

**“UNDERSTANDING WORLD RELIGIONS FROM A CHRISTIAN POINT OF VIEW”
TWIN LAKES CHURCH WOMEN’S BIBLE STUDY
SPRING 2016**

INTRODUCTION

This study of world religions will be from a Christian point of view. This means that it will be assumed that the Bible is the inspired word of God. The Bible is God’s special revelation to mankind. It is our source for truth and leads us to the fullest understanding of God and our relationship with him. While this claim can be debated (and certainly would be by people who practice other religions), it’s not the focus of this class to debate the reliability and authority of the Bible.

We will also start with truth of the Gospel, literally the “good news”. The Bible teaches that while God created everything good—including humans—mankind rebelled against him. This rebellion, common to all of us, results in a breakdown in the relationship between God and human beings, and separates us from the One who is the source of all life.

But because of his great love for us, God devised a rescue plan. Jesus was the Word made flesh, God with us. He lived a perfect life, taught us the ways of the Kingdom of God, and then gave his perfect life on the cross as atonement for our sins. His death is the ultimate display of God’s love, mercy and grace toward all people. Jesus was buried and rose again on the third day, vindicating his message and conquering death. Through faith, Jesus’ atonement takes away the guilt of our sin and we are restored to a right relationship with God.

For the rest of our earthly life as we walk with God, he works at transforming us to be like Jesus, through the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. God gives us the mission of proclaiming the Good News about Jesus, and urges us to show the love of Jesus to a suffering and broken world. Because of God’s grace and mercy, we know that our physical death will not be the end of us. We have been promised resurrection, just as Jesus was raised, and life forever with him. That hope brings us joy even in the sorrow and pain of this life.

These foundational truths of the Christian faith will be our reference point as we examine the teachings of other religions. If you do not yet consider yourself a Christian and would like more information, please don’t hesitate to ask Kim or Laurie for additional resources.

WEEK ONE, JANUARY 25, 2016

UNDERSTANDING RELIGIONS FROM A CHRISTIAN POINT OF VIEW

Homework Jan 26-Feb. 1, for discussion on Feb. 2

DAY ONE: OUR STARTING POINT

Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-21.

1. Name some of the blessings that God gave us through Jesus Christ.
2. According to this passage, why should Christians be bold in sharing the Gospel with other people, even people of other faiths?
3. Have you ever felt uneasy about sharing Jesus with a person of another faith? Why?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 5:18-20. According to these verses, what is the mission of someone who has come to know the love of Christ? Do you think of yourself as an “ambassador” with a message to deliver? Why or why not?

Prayer: Thank God for all the blessings that came through Jesus, our Lord. Ask God to help you gain knowledge and insight during this World Religions study, that will help you be a better equipped ambassador for him!

DAY TWO: MAN WAS MADE TO KNOW GOD

The next few days, let’s review the biblical perspective about human beings and how that relates to encountering people of other faiths.

The creation account in the Bible, in Genesis, is more than just a history of how our world came to be. There are important theological truths imbedded in the story—truths about God and also about mankind—who we are. The narrative specifically teaches us that human beings are different from the other animals and the rest of creation because we are created “in the image of God”.

1. Read Genesis 1:26-27. Since God is Spirit (John 4:24), the word “image” here isn’t talking about our physical appearance. If “image” isn’t talking about physical image, in what other ways are human beings the “image-bearers” of God?

2. If God made us in his image, what does that say about the relationship he wants to have with us? Anthropologists tell us that there has never been a human culture discovered that did not have religion in some form. Why do you think that is?

3. Read Genesis 9:6. What does this command to Noah say about the sanctity of human life? While this verse is about murder in particular, what might be some other implications for how human beings are to be valued?

Prayer: Thank God for creating human beings, and for gifting us with his image. Ask him to help you look at people as image bearers of God, and to always treat people as the special creation they are.

DAY THREE: SIN MESSES UP EVERYTHING

In Genesis 3, the story of mankind makes a tragic turn. Adam and Eve rebel against God and sin enters the human race. Within a few chapters mankind is a mess—anger, jealousy, murder, cheating, sexual immorality, self-centered pride, and all kinds of rotten behaviors emerge.

1. Read Romans 3:23 and 1 John 1:8.10. According to these verses, what is sin and how widespread is it?

2. If sin affects every part of our human experience, how might that impact the religions?

Prayer: Confess your sins to God. Thank him that he didn't just give us rules, religion, and judgment, but instead sent a savior, Jesus, to rescue us from our hopeless situation.

DAY FOUR: RELIGION—FROM BAD TO WORSE

Read Romans 1:21-25; Deut. 12:31; Jeremiah 32:35

1. What are some of the religious practices described in these verses that God considers to be particularly despicable? Why do you think these practices are particularly wicked?
2. Read Luke 11:37-46. Jesus affirmed that God had spoken through the Old Testament prophets and that the Law had come through Moses. Yet he was very critical of the religious leaders of his day. What are some things he criticizes?
3. Do you think that sin can enter our own Christian faith and practice? Have you experience this? As you study other religions, how can you avoid the sin of judgmental pride?

Prayer: Praise God and thank him for his gift of salvation. Ask him to help you to avoid a spirit of superiority and judgmental pride as you study these other religions. Ask him to help you to respond instead with deep gratitude for his grace, and a deep longing to tell others the Good News of his love.

DAY FIVE: EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT GOD.

Despite the fall of man and the infusion of sin into the human race, God has not left himself without a testimony. Theologians call this “Natural Theology” or “General Revelation”—knowledge about God that is available to everybody.

1. Read Psalm 19:1-4. According to this passage, what testifies about God? Who has access to this knowledge?

2. *Read Romans 1:20.* What can be known about God from looking at the creation? What do you think it means that “men are without excuse”?

3. *Read Romans 2:14-15.* These verses indicate that there is a moral code that’s embedded in our humanity. All human beings have a sense of morality, a sense that there are some things that are right and some things that are wrong. It’s how God created us. How might this moral code express itself in other religions? How might sin mess with this moral compass?

4. Knowing that all people have access to this general revelation, do you think there may be some truth in other religions? Do you think there may be some good practices? Why or why not?

Prayer: Ask God to help you see what is good in people of other religions. Ask him to even use what you learn to spur you on toward a more committed walk with him.

Day 6: OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD RELIGIOUS OTHERS

Read 2 Peter 3:15-16, Matthew 9:36, Colossians 4:5-6

1. Have you ever found yourself looking down on people of other faiths?

2. According to these verses, what should be our attitude toward people who are not Christians?

3. How can we critique other belief systems and religious practices while still respecting people?

Prayer: Ask God to fill you with his for others. Ask him to help you learn the art of speaking the truth but always with kindness, respect and grace.

OPTIONAL READING

Read Acts 17:16-32

Paul models effective interfaith dialogue in this passage. We see that he takes time to understand the religions around him and spends time *reasoning* with people (a word that indicates a back and forth dialogue). In his speech, notice how he starts with common ground, quotes well known writers, builds a case for the uniqueness of the one true God, and finishes with Jesus and the resurrection (the ultimate stumbling block!). It's interesting that when he is finished, there are many who "sneer", but some want to hear more. How can this story encourage us in our encounters with people of other faiths?

To view this video lecture online:

<https://vimeo.com/album/3752004>

Password: tlcwomen