

Religions of the World Part II - Hinduism

Last week we looked at some of the general questions people ask about the different religions of the world.

I know that last week's sermon got many of you thinking and discussing the three main views of the world's religions that we looked at: Pluralists, Exclusivists, and Inclusivists.

I received several e-mails and phone calls asking for a copy of my sermon notes from last week because many of you wanted to study a little deeper as some of you were stretched from the previous positions you held about other religions.

Some of you wrote to me saying that you have changed your views – others wrote to me saying that you will definitely think about other religions differently, and I am sure a couple of you just thought I was crazy and decided to ignore me.

For those of you who weren't here last week, I encourage you to go to our website and download last week's sermon as it was meant to make us think outside of our comfort zone and to give us a foundation for this and next week's sermons.

So today, we are going to look a little deeper at a couple of the major religions: Hinduism and Buddhism. Next week we are going to look at Judaism and Islam.

First, my disclaimer:

Although I have spent several hours studying each of these religions, reading books, watching videos, even watching a Barbara Walter's special – I am by no means an expert.

What I share with you is just some of the very basics of these different religions – just some of their core beliefs. I, by no means, claim to be able to give you the kind of depth or insight into these religions the way a theologian could or especially someone who is from one of these religions.

But with that being said, I believe it is very important for us to take a little time, to understand the basics of these different religions. As I said two weeks ago, we fear the unknown. It's good for us to learn about other religions so when a Buddhist moves in next door, or the Hindu is teaching our kids, or the Muslim is working next to us, we don't have to be as hesitant in speaking with them.

So let take the next few minutes and look at the Hindu religion.

The Hindus have several essential beliefs. We are only going to talk about a few of them.

They regard a number of books from a wide variety of time periods as sacred texts, like we do with our Bible. However, they have many more sacred texts than we do.

For example, the oldest of their texts is the Rig-Veda and it has 1,028 chapters. They are poems and epic stories – much like our psalms. However, unlike our psalms some of them are mythical stories.

There are actually 4 Vedas or sacred writings – the Rig-Veda is only one. The Hindus claim that the Vedas were directly given from God to the Vedic Sages.

After that we have the Upanishads, which are inspired writing of the sages on the Vedic texts. So the Vedas were given directly by God and the Upanishads were commentaries on those Vedas.

After that we have a book of poetry that describes epic battles and that is the world's longest collection of poetic history with over 100,000 couplets.

Now a little piece of this book is called the Bhagavad-Gita [bä'gə-väd-gē'tə](#). It is said that all Hindu homes have a copy of the Bhagavad-Gita. Some of the stories written in there help to answer the age-long questions like, “What is the meaning of life?” and “How should we live our lives?”

Now during a Hindu worship service, you would think that the Hindu priest would get up, read from one of the sacred texts and then preach about it.

I was hesitant to tell you this, for fear that you would all become Hindus, but their priest doesn't preach at all – no sermons! He just gives services – which are mainly offerings to the gods, and prayers on the behalf of the others. It is their belief that the priest is closer to God than they are and he intercedes for them.

Okay – enough of the scriptures – let's look a little closer at their beliefs.

I used to always think that Hindus were polytheists, that they believed in more than one god. By some accounts, there are more than 330 million gods and goddesses. But Hindus speak of God in the singular, and their sacred scriptures say that there is only one true God.

Now they believe that God is unknowable – unreachable. They believe that God makes himself known, however, through a multiple of other gods – making himself manifested through them. They also believe that God, although being unreachable, unknowable, is actually in everything – a part of everything. That your soul is literally a part of God, that animals are literally a part of God – everything is part of God.

Hinduism believes that our soul – the human soul – which actually is God within us – longs to be reunited with God.

And since God is a part of us and God is perfect, we cannot be marred by sin. Hindus believe that the human race is ignorant and that we really don't fully understand reality or what it really means to be human.

So, according to Hinduism, our struggle is not with sin, but with ignorance. If we do bad things, although we have God within us, it is because we don't understand. We don't recognize spiritual truth, and we do not recognize our destiny. We need to gain knowledge.

Hindus believe that we can find salvation in spiritual knowledge and by our work. The word Dharma means duty – so a Hindu believes that by gaining spiritual knowledge and doing their duty / Dharma, they will have the possibility of being set free from this life – but that also depends as well on something called karma.

The ultimate goal of a Hindu is to reunite our soul with God. It isn't easy to do – you have to go through many cycles of being reincarnated.

Hindus believe if you do bad things and think bad things, you build up bad karma and if you do good things and think good things, you build up good karma.

So, Hindus believe that if we did evil, and had more bad karma than good karma, we will bear that burden in the next life. We will have to learn through suffering until we gain knowledge and choose not to repeat the evil we have done.

If we did good, more good karma than bad karma, we will bear the fruits of that life into our next life and it will be a little easier for us because we learned those lessons already.

So throughout this cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, we can learn more spiritually, pursue more the duty that God has given us, and build up more good karma until no bad karma remains. At that point we are set free from the cycle of life, death and rebirth.

So, according to a Hindu, once we reach the end of the cycle, where we have knowledge and removed all bad karma from our lives, we reach salvation and release from the cycle of reincarnation.

We are then united with God in a state called “Nirvana.” Many Hindus believe that once you reach that state, nothing of your individuality is left. Just your soul joins back together with God – much like adding a drop of water to the ocean.

So those are the basic beliefs of Hinduism. Obviously there are some differences between Christianity and Hinduism.

For example, Hindus are pluralists. They believe everyone on the planet is going through this same pattern. We are all building up karma, good and bad. We are all, hopefully, growing in knowledge.

Another big difference relates back to the opening scripture from Ephesians that notes: we are not saved by our works but by the Grace of God. Where Hindus believe that it is up to our works, and our knowledge.

The basics of the Christian faith, if put into Hindu terms would sound like this, The perfect, holy, and righteous God became flesh, lived among us, and then bore upon the cross all of the bad karma of the human race. God paid the price for our bad karma. Our task is to respond, to accept this act on our behalf, and to begin a new life.

As a result of all of this, we are not reborn again and again until our bad karma is gone. Our salvation and deliverance come only through God's intervening action - in Jesus Christ - on our behalf.

And the last difference I want to mention is about eternal life. The Hindus believe their soul reunites with God like a drop of water in the ocean.

But we believe that when we die, our soul continues to be distinct from God. We'll have a chance to see God face-to-face, to be known by those who have gone before us and to celebrate in the kingdom of heaven. That is the hope we have as Christians.