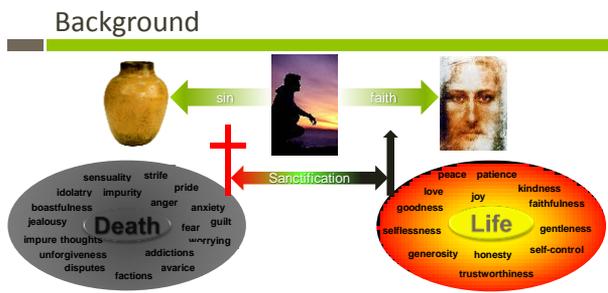




102311 – Relativism and Pluralism

Is Absolute Truth Intolerant?



### Truth – Relativism and Pluralism

- The five major challenges to Christianity today:
  1. Religious Pluralism
  2. Materialism (both consumerism and naturalism)
  3. Moral Relativism
  4. Narcissism
  5. Scientism (empirical science constitutes *the most authoritative* worldview)

### Truth – Relativism and Pluralism

- Religious Pluralism:
  - Two or more religions with mutually exclusive truth claims are equally valid.
  - Since we are all blind to *ultimate reality* we must interpret reality in our own way – reality is one, but views of it are many.
  - Is what is true for one person true for all?



### Truth – Relativism and Pluralism

- Religious Pluralism:
  - All **worldviews** are equally true and valid – *even opposing ones*.
  - Worldview questions:
    - Does God exist?
    - Who is God?
    - Why is there something rather than nothing?
    - What is man?
    - Where did we come from?
    - Who am I?
    - Why are we here?
    - What happens when I die?
  - Are there *different* answers to these questions?
  - Are the answers *equally* true?
  - Does it really matter what *I believe*?
  - Can't we just focus on the *similarities*?

### Truth – Relativism and Pluralism

- Moral Relativism:
  - Cultural biases have so seriously blinded us that we can never *know* the true nature of things.
    - We *know* that we can't *know* (LNC)
    - This view is often called post-modernism and is *true* for:
      - The rational realm
      - The religious realm
      - The moral realm
  - All claims to know objective truth are false because:
    - We are imprisoned in our own culture.
    - We are incapable of seeing beyond our biases.
    - Truth, therefore is relative to culture and *no objective standard exists*.

## Truth – Relativism and Pluralism



- Religious Pluralism:
  - 6 Blind Hindus touching an elephant:
    1. Side – it's a wall
    2. Ear – it's a leaf
    3. Leg – it's a tree trunk
    4. Trunk – it's a snake
    5. Tusk – it's a spear
    6. Tail – it's a rope
  - During an ensuing argument, the Rajah says:



"The elephant is big. Each man touched only one part. You must put all parts together to find out what an elephant is like."

## Truth – Relativism and Pluralism



- Religious Pluralism:
  - Every faith represents just one part of a larger truth about God.
    - Each has only a piece of truth, leading to God by different routes.
    - Eastern religions use the parable in this way.



"The elephant is big. Each man touched only one part. You must put all parts together to find out what an elephant is like."

## Truth – Relativism and Pluralism



- Three Serious Problems
  1. **Contradictory claims**
    - Contradictory claims can't be simultaneously true (LNC)
    - The defining elements of different religions *contradict each other*.
  - It's not an inductive problem of discovery – it's a problem of coherence.
    - Religious pluralism fails on *deductive* grounds, not *inductive*
- Christianity:
  - "You Christians just lack exposure to other beliefs."
  - "You are just uninformed and narrow-minded."
- Response:
  - Jesus claimed to be God:
    - John 8:58
    - Luke 10:18
    - Matt 23:34
  - World religions – I'm a prophet come to help you find God
  - Christianity – I'm God come to find you!

## Truth – Relativism and Pluralism



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- Christianity:
  - If Jesus is God – He would have to be a better way.
  - If Jesus is not God – He is an inferior way to get to God.
- This is not narrow – it's either true or not true.
  - A fact is not narrow – it's either true or not true!
    - John 14:6 – either true or not true.
    - Rev 3:20 – either true or not true

## Truth – Relativism and Pluralism



- Three Serious Problems
  2. **The Suicidal Elephant**
    - How do we *know* our cultural or religious biases blind us to the larger truth that all religions lead to God?
      - Someone who sees clearly *without bias* must tell us so!
    - And who is that person?
      - The Raja – was in a position of privileged truth
      - Because he could see clearly, he was able to correct those who were blind.
- Response:
  - Such a privileged view is precisely what advocates of both religious pluralism and the skepticism of post-modernity deny.
    - Completely objective assessments are illusions!
  - The truth is:
    - Soft agnosticism: in some combination of opinions.
    - Hard agnosticism: is out of reach for any of us.
  - Either way – we *know* what we aren't suppose to *know*

## Truth – Relativism and Pluralism



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    - And who is that person?
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- Response:
  - If all the tenets of every worldview were true, what would the word *truth* mean?
    - If all views of reality are true, all views of reality must also be false.
      - There would be nothing to say about anything.
    - If every statement points to truth, then nothing points to truth
      - To point in every direction is the same as not to point at all!



## Truth – Relativism and Pluralism



### □ Three Serious Problems:

3. **Talking Elephants**
  - The men are blind, *but is the elephant mute?*
    - What if the elephant could (or can) speak – or has spoken?
  - Christianity, Judaism, and Islam make this claim.
    - God makes Himself known, giving mankind a standard by which to measure all other religious claims.

### □ Response:

1. Christianity claims that we don't learn about God by *blind groping*, but by *Divine revelation* – His Self-disclosure!
  - Hebrews 1:1,2
  - Luke 3:2
2. The Bible is His revelation of the way things really are.
  - Psalm 119:105
  - 2 Tim 3:16
  - John 17:17
- The Objective Standard