerance in Islam? I believe it's the only religion in the world that has the death penalty for those who leave the religion. Islam calls for death should anyone convert from Islam to any other religion. I'm not suggesting they always enforce that, but that is what's taught and in some areas practiced. I'm not convinced that I should be at all concerned about proving that Christianity is true, which it certainly is, or that non-Christian religions are false, which they certainly are, nor am I saying that these other

religions do not have some things in common with Christianity; obviously, they do. I'm simply trying to point out certain features of Christianity which, taken together, place it in a class by itself as the unique, as the one-of-a-kind, as the only in-existence, known-to-man, faith-based belief system that is unlike any other.

Harry Emerson Fosdick, former high priest of American liberal theology, erroneously said on one occasion that there is nothing in Christianity that cannot be found in other religions of the world. So wrong on so many counts. It is true that unusual births and strange claims of resurrections are found in some of the non-Christian religions, but when one examines the details, one is struck not with the similarities of the two accounts—the Christian account and their account—but of the drastic dissimilarities that exist. What person in his right mind would want to suggest that the resurrection story in the gospels is to be placed in the same category with the resurrections found in the mystery religions so common in the Roman world of the Lord Jesus Christ's day? They have about as much in common as ancient witchcraft and modern medicine.

Therefore, to clear the air and to establish several important things during this mission's emphasis time of year, I will outline for you the uniqueness of Christianity, the uniqueness of the Christian faith, by considering three important fundamentals: the character of the Christian God, the person of the Christian Savior, and the nature of the Christian salvation.

First, the character of the Christian God. The God of the Christian revelation, whose name is Jehovah, claims to be the one true God, creator of heaven and earth. Though His revelation was given through Israel, and He was known as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, He is never depicted as a tribal god. He is the King of all the earth, a great God and a great King above all gods, and all other gods are idols. There is no other God like Him. He deserves and demands the worship and service of every individual, bar none, no exceptions. Some things about Him: First, God is an eternal being. He is self-existent and therefore eternal. All else exists because He willed its existence. He alone exists necessarily from eternity to eternity. Next, God is a personal being. He is eternally separate and distinct from all

other beings. He is conscious of himself, possesses the power of self-determination, can love and be loved, and He is love. Third, God is an infinite being. His attributes are infinite. He is all-good, all-wise, and all-powerful. He fills all heaven and all earth as well. He is not merely more wise, more just, and more good than any other being; He is infinitely wise, infinitely just, and infinitely good. He is both immanent and transcendent at the same time. His only limitations are those that He has voluntarily imposed upon Himself. Fourth, He is a moral being. You'll find nothing in the Bible of God bragging on being deceptive, like you do find in the Quran. The Greek, Norse, Roman, and Hindu gods were more immoral than even their devotees. Not so Jehovah. He loves righteousness and hates iniquity. He is righteous in all His ways and holy in all His works. He is both light and love. His love is a holy love, His holiness glows with love, and His love burns with holiness. He is a holy God and demands holiness of all His people. Fifth, He exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are three persons but only one God. All three persons are eternally co-equal in wisdom, love, and power. Each has all the powers and prerogatives of the other two. All three persons have been and are engaged in the work of creation, redemption, and judgment. So, how can we be sure there are three persons in the triune Godhead? Each of the persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—possesses the requirements of personhood, which are intellect, sensibility, and will. Sixth, He has revealed Himself to humanity. He is not a God afar off who hides Himself. He rejoices in the inhabited world and delights in the sons of men. He has revealed Himself through general revelation, which includes creation and conscience, and through special revelation, which includes the written word and the Living Word. No other religion—let me broaden this to include any faith system of any kind—no other has a God who possesses all these characteristics. The Christian God, therefore, is unique. There is none else like Him. Next, the person of the Christian Savior. All the well-known religions and what we would label as faith systems, except Hinduism and Shinto, have their founders. Some of them were good and great men compared to other men, but none of them belongs in the same category as the Lord Jesus Christ. He stands alone in solitary

grandeur among those who walk the earth. By almost universal consent, He is the greatest individual who ever lived. Even non-Christians gladly acknowledge the influence of His life and His teaching. John Paul Ror expressed it well when he wrote, He, being the mightiest among the holy and the holiest among the mighty, lifted with His pierced hands the gates of empires off their hinges, turned the streams of centuries out of their tunnels and out of their channels, and today rules the world. No other religion, including Islam, is so completely identified with the life and teaching of its founder.

Buddhism could exist and flourish if Gautama the Buddha had never lived. The same can be said of Communism and Karl Marx. Confucius is by no means essential to the system that bears his name. But that is not true of Christianity. Christianity stands or falls with Jesus Christ. Without Him, there would be no salvation, there would be no gospel, there would be no New Testament, there would be no Christian churches.

The uniqueness of Jesus Christ finds expression in six things. First, His virgin birth. This is clearly taught in two of the four Gospels. It is true that miraculous births are claimed for other religious leaders, but the details are so vulgar and grotesque as to make them suspect. In our Lord Jesus Christ's case, the miraculous element was reduced to an irreducible minimum: His conception. After that, natural processes occurred, and the Lord Jesus was born nine months later as any other child is born. He was neither a physical giant, nor did He make any effort to establish Himself as a mental prodigy. The record tells us that He increased in wisdom and in stature, in favor with God and man. Now, if modern scholars have a problem with His virgin birth, they can derive comfort from the fact that both Mary and Joseph did too, at first. We should also remember that the gospel writer who gives us the most details concerning the birth of Christ, Luke, was a physician. Moreover, the virgin birth was not added simply to embellish the story; it is a necessary part of the miracle of the Incarnation. It was essential to the preservation of His holy nature.

Next, His sinless character. You will never hear of Him committing a foul deed of any kind. The matchless life of perfect love lived by the Lord Jesus is a unique phenomenon in the history of the world. He

was born without sin and He lived without sin. On this point, we have the testimony of both His friends and His foes. He was the only man who ever lived whose inner life was white as snow, pure as sunlight, and strong as steel. Never once did He part from the path of rectitude; never once did He succumb to the world, the flesh, or the devil. He is the only person who ever loved God with all His heart and could say, "I delight to do thy will, O my God."

Third, His atoning death. Without sinning Himself, He died for the sin of others. He died not as a prophet or a reformer or even as a martyr; He died as a Savior, the only Savior of the world. He gave His life and shed His blood for the remission of sins, not the covering of sins. I think it's a bad mistake for pastors to talk about their sins being covered by the blood of Christ. No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. That's Old Testament; that's kaphar, that's the blood of animals. The blood of Christ remits, removes sins. His death, far from being an accident or incident of human history, was part of God's eternal plan and purpose and could be brought about only in God's way, in God's time, and with God's consent. In death, as well as in life, He occupied a solitary throne.

Fourth, His victorious resurrection. Not only did He claim to be the resurrection and life, He rose from the dead on the third day, as He had predicted. The resurrection accounts, as given by the four evangelists, bear all the earmarks of true history. They are all the more remarkable because the disciples did not expect to ever see the Lord Jesus again alive. They were the most surprised men there were, and seeing when His resurrection was reported to them, they refused to believe it until they saw Him with their own eyes. They were resistant to it. And when they finally preached Jesus and the resurrection in the city that crucified Him, some of them paid for it with their lives. I don't believe people die for what they know to be a lie. To say that the disciples deliberately fabricated the story is sheer nonsense. To say that they believed something that didn't actually happen is also nonsense. This historic event, one of the best-authenticated facts in history, is of the utmost significance to the Christian faith. It is the foundation stone; remove this stone, and the whole superstructure crumbles. Christianity stands or falls on the

resurrection. Meaning, He had to die. His virgin birth, His sinless character, His atoning death—all have no meaning apart from the resurrection. Deny that, and you have denied everything else.

Fifth, His ascension into heaven. His entrance into the world was a miracle; His departure from the world was also a miracle. This is the way God intended it to be. The Lord Jesus did not intend to remain on earth indefinitely. He came simply to tabernacle among us. When His redemptive mission was accomplished, it was fitting that He should return to heaven. The resurrection and the ascension are treated in the Apostle Paul's letters as two phases of one climactic event, by which God raised Him from the dead and exalted Him to His own right hand, far above all principality and power and might and dominion. He is now the Prince of Life, the Lord of Glory, and the Head of the Church. He now sits at the right hand of God, the place of power, where He is a living, reigning Lord and Savior, able to save all who come to God by Him. All power in heaven and on earth has been given to Him.

Sixth, His second coming to earth. The Old Testament predicts, and the New Testament clearly teaches, that Jesus Christ will return to the earth to rapture believers in Christ, to judge the world, and to establish His everlasting kingdom of justice and peace. These six aspects of His life and person place the Lord Jesus Christ in a class by Himself. He is a unique figure in the annals of history. Not one of these things can be truthfully said of any of the other so-called great figures of history or of any of the founders of the non-Christian religions. Jesus Christ would say to them what He said to His disciples: "Ye are from beneath; I am from above. Ye are of this world; I am not of this world."

And finally, the nature of Christian salvation. All the well-known religions of the world have something like a doctrine of salvation; even the Marxists. Indeed, salvation is the ultimate purpose of all religions, every faith system. Deliverance of some kind—they use various terms and advocate different ways, but they all purport to deliver our race from the human predicament in which we find ourselves. Every faith-based system deals with that in their own way. The doctrine of salvation in Christianity, however, differs fundamentally from the

salvation offered by all other belief systems, faith systems, and religions.

First, Christian salvation is the gift of God, not the work of man. In every other religion, individuals or groups seek after God and try by various ways and means to placate His wrath and secure His favor and protection. In Christianity, it is God who seeks after man; it is not man who seeks after God. Redemption is something accomplished by God and is offered to us without money and without price (Isaiah 55:1). Salvation is a free gift (Romans 6:23), bestowed by God on the principle of grace and received by individuals on the principle of faith (Ephesians 2:8), not by works of righteousness which we have done. Next, Christian salvation is rooted in morality. God is a holy God. He cannot forgive sin simply by fiat. He cannot dispense mercy at the expense of justice. He must remain just at the same time that He justifies the sinner. He cannot save the sinner, however much He loves him, without first solving the moral problem of sin. The theology of redemption, as taught in Scripture, embraces several great laws or principles required by the holiness of God: (1) The soul that sins shall die (Ezekiel 18:20). (2) Without shedding of blood is no remission of sins (Hebrews 9:22). (3) For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul (Leviticus 17:11). (4) For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins (Hebrews 10:4); they only cover for a time. (5) By His own blood, He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us (Hebrews 9:12). These five statements constitute the moral basis for the Christian doctrine of salvation. It is free but not cheap. It cost God the lifeblood of His only Son. When God forgives sins, He is not only good and kind, but He is also faithful and just. No other religion offers a salvation that is rooted in morality and therefore consistent with the holiness of God.

Third, salvation is always deliverance from sin, both its penalty and its power. Other religions treat the symptoms, not the disease. Salvation for them is release from suffering, as in Buddhism, or ignorance, as in Hinduism. In Christianity, salvation goes deeper and gets at the root cause of suffering, ignorance, and all the other ills that affect mankind.

The human predicament is the result of sin, and all men's fears, doubts, and frustrations stem from that. To get rid of them, one must get rid of sin. The Lord Jesus Christ, by His atoning death and victorious resurrection, met all the demands of a holy God against the sinner. Jesus Christ, acting on our behalf, accepted the penalty, paid the price, and settled the account. The sinner who repents and believes is forever set free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2). Here and now, he enjoys peace with God (Romans 5:1), and for him, there is no condemnation (Romans 8:1). But that's not all. Salvation in Christianity includes deliverance from the power as well as the penalty of sin. This is made possible by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of every believer. The Christian walks in the power of the Spirit and will not fulfill the lust of the flesh, according to Romans 8:1. The power of sin has been broken; sin has no more dominion over him, since he is not under law but under grace (Romans 6:14). He is given not just a new leaf to turn over but a new life to live. He is now in Christ, which means that he is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). All things have passed away, and all things have become new.

Fourth, salvation includes the whole person: body, soul, and spirit. When humanity fell, chaos was introduced into all parts of our constitution—spirit, soul, and body, mind, heart, and will. Confusion reigns. Theologians have called this contamination, this defilement, this wickedness, this confusion, total depravity. Salvation, if it is to be effective, must attack and conquer sin in every part of the person, not just the soul. This is precisely what Christian salvation does. It involves the whole person: spirit, soul, and body. It also includes the mind, the heart, and the will. One of the most encouraging things when I carefully examined Rich Gorman about his conversion to Christ was the plan that he was developing to go back to all the people to whom he owed apologies, all the lives that he had ruined, all the offenses he was responsible for. That, my friend, is what repentance does. God took him home before he had the opportunity to do that, so do that while you can.

Fifth, salvation is a present possession as well as a future prospect. Christianity is the only religion or belief system that offers a here-and-

now salvation. In all other religions, the devotee must wait until the future life to discover whether or not he is a candidate for salvation. Buddhism and Hinduism teach the doctrine of reincarnation. One can only hope that his lot in the next life will be an improvement on this one, but he is never sure. He may go up the scale of life in his next reincarnation, or he may go down. But before he gets through, he may have to pass through 8 million reincarnations. And when nirvana is finally reached, what kind of salvation is he promised to experience? The word “nirvana” means “blow out,” like a candle. This is the salvation that Hinduism promises to you, eventually. On the contrary, the Christian does not have to wait for the next life. Here and now, we can enjoy the forgiveness of sins and know that we have eternal life. Moreover, for the Christian, salvation is also a future prospect. What we have now is only a foretaste of what’s ahead. Our bodies, too, are to be redeemed in the resurrection. We will be given a new body, a spiritual body, a glorious body, which will be free of sin and endowed with new powers and properties quite beyond anything we have known in this life. Indeed, salvation will extend to the whole creation and will involve a new heaven and a new earth, from which all taint and trace of sin will have been removed.

Sixth, salvation involves not only the individual but the society as well. The gospel has social implications. “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matthew 22:37-39). The gospel is first personal but also has a social effect. Both are important.

Traditionally, liberals have preached a social gospel, and conservatives have preached a personal gospel. However, when a personal gospel is faithfully preached and truly embraced, the impact on society is astounding. One liberal seminary did a study back in the ’70s, and they found that one church in Hammond, Indiana, did more for social causes in the Chicago area than all government organizations combined did, on purpose. Astounding.

The New Testament writers refused to settle for a dichotomy. In Paul’s letters, faith and love are frequently mentioned in the same verse. Don’t think you can have faith without love; don’t think you can have real love without faith. John brought the two together—faith and love—

in his first epistle. James insisted that faith and works belong together and went so far as to say that without works, faith is dead (James 2:14-26). Genuine faith in Christ always leads to love for the brethren, and love does not stop with the brethren; it goes on to embrace the world in all its varied needs—physical, mental, material, and social, as well as spiritual. When the question is asked, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” the Christian’s answer is a resounding yes.

I once went to a continuing education course over on Robertson years ago with a couple of members here, in which the professor, who was teaching that course to a room filled with predominantly Jewish attorneys, and he was a professor of law at Loyola Law School, spent the week teaching that you should not try to help a person that you encounter on the road who appears to be injured. How do you know you’re not interfering with a police sting operation? You’re not a doctor; you might do more harm than good. You should not try to help this guy; you should just move on and ignore him. In other words, he was teaching in the 20th century what the Lord Jesus Christ said the priests and the Levites were teaching in the first century. Sad.

We are our brother’s keeper, as the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:31-32 illustrates. The love of Christ will compel him to share his resources, however meager, with the world round about him. His Master went about doing good (Acts 10:38), and he can do no less (Galatians 6:10). He has no illusions that by his own efforts he can bring in the kingdom, but as the salt of the earth and the light of the world, he will do his best to permeate society with the principles of the gospel, including brotherly love and peace with men, if it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men (Romans 12:18). And as soon as you say, “I can’t live with him anymore,” you’re reflecting more on God than on you.

Wherever missionaries have gone, they have built churches, opened hospitals, founded orphanages, operated schools, and in 101 other ways have tried to follow in the steps of the Master, who had compassion on the multitudes, who helped the helpless, fed the hungry, healed the sick, cleansed the leper, and raised the dead. The non-Christian religions are now engaging in various kinds of social service and medical and educational work Christians embarked on

many centuries ago, but the impulse did not come from their religious beliefs. They have been forced into them by the competition afforded by Christian missionaries in their areas.

Each non-Christian religion has its own doctrine of salvation, but none of them can compare with the glorious salvation found in the Lord Jesus Christ. This, my friends, is why we engage in missions. We cannot do otherwise and obey the Great Commission. We cannot do otherwise and reach our own children, our friends, and our loved ones here at home. We cannot do otherwise.

Let's pray. Thank you, Father, for Your goodness. We know that the Savior is unique; neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. But also, this Christian faith is unique. It has been delivered to us; help us to recognize and acknowledge its uniqueness as a belief system, as a faith system, as a religious system—whatever phrase and term you want to use—known to man. There is nothing else like it. It bears investigating, it bears scrutiny, and it always holds up to scrutiny. I pray that You might speak to hearts this morning, those who are here who are not believers in Christ. I pray that You might draw them to the Savior, that they might embrace Him and not only live forever but love accordingly and serve accordingly and minister to others accordingly. Bless, we pray, in Jesus' name, amen.