

# How to Relate to Non-Christians



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Rom. 1:18-20; 2:14-16; Phil. 2:5-11; Rev. 14:6, 7.*

**Memory Text:** “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (*Acts 4:12, NIV*).

Many people today no longer want to hear about absolute truth. The various religions, including the Christian faith, are seen as equally valid ways to reach the beyond. Many claim that, in essence, we all worship the same God—we simply have different historically and culturally conditioned ways of doing so. Everyone should be allowed to have his or her own truth. And no belief system should claim superiority over another.

As Christians, of course, we reject that concept. The very nature of our Christianity demands we do. We maintain that the religion of Christ is unique and that we must continue to call people everywhere to become His disciples.

The question, then, remains for us: How should we relate to those who are not of the Christian faith? This week we look at some broad principles regarding this important topic.

**The Week at a Glance:** Why, as Christians, must we reject the notion that all religions are valid? How should we treat non-Christians? What's the best way to witness to them? Why should we witness to them? To whom does the three angels' messages go?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 28.*

## Incurably Religious

All through human history, in almost every culture, in every age, even in the most adverse and trying conditions, humans have had belief in some sort of god or gods. Through the centuries the question has been asked: Where does this belief come from? Was religion “invented” or “discovered”? Does humanity’s belief in God originate in humanity itself, as a projection of some inner need? Has humankind always been religious? And if so, why so?

As Christians, we believe that religion originated with God, who has revealed Himself to us in various ways, the greatest revelation being that of Jesus Christ coming in the flesh, where He revealed to us the love and self-sacrificing character of the Lord.

Not everyone, though, has heard or known the good news of the love and character of our Lord. And yet, God has not forsaken these people, either. Remember, at the Cross, Christ died for the sins of the whole world (*1 John 2:2*); His death, by default, excluded no one (*John 3:16*); He suffered death for every person (*Heb. 2:9*). No one was left out, not even those who have never heard, nor will ever hear, of Christ’s death, at least in this life. Why would the Lord die in their behalf if they weren’t, somehow, offered the option of salvation?

**Read Romans 1:18-20, 2:14-16. What do these texts tell us about those who haven’t heard directly about Jesus and the salvation He offers? Are they still accountable to God, and, if so, why?**

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Those who consciously turn their backs on God do so at their eternal risk, that’s for certain. But many have always lived in *darkness* through no fault of their own. Yet, even these people have had a limited revelation of God and, thus, will be held responsible only for what they knew in their deepest of hearts.

**English poet Samuel Coleridge once suggested that instead of locking criminals in jail, the offenders should be placed in nature, where, seeing the natural world’s “soft influences,” they would turn from their evil ways. However nice an idealized and romantic view of the natural world this is, what are its flaws? What are the limits of what we can know about God, truth, and morality from nature alone?**

## The Universal Claims

**Read** John 14:6. What is Jesus saying? Why would many people, especially in today’s world, find such words so hard to accept?

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The religion of the Bible knows nothing of the notion of relativism, of each person seeking his or her own version of *truth*. There is only one God, one Creator, one Redeemer, one Lawgiver, and one means of salvation. Given the very nature of what we believe as Christians—that *all* the world is fallen into sin and that at the Cross Jesus Christ bore the sins of *all* people upon Himself—it’s hard to see how there can be different *truths* for different folk. The very claims of the Bible regarding Creation, Redemption, sin, are universal, encompassing every human being. Given these claims, then, it’s not realistic to assume that every other spiritual or religious path is valid, as long as those who are on these paths act from a sincere and loving heart.

**Look up** the following texts. What point do they make about the universality of the claims of the Bible? *Gen. 1:1, Rom. 3:23, 5:12, Heb. 2:9, Rev. 20:13.*

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What all this means, then, is that we, as Christians, should preach to non-Christians, sharing with them what we believe. If Christianity is true, then other religions have to be false. This doesn’t mean there isn’t some good in these faiths, and we certainly aren’t in a position to judge the hearts of others, whatever their beliefs. Instead, because of the universal claims of Christianity, we must, in meekness, humility, and love tell others the good news of a loving God who sent His own Son into human flesh and in that flesh ransomed the world from sin. The claims of the Cross included everyone; everyone, therefore, must be told about it.

**How do you respond to someone who makes the claim, “Well, your religion is just *your* truth; I have my own truth”? What’s wrong with that statement?**

## **Christ—the Only Way** (*Acts 4:12*).

It is often pointed out that other religions also have their heroes, just as Christianity has Christ. And, indeed, we must have great respect for Muhammad, who insisted—in a highly polytheistic society—upon the worship of one God. Who can't help respecting and admiring the Gautama Buddha's compassion and sensitivity to human suffering? And there's much good, too, in the profound teachings of Confucius.

But these people do not begin to compare with Jesus Christ, not in who they were nor in what they accomplished, nor even claimed to accomplish, for the world. To suggest that Jesus and these other people are simply different versions of good men teaching good things is to pervert the basic teaching of Scripture grossly. The Bible teaches that Jesus is the Savior of the world. Either we accept the claim fully, or we reject it fully. It's hard to see, with such a claim, how there can be any middle ground, any compromise.

**What fundamental truth must we recognize when comparing Christianity with other religions?** *Acts 4:12; see also Isa. 45:5.*

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It's precisely because of the universality of what Christ has done that, as Christians—having now been redeemed by Jesus (*Eph. 1:7, Col. 1:14, Heb. 9:12*)—we should be motivated to tell others in order that they, by faith, can share in the promises of God made to them, as well.

“How then should we relate to those of other religions? First of all, we must treat them as fellow human beings—with respect and honor. . . . We need to approach them with openness, ready to listen and learn. In our finiteness we do not have all that we need at any point in our experience. Different points of emphasis may help to strengthen our own experience. Nor should we apologize for what we believe or our conviction that we have truth in having Jesus Christ. Never should we hesitate to witness to another. But our efforts must always reflect humility and avoid a spirit of triumphalism or a subtle attitude of imperialism.”—S. Kubo, *The God of Relationships* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Pub. Assn., 1993), p. 138.

**How do you show respect for people and for their personal faith and integrity, while at the same time rejecting their beliefs? Or can you?**

## All Things to All Men

Though the truths of what we believe are eternal and unchanging, the context in which we spread those truths is always changing. The approach one would take with an Indian shaman wouldn't be the same as with a New Age German banker; the witness to a Canadian Inuit living in the far end of the Yukon wouldn't be the same as with a Singaporean business executive. Though the message is the same, the methods often vary.

**How** did the apostle Paul apply this basic principle in his ministry? *Acts 16:1-3, 1 Cor. 9:19-23*. **How** does that explain his actions in Jerusalem? *Acts 21:17-26*. **What principle of ministry do we see here by Paul's words and actions? Remember, too, that he is the same man who wrote Galatians 1:8, 9.**

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“More than 2 billion of the world's population will hear the gospel only if cross-cultural missionaries will make themselves servants and become all things to them. From tribes in Africa to heavy-metal rockers in the ‘jungles’ of New York City, from the sophisticated professional to the troubled teenager next door, people desperately need to hear the gospel in a context they can understand. Who will humble themselves and become incarnate as slaves for the sake of these souls? Who will go through the hard, risky business of contextualization so others may clearly hear the gospel?”—Jon Dybdahl, “Cross-Cultural Adaptation: How to Contextualize the Gospel,” *Ministry* (November 1992), p. 17.

**In what** perfect way was this principle of reaching people where they are realized in the ministry of our Savior? *Phil. 2:5-11*.

**Christ came to meet us where we are. He assumed human form. He expressed Himself in human language. He became one of us. If, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the church wants to reach the modern world with the message of Christ, it will have to meet people where they are and speak the language of the people of today and not of a century ago.**

## Christ's Method Alone

We've tried to show this week a crucial point regarding the universality of our faith; we can't be true to what we believe without believing that these truths that offer us so much hope, offer that same hope to every other human being. The nature of the claims cry out for us to tell them to others. Indeed, that's an essential component of who we are as Seventh-day Adventists. It's also why, through the grace of God, we are in almost every country of the world.

**Read Revelation 14:6, 7, the first angel's message. What does it tell us about whom we are to preach to?**

That's every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, which would include those of every faith. Our commission is set before us in no uncertain terms.

At the same time, we must remember that no matter where people live, no matter their religious faith, no matter their beliefs, we are all the same, beings created in the image of God, beings who are sinners, beings who have basic needs. As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we believe that the light that God has given us can help meet those needs better than anything else the world has to offer. The better we seek to meet those needs, the more we can reveal to the non-Christian world the love and character of God, and the more effective our witness will be.

**Look at this quote from Ellen White: "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.'"—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143. Why would an approach like this be effective for whatever people group we were seeking to reach?**

The bottom line is that we live in a world filled with hurting, suffering people; the good news is that we worship and know the Lord, who cares about these people and their suffering. As Adventists, we can minister to them, even from our own personal sufferings, and point them to something better in this life, as well as to the only One who can give them eternal life. This is our calling; to do anything else would be unfaithful to that calling.

**Talk to those in your church about ways to reach out to the non-Christian faiths in your own community. What practical things could you do to make a positive impact for the Lord?**

**Further Study:** “Even among the heathen are those who have cherished the spirit of kindness; before the words of life had fallen upon their ears, they have befriended the missionaries, even ministering to them at the peril of their own lives. Among the heathen are those who worship God ignorantly, those to whom the light is never brought by human instrumentality, yet they will not perish. Though ignorant of the written law of God, they have heard His voice speaking to them in nature, and have done the things that the law required. Their works are evidence that the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts, and they are recognized as the children of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 638.

“There is need of coming close to the people by personal effort. If less time were given to sermonizing, and more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen. The poor are to be relieved, the sick cared for, the sorrowing and bereaved comforted, the ignorant instructed, the inexperienced counseled. We are to weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice. Accompanied by the power of persuasion, the power of prayer, the power of the love of God, this work will not, cannot, be without fruit.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 458.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Look at that last quote from Ellen White. How can your church, as a whole, better manifest those principles in your community?
- 2 To what extent do believers hold the eternal destiny of non-believers in their hands? Why did God choose to involve human beings in His plan of salvation?

**Summary:** As Christians, we do not believe that our faith is just one path of many that ultimately leads to God. The Bible makes it clear that there’s only one path, and that’s through Jesus. Thus, it becomes crucial that we witness to those of every other faith, and the most effective way to do that is through kind, loving, self-sacrificing service. That’s how we are to relate to non-Christians. It’s also the essence of who we should be as Seventh-day Adventists.

## Freed by Christ

By ROMBEK SOKIRI LOGWORONG

“Do not burn us!” the evil spirits commanded Abuk Deng as she ironed her employer’s clothes. Abuk tried to ignore the spirits and continue with her work, but the spirits threw her to the ground and tormented her for several minutes before finally leaving her alone.

After the death of her husband, Abuk and her children fled to northern Sudan to escape the ongoing civil war in the south. She left everything of value in the village, taking only what she could fit into a small suitcase. She carefully packed the eagle claws her husband had given her before he died. “Take good care of them,” he said, “for they will protect the family from harm.”

Abuk and her children arrived in Khartoum, and she found work as a maid. But soon evil spirits took possession of her and demanded sacrifices. But because she had no regular source of income and could not buy animals for the spirits, they made her life miserable, disturbing her at work and threatening her. Abuk feared that the spirits would make her or her children sick.

She longed for deliverance from the spirits, and although she was not a Christian, she let some Christians pray for her. But nothing happened. Then an Adventist relative learned of Abuk’s problem and asked the pastor to pray for her. Abuk was not sure it would work, but she was willing to try anything.

When the pastor and church members visited Abuk, they asked her when the spirits had begun tormenting her. Abuk mentioned the eagle claws, and the pastor explained to her that the eagle claws symbolized the presence of the evil spirits and must be destroyed. He asked her to get them. As Abuk retrieved the claws from the small suitcase, she screamed loudly and started to shout at the visitors in unknown languages. The pastor and church members prayed, asking God to set Abuk free from the power of Satan. They continued praying until Abuk stopped shouting.

Abuk gave the pastor the eagle claws, and he destroyed them. Since then Abuk has been free from the evil spirits that had tormented her. Today she is a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Khartoum, Sudan. She no longer fears the evil spirits, for she has discovered the power of Jesus Christ to free her from physical and spiritual bondage. She knows the truth of the verse, “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36, NIV).

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