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10 Principles for Witnessing to People in Non-Christian Faiths - Part 2

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As indicated in the first installment, we can no longer ignore the fact that our society is now religiously diverse. Inevitably we encounter people who are advocates and adherents of various cults and non-Christian world religions. Some, like Muslims and Hindus, are quietly growing in this country through immigration and high birth-rates. Others, including Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, are aggressively seeking converts.

In this two-part article we explore ten basic principles for effectively witnessing to people of non-Christian world religions and cults. In part one we detailed these five important points. (See part 1 at <http://www.marketfaith.org/wpcontent/uploads/2014/10/Issue-9-38.pdf>.) The first 5 principles are:

- 1. Have a clear understanding of the biblical basis of historic Christian doctrine.**
- 2. Focus particularly on biblical teachings about the nature of God, the person and work of Jesus Christ, the plan of salvation, and life after death.**
- 3. Take the initiative in the witnessing encounter and seek to develop a friendly relationship with the person in the religion or cult.**
- 4. Listen carefully to determine how committed the person is to the cult or religion and its teachings.**
- 5. Establish the sole authority of the Bible.**

In this installment we examine five more principles for reaching out to adherents of non-Christian religions.

6. Define all terms clearly.

Remember, cults and sects often redefine standard Christian or biblical terms to accommodate their pre-conceived doctrines. For example, Mormons will unhesitatingly say they are Christians, believe God is their Heavenly Father, believe Jesus is the Son of God and their savior, preach the gospel, believe in the Second Coming, etc. Most Christians, however, do not understand that, though they use these common Christian terms, they have entirely different meanings for them.

Therefore, we must carefully define the words we use and ask the person in the other faith to do the same. Don't allow them to simply throw out Christian terms without clarifying exactly what they mean. You may even need to define it for them and ask if you are correct. For example you may ask a Mormon, "When you say, 'Jesus is the Son of God', you mean that he was the Heavenly Father's first child in the pre-existence and the Heavenly Father's only physically begotten son on earth. Am I correct?" They should answer "yes" if they are honest and knowledgeable about their church's teachings (many Mormons are not knowledgeable about their own faith). Then you will say, "Do you understand that is entirely different than what all other Christian denominations believe?"

Also, many people from non-Christian worldviews and religions are not familiar with common Christian and biblical terms. In fact, they may have never heard them used at all. So many of the words we assume people should understand may fly completely over their heads. Some have never even heard of Jesus or seen a Bible. Be sensitive to your listeners.

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In order to do that we may need to be more familiar with what they believe. The better educated we are about their beliefs the better we can interact with them. The MarketFaith website section "Non-Christian Worldviews" contains articles on the beliefs and practices of most major religious groups.

7. Focus on basic issues and do not get sidetracked with secondary issues or defending your denomination.

One way some people in other religions try to divert attention from the main issues is to try to get us to focus on nonessential issues. Sometimes they argue that since Christianity has so many different denominations Christians don't agree about what they believe. In their minds, if Christianity were true, then all Christians would believe exactly the same things.

Most cult groups actually do require all their members to believe exactly the same things. For instance, Jehovah's Witnesses do not allow its members to disagree with any teaching of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. Anyone who expresses dissent and does not recant when ordered to by the elders will be disfellowshipped (excommunicated) from the movement.

The truth is, however, all orthodox Christian movements do believe the same things about the essential doctrines of the faith. They agree on the nature of God (His omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, etc.) and the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). They agree on the Person, Deity, and saving work (death and resurrection) of Jesus Christ. They may disagree on some secondary issues like baptism, the Lord's Supper, worship styles, Calvinism vs. Arminianism, millennialism, etc. While those are important issues, none of them is essential to

what makes an organization or an individual authentically Christian. In most cases, Christians of varying denominations regard each other as fellow believers.

Thus, when we engage in witness with followers of other faiths or pseudo-Christian cults, we must not allow them to divert us from the essential concerns. We are not witnessing for a church or denomination, we are witnessing for the Lord Jesus Christ. We should stick to the primary issues of who God is, who Jesus is, and how one receives salvation.

8. Share your testimony of faith in Jesus Christ.

Describe your salvation experience and relationship with Christ in personal terms. Center the discussion on God's grace as shown in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Avoid emphasizing emotional feelings, but focus on your assurance of eternal life through Christ. Tell about your life before you were saved, how you came to know about and receive Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, and what He has meant to you since then.

Be warned however, some cultists will share the testimony of their faith with you. For instance, Mormons often "bear their testimony" that they believe the Book of Mormon is true, that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, and that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the one true church. The problem with that testimony is that it is entirely subjective. That is, they talk about an inner experience that proves to them it is true, regardless of what the facts may be. That's one reason it is hard to witness to some people, they don't care what the evidence shows, all they know is that they "feel" their religion is right.

That's why when we share our testimonies, we should focus on the facts of the Gospel and how we accepted what Jesus did for us on the cross and

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by His resurrection. Those are true whether we feel anything or not. We believe it because it is true, not that it is true because we believe it. We may experience an inner testimony of our faith, but that is not the basis for what we believe, it is the result.

9. Explain carefully the biblical plan of salvation.

Every Christian should know how to share the basic plan of salvation – that is the Gospel or Good News. There are literally dozens of valid methods used to train Christians to do personal evangelism. The first method I learned was The Four Spiritual Laws, and I sometimes still use that outline. I have also studied Evangelism Explosion; Continuous Witness Training; Steps to Peace with God; How to Have a Full and Meaningful Life; the Roman Road; and others. Those are all good ways to engage people in a presentation of the Gospel. Whatever method we utilize should emphasize the following basic points:

God's desire is that all people have eternal life.

* The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23b NASB)

* For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:16 NASB)

* I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. (John 10:10b NASB)

* If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. (John 14:3 NASB).

People have a problem, which is sin.

* For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23 NASB)

* For the wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23a NASB).

God's only provision for sin is Jesus Christ.

* In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1: 1 NASB)

* I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. (John 14: 6 NASB)

* He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification. (Romans 4: 25 NASB)

* For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit. (1 Peter 3:18 NASB)

Each person must repent of (i.e.: turn away from) his or her sins and by faith receive Jesus as his or her Lord and Savior

* But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name. (John 1:12 NASB)

* Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord. (Acts 3:19 NASB)

* But kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance. (Acts 26: 20 NASB)

* For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2: 8-9 NASB)

Remember, you may need to explain carefully what these verses and biblical terms mean to someone in another faith.

10. Pray and trust the Holy Spirit to lead you in your witnessing to people in non-Christian faiths.

This may be the most important principle of all in witnessing – whatever the situation. We should pray that the Holy Spirit will open their hearts and speak through us. It is never our ability or responsibility to convince someone to become a Christian.

In many cases, it may take years for some people to accept Christ. And, unfortunately, many people to whom we witness will never come to Christ. Nevertheless, our part is to tell the story and let God's Spirit go to work. Only God knows what is happening in someone's life and we must trust Him to break down the barriers that may exist.

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