

10 THINGS YOU WISH JESUS NEVER SAID: GTCC SERIES BY JEREMY BEDENBAUGH
WEEK 1: THE UNIVERSE—IT'S ALL ABOUT ME!¹

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. A Search for the Real Jesus.** If we're honest when we listen to Jesus, we would recognize that most of what he said and did could only be described with words like 'scandalous,' 'penetrating,' 'shocking,' 'troubling,' 'incisive,' 'harsh,' 'difficult,' or even 'weird.' Christians bill Jesus as compassionate yet he once called a woman a 'dog' (Matthew 15.26). We regard Him as humble but he claimed that the entire universe was always and only about Him (John 14.6); His followers tout His mercy, yet He talked more of judgment and hell than all others combined (Matthew 8.12); Politicians call Jesus as the final witness for family values, but He commanded that we hate our mother and father (Matthew 10.34-39); He is worshipped as God incarnate and still admits there are things even He doesn't know or can't do (Matthew 24.36).
- B. What did Jesus say?** If we listen to Jesus, we pick up quickly that He is very direct with people. He taught but claimed to be much more than a teacher. He healed but claimed to offer more than health. He was a man of God but also claimed to offer the only way to God (John 14.6). He not only claimed that people should follow God but that they should follow Him (Matt. 16.24). He didn't simply teach about the forgiveness of sin, he offered it (Matt. 9.6). But he went farther and said that He was the **ONLY** way to forgiveness—"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father except **THROUGH ME.**" Is Jesus a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord?
- C. Is This a Problem?**

1. *Divisive and Violent*

2. *Arrogance and Abuse*

II. HOW CAN WE ADDRESS THESE PROBLEMS?

- A. Make Religion Illegal**—Many governments, especially those associated with fascism, communism, and dictatorships have tried outlawing religion or severely limiting its practice. Unfortunately, in their attempt to curbe the violence of religion, they unleashed some of the most fiercely oppressive regimes known to the world. In spite of oppression, Christianity did not shrink but grew rapidly. Countries like Ghana, China, Nigeria, Korea, and Russia are now flooded with Christians, and in fact all major religions are gaining in worldwide population.
- B. Make Religion Ridiculous**—This method attempts to create an educational and cultural, environment that makes any religious truth claim seem ridiculous. Adherents of this view argue that every religion is just one of many valid paths to God and that any person making such claims is a dangerous extremist. One time Oprah Winfrey hosted a well-known Christian on her show. When he stated that Christianity is the truth, Oprah responded, "I respect that, *as long as you don't say that your faith is more true than my faith.*"

¹ Much of this material developed from Tim Keller's *Reason For God*, chapter 1.

1. *Religious belief is simply culturally conditioned*—Aren't our beliefs and practices really just by-products of cultural conditioning? If you were born in Morocco, wouldn't you be a Muslim? Alvin Plantinga responds this way:

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?" You can't say, "all claims about religions are historically conditioned except the one I am making right now."

2. *One Mountain peak but many paths to the top*—What about religions that practice child sacrifice, sexual abuse, and mutilation? Still more importantly, who is this God who stands on the one mountain peak? Here, the valid view of God is an "open, inclusive, and tolerant" view that lets people draw their own personal conclusions about him (or her). There is difficulty with this view, however, because in an effort to be *inclusive*, it actually *excludes* all people everywhere who have specific ideas about what God is like (whether Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, etc.). The modern "open" view of God itself is actually *closed and exclusive*, because it says that the *only valid view of God* is the view that the "one true God" is the God who is happy to let people think whatever they want to think about him. Western Theology: God is laid back about things! So, the view that doctrine does not matter is a doctrine in itself, excluding Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, and Muslims.
3. *Each Religion is Part of the Whole Truth*--**Elephant Illustration.** The only way to possibly know that every religion only sees part of the truth is if you see all of the truth, the very thing you claim nobody else has. This is imperialistic.

"There is an appearance of humility in the protestation that the truth is much greater than any one of us can grasp, but if this is used to invalidate all claims to discern the truth it is in fact an arrogant claim to a kind of knowledge which is superior to all others...We have to ask: What is the absolute vantage ground from which you claim to be able to relativize all the absolute claims these different Scriptures make?"

4. *It is arrogant to claim that you have a corner on the truth*—Aren't there good Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and Atheists out there who are just as smart as you? How can you be sure you're right and they're wrong? Religion scholar John Hick has written that in light of this reality, it is arrogant and wrong to try to convert someone to your views. But most people in the world do not hold to Hick's conviction that all religions are equal. This would make the statement "all religious claims to have a better view of things are arrogant and wrong" to be, on its own terms, arrogant and wrong.

"Skeptics believe that *any* exclusive claims to a superior knowledge of spiritual reality cannot be true. But this objection is itself a religious belief. It assumes God is unknowable, or that God is loving but not wrathful, or that God is an impersonal force rather than a person who speaks in Scripture. All of these are unprovable faith assumptions...They believe the world would be a better place if everyone dropped the traditional views of God and truth and adopted theirs. Therefore, their view is also an exclusive claim."

5. *Sincerity is What Really Counts—Q:* What do the majority of American Idol contestants and Adolf Hitler have in common? Answer: They are all extremely sincere and sincerely wrong.

C. Make Religion Private—Professor Michael Perry: “To say that religious reasoning must be kept out of the public square because it’s faith based and controversial is itself a faith-based statement which is incredibly controversial, and therefore on it’s on terms ought to be thrown out.”

What is really at stake is not who has exclusive beliefs and who doesn’t. We all do! The question is which set of exclusive beliefs can produce peace-loving, reconciling, inclusive behavior.

III. CHRISTIANITY AND PEACE

- A. Made in the Image of God**—This doctrine leads Christians not only to honor the dignity of all people but to expect many great things from non-Christians.
- B. Universal Sinfulness**—This belief creates humility. Christians acknowledge that the reality of who they are will never fully match the ideal of who they want to be.
- C. Method of Christianity**—In all other religions we are told that in order to be saved, we must perform the truth, i.e. loving your family or loving your neighbor, and if God sees you loving Him and loving others, then He will bless you and save you. But that’s not what the Gospel says at all. I John 4:10 says, “this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent His son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” God purposely comes and loves those who are not good, who do not love their neighbors, and are not virtuous. Jesus dies so that non-virtuous people can be saved by radical grace. If you’re saved by performance, then superiority abounds, but the Gospel says you’re not saved by your performance. This leads us to expect that people who don’t believe as we do might very well be better than us. We’re not saved b/c we’re wise, good, virtuous, or performing the truth; we’re saved because Jesus performed the truth. Thus, many who don’t believe with us can easily be better people.
- D. The Bottom Line**—Not only did Jesus personally conduct an “inclusive” ministry to all typed of people, but when Christianity began to grow in the earliest days, they lived in a world of what looked like inclusive religion—everyone had their own god! Christians came along and said, “Jesus is Lord of all.” It seems that this would create division but it actually created the most inclusive society ever known. Greeks didn’t mix rich and poor, but Christians did. The Jews didn’t mix the races but the Christians did. In Roman society women were 2nd class citizens with few rights, but Christians changed this. The reason behind this is that ultimate reality is visible in Jesus Christ, and this ultimate reality is always about a man on a cross loving people who don’t love him, forgiving people who abuse him, and sacrificially serving people who oppose him. If that’s ultimate reality, how can we be cruel, coercive, or condescending to anyone? We can’t.