

Why the Battle?
Module Two - Christology
The Rev. Alfred T. K. Zadig, Jr.

How many of you have ever stacked Dominoes? One chip goes down, they all go down. Once you are over Scripture, it affects every other issue. If you are under Scripture, it affects every other issue. As we said in the last session, As part of the Anglican Church of North America what we call the ACNA, we are **under** the authority of the Bible. In fact at every Ordination, before the bishop gives the Bible he gently smacks the Priest over the head with it to demonstrate, they are under the Word. The Episcopal church was built on this foundation but for decades has shown in their decisions and policies they are **over** the authority of the Bible and that is the chasm that separates us. The biggest hardest hurdle is the issue of Jesus Himself.

Is Jesus a really good guy or is he the only hope for salvation? If we are above Scripture our answer would go something like this, "I have a great friend who is a Hindu, and he is one of the most ethical, kind and generous men I've ever met. On that basis how could his religion be wrong? He must be going to heaven because he's a nice guy." If we are under Scripture we would say, "What a guy, think what he could be if he were in relationship with Jesus Christ both now and eternally!" Under Scripture we say, "Lord I don't understand it, but I trust your word more than the world, when you tell us in:

John 14 I am the Way the truth and the Life, and no one comes to the Father but through me.

Lord I don't understand it, but I trust your word when you tell us in:

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

1 Timothy 2:5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

Being under the Authority of Scripture tells us that Jesus is the only mediator between God and man. He is God who humbled Himself and became a man, the only sufficient sacrifice for our sin and the only one to have conquered death forever. If we are under the Word, we say Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.

This question of the identity of Jesus is the area of faith we call Christology, the person and nature of Jesus. Jesus died for all, totally inclusive, yet there is only one way to attain salvation, which is exclusive. Kind of like marriage. Is my wife my only spouse? Are we exclusive? The answer determines the rest of my life. It doesn't make other women bad or prevent me from having conversations, but I am exclusive to her as Christ is to humanity.

As the poet Carl Sandburg said, "The ugliest word in the English language is exclusive." But Christianity is the most inclusive religion in the world. Remember when Jesus said in Revelation, "The spirit and the bride say come, let all who hear come and take the free gift of the water of life!" But Christianity also makes the most exclusive claims for Christ.

Acts 4: "There is no other name given under heaven by which we can be saved."

Since the beginning of the 18th century, there has been something working against this notion of the unique salvation that only Jesus can bring.

Something called Universalism. Coming from the worldview of being over Scripture, it is the belief that there are many ways to God, that universally all humans will be embraced by God and experience eternal life. It's actually much older than the 18th century. Back to Genesis, where the serpent says to Adam and Eve, *did God really say...*

As a Priest, it would make my life so much easier if Jesus were to have said: "I am A way, A truth A life...one among many." It would make my life easier because then we could say to the Hindus-you take India. To the Buddhists-you have Asia. To the Muslims...you take the middle east. No judgment! No worries, take it. Imagine the relief this would bring to our mission budgets! No plane tickets required! No need to go to India, Burundi, you name it. My friends, the conflict we are in is a reality because the leadership of the Episcopal church has taken a stand to be over Scripture, and is therefore immersed in Universalism.

Paul writes to Timothy, Second letter chapter 3, "There will be a day when the church will act religious, but will reject the power that could make them Godly." Well intentioned folks above Scripture who have put their trust in culture more than Scripture.

Bishop John of Newark, New Jersey in many ways is the poster child symbol of the Episcopal Church and is a lovely classic universalist who said, "The idea that Jesus is the only way to God or that only those who have been washed in the blood of Christ are ever to be listed among the saved, has become an-anathema"(in other words, an outrage and disgrace) "and even dangerous." Bishop Spong is retired, but is still in good standing as a Senior Bishop in the house of Bishops.

This universalist teaching says, "Jesus was a good man, teacher and Rabbi who offers a positive role model and points to God. He is 'a' way, but calling him "The" way is exclusive and judgmental.

In 2004 the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles hosted a conference called "Beyond One Way: Christians and Religious Pluralism." One former Rector of All Saints Pasadena wrote, "I can no longer think about Jesus as the only way to God and to a saving faith. I reject the claim that Christianity has the truth and all other religions

are in error. I think it is a mistaken view to say Christianity is superior to Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Judaism and that Christ is the only way to God and salvation.” Again, when you’re over Scripture, who would disagree? It sounds great, and wins the court of secular opinion. There is just one problem. Jesus said the opposite!

Intellectually, how can two opposite claims about Jesus be right? C.S. Lewis said Christianity if false is of no importance. If true is of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important. How can opposite claims all be right?

Three quick examples:

On the subject of God, Hinduism’s supreme being is the indefinable impersonal Brahman. On the other hand, Christianity teaches there is a supreme being who is the infinite personal Creator. Jesus is keenly interested and compassionate towards the downtrodden, poor, hungry, and the marginalized. Quite in contrast to the aloof deity of Hinduism.

Buddhism says there is no personal god. Buddhism is a practical approach to life. Buddhism has no God nor does it have a messiah. It has the Buddha, simply the enlightened one who doesn’t speak, but sits in silence.

Islam outright rejects the Trinity that Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior-ship of Jesus. It rejects His crucifixion. They believe someone else died in His place, like Simon of Cyrene, or even Judas. The Resurrection is denied as is the sin nature of man and salvation by grace alone through Faith in Jesus Christ. Allah is the Islamic God of strict judgment and offers mercy only to his followers, and knows nothing of unconditional love, or ultimate sacrifice on mankind’s behalf that Jesus Christ offers to the world today.

BUT Can they all be right? How on earth can all roads lead to the same place when they don’t agree what that same place is? None of the world’s religions believe in the same heaven! As Christians, we believe that heaven is the place where the Throne of God is located as well as the holy Angels, a place radiating with the power of God.

The Hindus believe in reincarnation, that depending on the kind of life you’ve led, you could come back as a flower, a dog, a cat, a Yankee Fan, or Gamecock or Tiger Fan!

Buddhists believe there are as many as 33 heavens and 33 hells listed as possible destinations. There is the Buddhist best heaven. Everything is just the way you want it to be. The problem is that it’s not permanent, then you’re reincarnated back to earth.

In Islam the only sure bet way to heaven for the Muslim is through martyrdom. Heaven is a place where there are between 70 and 100 virgins for each martyr. But

what about the women? What is their heaven? So, when you read the Quran, you will find out that the paradise of Islam is a sensual paradise, not a spiritual paradise.

Contrast that with Matthew 22:25: The Sadducees came to Jesus Christ with a question.

Paraphrasing: "There were with us seven brothers, and the first died, and his wife then married the next brother, then he died and she ended up marrying each of the 7 men. Therefore, in the resurrection, who will be her husband...for they all had her?" The answer of Jesus tells us everything about heaven! Jesus said, "You are mistaken, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given to marriage, but are like the angels of God in heaven." We will be like angels existing to glorify "not" ourselves, but Jesus Christ!

Under Scripture-powerful. Over Scripture-Anything goes.

There is something so beautiful in exclusively dedicating yourself to the one who says I am the way the truth and the life. Here is our discipleship moment. If we are over and re-writing Scripture then we're not following Jesus, as much as we are expecting Him to follow us! If we are over the authority of Scripture and rewriting salvation, it means we are part of a false Gospel, but more than that we are leading others astray! It's why James writes, "Not many of you should be teachers!" It's why Jesus said in Matthew, "Whoever causes one of these little ones to go astray, it would be better to have a millstone fasted around his neck and be drowned in the sea."

Roman Catholic theologian, Peter Kreeft, a favorite author of mine writes, "The very name Jesus means Savior, to save us from sin, death and hell. That may sound old fashioned but it is the heart of Christianity. Jesus is the Noah's ark that rescues us from the Flood of Hell. Jesus is the blood of the Passover lamb that rescues us from the angel of death. Jesus is the life giving water that quenches the fire of hell. Hell is life's ONLY final tragedy." Jesus saves us from that tragedy, meaning not to accept His gift of salvation, or to teach over Scripture to others that Jesus is one of many gods, is the most halacious thing anyone can possibly do." If there is nothing eternal for Jesus to save us from, then He is not our eternal SAVIOR.

During an Official Episcopal National Christian Education conference, the event organizers included shrines to Islam, Native American Spirituality, and Buddhism. At each shrine one was encouraged to engage in some activity relative to the religion represented. For example, one could wave a feather and say a Native American "ancestor prayer", weave a small prayer mat out of strips of construction paper, or ring a Buddhist prayer bell and do a Buddhist chant. But again, you can do that when you have made the decision to be over Scripture.

Right after 9-11, I took a group of St. Michaelites to do relief work in Manhattan. On the way home, we stopped at the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine for evening prayer. To our horror we discovered an altar dedicated to Shinto-ism, an ancient Japanese

nature religion. Without even knowing there was such an altar, many in our group, including the Corbetts, said Al, we have to leave, there is something in this Cathedral that is not of the Lord. We immediately left the cathedral and I wrote to the Bishop of New York asking him how on earth there could be such. His response to me? It's people like you who are no better than terrorists who caused 9-11.

As we look at our challenge in the Anglican church; it's not about choosing option a verses option b. It's Biblical Christianity here, or False Gospel there. If Jesus is just one more among many, why on earth would He have to be tortured to death on a Cross? It's the over-under domino effect.

Let me end with the story of my own grandfather. I love this picture, on the left is my father. After his conversion from Judaism to Christianity, he became an Episcopal Priest in the Diocese of Long Island, New York. He is with his father, a Jewish agnostic. On the right is that same grandfather with my mother's mother, a devout Norwegian Lutheran. I recount this story because I have found that sometimes our family members determine our theology. We can all of a sudden be above Scripture because a family member has decided to live a certain way and so we think that to love them we must affirm them regardless of Scripture. I'm here to say you can love and not affirm. My grandfather was the gentlest, kindest man you could meet. He moved from Germany to New York City as a Jew, narrowly escaping the Holocaust. He lived primarily as a Jewish agnostic on the upper east side, never understanding how a loving God could allow such suffering. He died at the age of 98 as a Jewish Agnostic. I so want to believe this kind wonderful man is with Jesus. I remember how my zealous brother and I prayerfully tried to lead him to Christ. As far as I know he never did. If I'm over Scripture I'm saying, he was a nice guy, he's got to be in heaven. Being Under Scripture all I can say is Lord, I did my best to lead Him to you. I know you are loving and just, yet I bow to the authority of your word, even when I don't understand. I trust your word over the kindness of a man I knew and loved. I pray He is with you Lord. Either way It will never dampen my hunger to tell others about you and live under your word.

Let us pray