

Elephant – Christianity

4/9/23

2 Timothy 4:3-4

Sunday AM

Have you ever heard of the *elephant analogy* used to show that all religions are valid ways to God? My religion professor at one of the colleges I attended many yrs ago especially loved this analogy, b/c it equalizes all religious faiths, making them equally true in their description of God.

The analogy speaks of (6) blind men who are touching some part of an elephant. Since they've never encountered an elephant before, they're curious to explore this new wonder. The 1<sup>st</sup> man grabs the trunk and says it's a snake. The 2<sup>nd</sup> guy feels one of the elephant's legs and calls it a tree. The 3<sup>rd</sup> man finds the elephant's tail and thinks it is a rope. The 4<sup>th</sup> man touches the elephant's side concluding it's a wall. The 5<sup>th</sup> man touches an ear and thinks it's a fan, while the 6<sup>th</sup> man touches the tusk and calls it a spear. The proposed point is that each man in his blindness is describing the same thing – an elephant; only they're each describing it in a radically different way.

**Of course**, when this analogy is superimposed on the different religions in our world, the idea is that they are all describing the same God in radically different ways – attempting to communicate that no one religion has cornered the market on truth – and therefore, they all should be viewed as equally valid. And this idea is the anthem of the *co-exist* movement.

**Problem is**, while it sounds nice, there are just a few issues w/ such a primitive, PC notion that makes our sweet, elephant analogy the *elephant in the room*.

**First** – few, *if any*, of the 4200+ different religions in existence today would agree that their way is but one of the ways to touch God – w/ most of them believing their way is the ONLY correct way to God.

**Second** – there's a little logical argument known as the Law of Non-Contradiction that wreaks havoc on such a preposterous notion. *Let me explain...*

The Law of Non-Contradiction is a basic law in classical logic that says *something can't be both true and untrue at the same time w/in the same context*. Meaning two distinctively different things **cannot** be the same w/in the same context b/c they're uniquely different and in contradiction to one another.

**For example** – if this table is a table, then it can't, not be a table at the same time. Likewise, you can't be here physically and not here physically at the same time.

When this principle is applied to the 4200+ differing religions/cults. Due to the immense differences b/w beliefs, the Law of Non-contradiction tells us that *while we can all be wrong, we cannot all be right*.

**Meaning** – All roads do not lead to God! Nor are we all touching the same elephant.

**This also means** – no matter how many “*co-exist*” bumper stickers we stick on our cars; no matter how many PC speeches are given by pastors, popes, presidents, and kings espousing some form of tolerant universalism – *they'll never change the reality that every religion, at its core, is uniquely different from the next* and therefore in contradiction to one another.

So, if *Islam* is the way to God, then *Joseph Smith*, and every other way, is wrong? If the *Pope* is God's true messenger, then *Buddha's* teachings miss the mark! If *Jesus* is the only way, truth, and life as He declared in *John 14*, then there are no other avenues to God.

**Yet** – despite our differences, this shouldn't lead us to intolerance/indifference, or to trying to take each other out. Rather, our differences should lead us to open dialogue w/ a willingness to understand/respect each other's differences – yet sadly, this seldom occurs!

**In fact, after 56 yrs of life**, when it comes to faith, I've learned (3) things. (1) No matter what I believe, not everyone is going to believe what I believe. (2) I can no more change your beliefs than you can change mine. And (3) we live in an age where the *trivial* is emphasized and the *significant* is being relegated to the peripheral. Meaning we often major on the minors.

**So, what are we to do?** When it comes to the Christian faith, the Apostle Paul, who lived in an intense, religiously pluralistic society, *gave us some counsel*.

*The H.S. tells us clearly that in the last times, some will turn away from true faith and will follow deceptive spirits/teachings that come from demons... Don't waste time arguing over godless ideas and old wives' tales.*

*Instead, train yourself to be godly. Physical training is good, but training for godliness is much better, promising benefits in this life and in the life to come. 1 Timothy 4:1, 7-8*

*Study to show yourself as one approved by God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the Word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15*

*For the time will come when people will not put up w/ sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. 2 Timothy 4:3-4*

When Paul penned these words to Timothy, I'm sure he was concerned for the souls of all people and desired for them to know the One true God; yet **he also knew that while He was to share the truth of God w/ others, not everyone would embrace this truth**.

So, **starting today**, we're going to lay the basic belief systems of the world besides Christianity to discover the real differences b/w them. My intent isn't to condemn or speak condescendingly of any of them, but to help us understand our unique differences.

At the same time, we can't be so naïve as to buy into this PC, universal ideology of "co-existence" b/c it's socially expedient and culturally encouraged. **We must know why we believe what we believe and be willing to allow our beliefs/convictions to be vetted**. IOW – we can't just believe b/c we've always believed. We must take the time to scrutinize each faith, including our own, to know our similarities and differences.

W/ today being Easter Sunday, I can think of no better place to start than w/ laying out the fundamental beliefs of the Christian faith.

I The **HISTORY** of Christianity

**Cartoon** – CB talks w/ Sally about church history.

Thankfully the history of Christianity goes back further than when our church started 50 yrs ago – and can be validated by a number of credible sources.

**Still**, knowing our history provides us w/ the foundation/framework for credibility. It helps us to retain perspective and appreciate our spiritual roots – whereas **a suspicious history leads to a suspect faith**.

The roots of **Christianity** are in lock-step w/ **Judaism** as both faiths recognize their beginnings in Genesis 1 and then walk hand-in-hand w/ each other thru the book of Malachi. But from there they diverge as Christians believe Jesus to be the Messiah/Savior.

**LME** – Christians believe that thru the virgin birth, God wrapped Himself in human flesh to become a living sacrifice to take away the sin of the world. As such, Jesus is God’s single solution to atone for the sinfulness of mankind by offering His life on an old Roman cross for the forgiveness of sin and (3) days later, rising from the dead.

Shortly after His death/resurrection, the disciples, inspired by their firsthand encounter w/ the resurrected Christ, banded together and set out under the leading of the H.S. to share the news of Jesus w/ the world around them – formally starting the Christian faith.

Since that day some 2,000 yrs ago, the Christian faith has expanded thru-out the world to become the largest religion in the world spreading to nearly every country and touching the lives of billions.

## II The Essential **BELIEFS** of Christianity

### A About the **BIBLE**

The Bible is God’s inspired Word to man written by human authors supernaturally/divinely inspired under the guidance of the H.S.

God is the **author**. Man was the **method**. Salvation is the **focus**; and truth, w/out any mixture of error, is the **matter** – meaning the Bible is God’s primary means of revelation and truth for mankind.

*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so the servant of God may be fully equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16*

### B About **GOD**

The one and only God is the sovereign creator and ruler of the universe. He is one God eternally existing in (3) persons – Father, Son, and H.S. w/out division of nature, essence, or being. **Trinity**

### C About the **FATHER**

God the Father is the 1<sup>st</sup> Person of the Trinity who oversees all things according to His own sovereign purpose and grace. He is the Creator/Sustainer of all things who upholds, directs, and governs the creation.

### D About **JESUS CHRIST**

Jesus is the 2<sup>nd</sup> person of the Godhead who is coequal w/ the Father and the H.S. He is the physical representation of the Godhead who according to the Father’s plan, humbled Himself by becoming flesh, inseparably uniting His undiminished deity w/ true humanity. As fully God and man, He lived a sinless life to die on the cross to pay in full the penalty for sin as God’s one/only solution to the problem of sin – and then on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, miraculously arose from the dead, ascending into heaven to be our mediator.

*You must have the same attitude as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality w/ God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the nature of a servant, and being made in human likeness, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross! Ph. 2:5*

E About the HOLY SPIRIT

The H.S. is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Person of the Trinity, coequal w/ the Father/Son. He's present in the world to make men aware of their need for God's grace by convicting the unbeliever of sin and drawing them to salvation. Once in Christ, the H.S. indwells the believer to insure forgiveness and guides/empowers the believer to live a God-honoring life.

F About HUMAN BEINGS

Man is the focal point of creation created in God's image – having body, soul, and spirit. The sacredness of this humanity is evident in that after sin entered into the human condition, God demonstrated His love for man by sending Christ to die on the cross to rescue him from the penalty of sin – showing us that every person of every race possesses dignity and worth to God.

*Let us make mankind in our image..., so God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them... Genesis 1:26*

G About SIN

*All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.*

While every person has tremendous potential for good, we've all been marred by a disposition of disobedience toward God that infects us w/ an incurable spiritual disease called "sin". Sin entered into the human condition thru the disobedience of Adam/Eve and has been passed to everyone so now all have been infected and have fallen short of God's glory. Meaning ***every person is incapable of pleasing God on his own merit.***

*Just as sin entered the world through one man (Adam), and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, b/c all have sinned. Romans 5:12*

G About SALVATION

*In Christ alone, we have redemption through his blood the forgiveness of sin. Ephesians 1:7*

Salvation is solely an act of God's grace gifted to anyone who will believe based solely on the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and His shed blood on the cross – it is a free gift of God and cannot be obtained on the basis of human merit or works.

*For it is by grace you have been saved, thru faith – and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so no one can boast. Ephesians 2:8-9*

While salvation is God's free gift to man, it must be received by faith apart from human effort. Salvation is received only by trusting in Jesus as God's sole offering for the forgiveness of sin.

**Here's the crux** of the matter as it pertains to the Christian faith – Jesus never claims to be **A** way to God but the **ONLY** way to God.

*Salvation is found in no one else, for there's no other name under heaven given to man by which we must be saved. Acts 4:12*

The ***law of non-contradiction*** offers a real challenge as it pertains to Christianity. ***Either Jesus is the only way to God or He's no way to God – either He rose from the dead or He didn't*** – but He can't do both.

**In either case** – these truths of Jesus being God’s only solution to the problem of sin is either true or false. But if it’s true, then all other ways are false. Such a claim may appear intolerant/cold, but in actuality its merciful/loving b/c instead of leaving a man to fend for himself and perish into eternal condemnation, God has made a provision for every person to be rescued into a relationship w/ Him thru Christ alone.