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*The Biblical Basis for Studying
& Exposing Other Religions*

By Steve Klein

The very idea of entering a study of other religions immediately raises questions. What are our motives? Why should we care what others believe if we are happy with what we believe? Are we like the closed-minded Pharisees who trusted that they had cornered the market on truth and therefore everyone else must be wrong? Shouldn't we be focusing our study on the text of the Bible alone and not on the beliefs of others? These questions need to be dealt with up front so that our minds may be clear and committed to our study.

WE ARE HAPPY WITH WHAT WE BELIEVE, SO WE WANT TO SHARE IT!

As Christians, we should all recognize that differences in belief and teaching can have eternal consequences (cf. 2 John 9; 1 Timothy 4:1-3). If we are right in our beliefs and practices, those who differ stand in danger of losing their souls. If we are wrong, we may discover it by examining what others say in light of the Scriptures.

We have a duty to share and defend our faith. Peter charges us to "sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15). There is no doubt that we can do a better job of this if we have a good understanding of the conceptions and misconceptions of others. The apostle Paul's defense of Christianity before the idolaters of Athens was masterful; this was due in part to Paul's observation and understanding of the Athenians' "superstitious" beliefs and practices (Acts 17:16, 22-31).

WE MUST "BEWARE" OF FALSE TEACHING

Christians also have an obligation to maintain unity with one another based on truth (Ephesians 4:1-3). Divergent doctrines are obviously the enemy of unity (Ephesians 4:14). We should "not be carried about with various and strange doctrines" (Hebrews 13:9).

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Times of Services

Sundays - 2:00 pm Bible class, 3:00 pm Assembly Wednesdays - 6:30 pm Bible class

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One of the best safe guards against false teaching is a thorough awareness of it; we should be able to recognize a false doctrine (1 John 4:1), convincingly explain what is wrong with it (Titus 1:9; 2 Timothy 4:2), and identify those who teach it (Romans 16:17-18). In Matthew 16:6-12, Jesus warned his disciples to "take heed" and "beware" of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The phrase "take heed" (Greek. horao) means to "discern clearly" and the word "beware" (Greek. prosexo) means to "hold the mind towards," "pay attention to," or "be cautious about" (Strong's Greek Dictionary). When it comes to false teaching, the most dangerous thing we can do is stick our heads in the sand and ignore it. To beware is to be aware. The many passages found in the New Testament warning us to beware of false teachers are sufficient by themselves to authorize us to study other religions (cf. Matthew 7:15; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; 2 Peter 2:1-4; 3:17; 1 John 4:1).

OPEN-MINDEDNESS DEMANDS EXAMINATION OF OTHERS' BELIEFS

Christians are to be people of conviction -- we believe that we have the truth and we are determined to live accordingly (cf. 1 John 2:21; 2 Peter 1:12). But our convictions are not like those of the Pharisees; in fact they are exactly opposite. The Pharisee's beliefs were based on tradition and their hypocrisy permitted them to compromise their beliefs (Matthew 15:1-6; 23:13-31). The convictions of a true Christian are arrived at by testing instead of by tradition (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Christians examine teaching in light of God's word and then receive it or reject it accordingly (1 John 4:1). Rather than being like the Pharisees, who held to their unfounded convictions and were unwilling to examine anything else, Christians will not adopt a belief unless it is well founded and they eagerly examine everything else.

THE BIBLE ITSELF EXAMINES AND EXPOSES FALSE RELIGIONS

The Bible itself is full of exposés of false religion. The Old Testament lays bare many religious errors -- from the unacceptable sacrifice of Cain (Genesis 4:1-5) to the perverted religious practices of the Israelites (2 Kings 17:12-17, 24; Psalm 106:36-38). It is important for us to observe that the Old Testament not only contains details of false religions among those who never claimed to be God's people (Isaiah 19:1-3; 66:17), but it also uncovers false religion among those who claimed to have a relationship with Jehovah. Examples include the perverted worship of Jehovah engaged in by Micah and Jeroboam (Judges 17-18; 1 Kings 12:25-33; 2 Chronicles 11:14-15;) the rank idolatry of the Israelites under kings like Manasseh (2 Chronicles 33:1-7, cf. Hosea 4:12-13; Ezekiel 23:37-39; 14:1-7), and the false prophecies propounded in Jeremiah's day (Jeremiah 14:14). Remedies for false religion were often the subject of messages sent by God through His prophets. The religious reforms instituted by King Josiah illustrate the severity of the measures which were taken (2 Kings 23:1-20).

The New Testament is also filled with descriptions and condemnations of false teaching and false religion, not only among pagans and Jews, but also among Christians. As was already mentioned, Paul was aware of and exposed pagan idolatry among the Greeks of Athens (Acts 17:17-31). But many New Testament epistles also deal with some erroneous practice or belief among Christians. Even a cursory examination of the New Testament would reveal that false religion among Christians took many forms, including eating meat offered to idols (1 Corinthians 8:1-13; 10:14-31; Revelation 2:14, 20), the Judaizing of Christianity (Acts 15; Galatians), early Gnosticism (1 John), and the imposition of human philosophy and tradition (Colossians 2:8, 20-23; cf. Matthew 23:13-33). -2/10/02 West GA Bulletin

Editor's Note: If you would like a Home Bible Study, or would like to study further over the phone, or by computer, please feel free to contact us: Mark J. Ward, 445 Touchstone Parkway, Brunswick, Georgia 31525, (912) 265-6936 - markjward@yahoo.com

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