

“Hinduism”

Theme: “Christianity and Religions of the World

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber – Based on a sermon series by Rev. Adam Hamilton
January 14, 2007 at First United Methodist Church - Durango

Ephesians 2

You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived...and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works.

SLIDE 1 Hinduism

Today we continue and a series of sermons we are doing called Christianity and religions of the world. Our hope in the sermons is to discover what other faith systems believe, how they understand the world and God, and see if we can not only learn more about them a more about our own faith in the process, and be better equipped to talk about our own faith with people of other religions. I'm excited to share it with you this week's sermon on Hinduism and I hope you'll take out your sermon notes and your study guide so you can write some things down you'd like to remember, and then use the study guide in the days ahead to grow deeper in your faith.

Before we continue however, I would like to offer a disclaimer. Over the past few months I have been preparing for this series of sermons by reading through the material from Adam Hamilton, looking over the sermons and the video footage that he prepared, reading books on the world religions, watching PBS documentaries, and talking with people of other faith traditions. I have read a number of the Hindu scriptures and pulled out my notes from my college and seminary courses on Comparative Philosophies of Religion.

All of that research and reading does not make me an expert. I want to say up front that I am not an expert on Hinduism or any of these other world religions that we will be studying over the next few weeks. I might know a little more than some of you know about Hinduism, but a

whole lot less than I should know. Unfortunately there comes a time when you have to write the sermon and prepare what it is you are going to say. The reality is that Hinduism could be a lifelong study. Some of you asked in our small group if we were going to look at all the various types of Hinduism—there are at least 4 main streams. Just like there are many forms of Christianity, there are many ways that people live out their Hindu faith. This is true of all of the faith traditions we will look at, and so all we can really do each week is look at the broad strokes, and the main beliefs of each faith, knowing that we could never do justice to all the ways those faith traditions are lived out.

So I will apologize upfront and tell you there are numerous things about Hinduism I do not know. What I'm going to try to do today is summarize what I have learned and hopefully that will help us to understand both Hinduism as well as the Christian faith more clearly.

SLIDE 2 Origins of Hinduism

Each week we will be giving you a bit of history of the faith tradition we're going to study, and so let me give you an idea of where Hinduism came from. What I learned in seminary from my professor Sudarshan Kapur is that Hinduism seems to have arisen out of a nomadic people called the Aryans. You may have studied them in your history courses in high school or college. They first lived in what is currently modern-day India. Some believe they first were found as a society or culture in South Eastern at Europe, near the bridge between Europe and Asia.

Regardless of where they developed they had a unique language and a unique culture. They had a pantheon of gods they worshiped which explained nature and the human experiences that we have. These people were travelers. The word Aryan means a noble one and they took their culture and religion and language across both Europe and Asia, as far away as Ireland. The word Ireland itself originates from the word Aryan. They traveled all the way to Iran which has a common linkage to the Aryans. Throughout that range of geography they spread their culture.

In the West that developed into the Greco Roman pantheon of gods. In the East that began to look like the Hindu pantheon of gods. In the East the language was Sanskrit, and in the west the language was Latin. If you study languages you will find these two are linked together and that they have a common origin. You will find the two sets of gods in

the Greco-Roman world and in the Hindu world also have linkage and overlap. Some of their names are similar, and some of the myths around those gods are similar because of their common origin in the area and people.

Let's put the historical history of Hinduism in line at with Judaism.

SLIDE 3 Time-line of the Hebrews

Abraham	Slaves in Egypt	Moses	David	Exile	Jesus
2000 B.C.	1600 B.C.	1200 B.C.	1000 B.C.	586 B.C.	5 B.C.

First, let's start with of the timeline where you find Abraham at about 2000 B.C.. Remember that the first 11 chapters of your Old Testament deal with things going all the way back to creation. We have no idea how to date Noah and the Ark or Cain and Abel or Adam and Eve. They tell the stories that go all the way back to the beginning of time. Likewise, Hinduism has stories that go all the way back to the beginning of time as well.

What we do know is that in the book of Genesis the biblical stories narrowed down to one man and from that point forward the focus is on Abraham and all of his descendents. Remember as kids we might have learned to sing that father Abraham had many children, and we believe that as Christians we are inheritors of that whole line of salvation history. While we don't know the exact date, somewhere between 2000 and 1800 B.C. is the time of Abraham. During that same period of time in the Aryan people are developing their faith system in the Indus Valley, around modern-day India.

As we move forward, you will remember that the Israelite people were slaves in Egypt around 1600 B.C. In 1200 B.C. Moses comes on the scene and he delivers the Israelites through Exodus and takes them to the edge of the Promised Land. King David comes along in 1000 B.C. and you remember that David wrote a large section of our Old Testament which is the Psalms. In 586 B.C. the Jewish people are carried off into exile in Babylon. Finally, around five B.C. is where Jesus was born as well as the apostle Paul.

The Hindu Vedas, which are the Hindu scriptures, were finally written down about 1000 B.C. They are poems and hymns and songs. It's interesting that these poems, the Vedas, were being written down

about the same time as David was writing down his poems and hymns and songs for the Hebrew people in Israel.

The most prominent of the Hindu scriptures is called the Bhagavad-Gita. It was probably written about the time that the Jews were in exile in Babylon about 500 B.C. As we will learn next week this is also the time in which Buddhism began to develop. Each week we will try to give you an idea of how these other faith traditions fit into our own biblical timeline that we are familiar with.

One important thing to know about the Vedas is that Hindus believe that those were given orally by God at the beginning of time to the Vedic sages in the third or fourth millennium before the time of Christ—this was at the beginning of when human beings could sense and understand certain things about God. Most scholars believe they were not put down in written form until around 1000 B.C. Just like Judaism and Christianity, Hindu began in an oral culture.

Now that we have a little bit of a picture of history, let's take a look at four key Hindu beliefs and try to understand them as clearly as we can. Then we will contrast our Christian beliefs so that we come away understanding where we agree and we disagree with our friends who are Hindu. Let's begin with the Hindu Scriptures.

SLIDE 4 Hindu Scriptures

I hinted at this briefly but there are a number of scriptures that are important to the Hindu people. The earliest and most authoritative, which would be comparable to the law of the Jews that we find in the Hebrew Bible and the Law of Moses, are the four Vedic scriptures. They are fairly lengthy and I read this week one small section of them. There are a 1,028 in the Rig-Veda.

Every one of these Vedas is like a song or a poem. Some tell stories that are clearly mythological, about the slaying of dragons by some of the gods. Mostly they are stories of the gods and goddesses and their interactions with human beings. There are three other sections of Vedas and not every Hindu would be familiar with all four of them.

Later on there were commentaries written to try to explain the significance of those scriptures for people's lives. Those are called the Upanishads. They began to be written about 800 B.C. and they were

written until long after the time of Christ. This past week I read a few summaries of the Upanishads.

Around 500 B.C., the epic poem that I mentioned earlier was written and it is the longest poem known to humankind. It is called the Mahabharata and is over 100,000 verses. The Bhagavad-Gita is actually a small portion of this poem, and tells of the beautiful story of Lord Krishna, a human incarnation of one of the gods. Lord Krishna is on a battlefield with Arjuna, a human being which represents all of humanity. The story is meant to be a reflection of what our spiritual life should be like, as Krishna talks with Arjuna about what is expected of human beings by the gods. That is the Bhagavad-Gita and it is the one scripture I am told that no family would be without.

If you were to go to a Hindu temple worship you would not see a priest or leader preaching or teaching on the scripture text like we do here in our church. Their worship does not include this aspect, but is simply about bringing offerings to the gods. You also will not find a Bible study or scripture study like we would do here in our church, but each Hindu is encouraged to read the scriptures on their own, and the Bhagavad-Gita is one of those that will be read.

As I read through some of the Hindu scriptures, I found there were some beautiful things in here. There are some things that sound very much like what we find in our Christian and Hebrew Scriptures. There are other things that would be very different from that. So the Vedas are the actual scriptures that were given to the people by God. The rest are commentaries upon those scriptures that were developed later.

So what about God himself? What is God like according to the Hindus? What is their conception of God? How do we know God?

SLIDE 5 What is God Like in Hinduism?

Here is where we often have a misconception about Hinduism. Some have said that Hinduism claims more than 330,000 different gods and goddesses, although the focus is on about 10 to 12 of them. I had thought that Hindus had a multitude of gods until I had a Hindu professor and discovered this is not entirely accurate.

If you talked to a Hindu who understands their faith fully, they would tell you that the thousands of different gods and goddesses are really just manifestations of one true God. A Hindu would tell you, "I believe in one

true God just like you do. I am a monotheist, however I believe that God has been manifest in a variety of forms. There is one God but there are different manifestations of that God so we might understand him more fully.”

In Hinduism there are two basic conceptions of God. It is somewhat confusing to me as to how these interact, but the first is the idea of Brahman.

SLIDE 6 Brahman

Brahman is transcendent. You can't really connect with Brahman because it is transpersonal. Brahman is not personal but is the life force that is in everything, and a part of everything, and out of which everything flows. As I learned about Brahman I thought about God as he is revealed to Abraham and the two of them have a conversation and Abraham says to God, “What shall I call you?” God says to call me, “I Am that I Am. I am life itself and everything comes from me.” In a few minutes we will find that there are significant differences in how we understand God as Christians and as Hindus. But here in Brahman we find a sense that God is unknowable by humankind, which is not unlike Abraham's initial interactions with God.

At the same time, Hindus believe that human beings can know God through various manifestations of God. Hindus believe that there are stories that tell them about God, some of which are clearly mythological in nature, and most Hindus would agree with that. There are also historical manifestations of God, and the idea is that God clearly does want to be known. So there is an unknowable concept of God as well as an understanding that God does want to be known, and I have to admit I'm not real clear about how these two interact. The various gods and goddesses that are revered in Hinduism are simply manifestations of the one God, and Windows into seeing God clearly.

I have been to the Hindu temple in Denver and in that temple you will find idols and statues of the gods that take various forms. Some are animals but most look like human forms. The people come and they bow before them and they make their offering before those gods or those deities.

Some of the understandings of God that we find in the Hindu scriptures would be familiar to us as Christians. There is a God of love,

and justice, and peace, and in that regard my sense is that Hindus are reaching out for the same God that we are reaching out for as Christians—the God who created all things and who is perfect love and perfect peace.

At the same time there were stories where I would look and say, “That does not look at all like the God that we worship in the Christian faith.” There are some similarities and some differences when it comes to the picture of God and who God is.

Where we really begin to see a difference between Hinduism and our Christian faith is in our understanding of the human condition. What are we like as human beings? What does salvation mean for us? What do we need to be saved from and how are we saved or delivered? What is our ultimate destiny as human beings?

SLIDE 7 The Human Condition and Salvation

I tried to find someone in the Durango area who could speak with me about Hinduism but was unable to find someone who felt they could share appropriately. So instead, we are going to turn to the video resource we are using in our small groups. In that resource there is an interview with a leader of the Hindu community in Kansas City, Anand Bhattacharyya. In this clip Anand is going to share with us about the human condition and God. Let's listen in.

VIDEO Hinduism 1

SLIDE 7

This is a very important point to. In Hinduism the belief is that the soul in you is actually a part of God. It is called the Atman. The idea is that God has placed a little of himself in you. Christians have a different understanding of the soul that we will talk about in a minute, but for a Hindu your soul is part and parcel of God. Your soul is not broken, it is not sinful, you were not born with original sin. The problem is not sin for a Hindu, the problem is ignorance. If only you understood and were we'll able to wipe away the ignorance then you could see the glory of God shining through you. You wouldn't sin if you understood. Knowledge is the answer.

But knowledge must be coupled with duty or deeds—or fulfilling what your mission is on Earth. These are the modes to salvation. Some say that there are three words you must know to know Hinduism.

SLIDE 8 Dharma, Karma and Reincarnation

Dharma is duty. All of us have a duty in our lives and if we fill our duty (and part of that duty is gaining spiritual knowledge) then we can be set free from this ignorance that keeps us from seeing the glory of God. This is why Hindus strive after knowledge.

The word yoga is not simply about a type of exercise or relaxation. Yoga is meant to be a path toward spiritual knowledge. There are four primary paths to spiritual knowledge within Hinduism, by which you gain spiritual knowledge which sets you free, and yoga is one of them.

What are you being set free from? You are being set free from the human condition, the trap of having to be reborn again and again in this life.

Karma is very important in the Hindu system and it means it works or deeds. The idea is that all of us do some things that are good, and we think some things that are good, and when we do that we build up good karma. We do things that are wrong or think things that are wrong and we build up bad karma. In the course of our lives we are going to do both of these things unless we are at that point where we are ready to be united with God. At the end of your life, if you have build up more good karma than bad karma, that good karma will carry with you into the next life and you'll be reborn in a higher state, with greater bliss, and a chance for you to learn more and continue in a series of cycles of birth and death and rebirth to build up more and more good karma and less and less bad karma until you are ready to be released from this cycle of birth and death and rebirth.

Likewise, if you build up more bad karma than good then you carry that into the next life. In the words of a country and western song I heard once, "What goes around comes around." So if in this life you are having a bad time it may be that you built up a lot of bad karma in the last life and you are carrying that with you and the bad stuff that is happening in your life was given to you in a sense as a punishment, and in a sense as a way of working out your salvation so you can get it right this time since you didn't get it right last time. And if things are really blissful in your life it

may be because you did pretty well in your last life. If you continue to do so well you will get to step forward in the evolutionary chain in the next life.

This is the idea of salvation in the Hindu system of faith. You gain more and more good karma by spiritual knowledge and doing good deeds until you are finally ready to move into union with God. The goal is to be united with God in the end—a state which is called Nirvana.

SLIDE 9 Nirvana

Again there are different perceptions of what this will look like for Hindus. For some Nirvana is like taking a drop of water, which is your soul, and dropping it back into the ocean, which is God. You are completely absorbed into the divine being.

For some Nirvana is more like a fish being dropped back into the ocean. You are still in some way distinct from God, and yet you are completely surrounded by God and absorbed into him at the same time.

Let's hear from Anand again about how reincarnation works.

VIDEO Hindu 2

SLIDE 10 Picture of Hindu boys

You are probably already beginning to see some differences between Christianity and Hinduism. The ultimate goal of Hinduism is union with God. The soul is placed on Earth to begin a series of lessons that are learned and one begins as a very simple life form. As good karma is built up then you return as a more advanced life form, and a higher life form, and a higher life form.

Finally, you are born as a human and the belief of traditional Hinduism is that you are born into the lowest caste in society. They are known as the Untouchables and not much is expected of you, but if you do your duty as an untouchable and gain some spiritual knowledge then you move to the next cast in Hindu society. After a series of lifetimes, you gain enough good karma and you gain enough spiritual knowledge to be released and united with God.

For the last part of the sermon let's take a look at some of the differences between Christianity and Hinduism.

SLIDE 11 Essential Differences Between Christianity and Hinduism

I want to begin with the concept of God.

SLIDE 12 God

As I read the Hindu scriptures there are several ways that I see parallels between Christianity and Hinduism. Yet there are places where I see almost the antithesis or the opposite of the God I know in understanding Christianity. I see a lot of beauty and comparable attributes and ways of understanding God, yet I also see some clear differences.

The 10 Commandments are clear that we are not to make graven images of God, or bow before idols. In the time of the Hebrews that was a very important commandment because people tended to create and fashion out of stone or gold or clay or wood idols, and they would fall down and worship them. While those idols start out as images that are meant to be windows to God, human beings tend naturally over time to focus on the object itself rather than God behind the object.

I think that God knew that if the Jews were to build a form that represented God, eventually they would begin to worship the form itself and not see that God is so big that he cannot be contained by any of our forms. Do you remember what God said to David when he went to build the temple? “You think you can build a house big enough to hold me?” Of course not, because God is bigger than this. There is a distinct difference here between Christianity and Hinduism in terms of the purpose of idols and the use of them in worship.

Now we understand the idea of God being manifested, or being made real in certain ways, because we Christians believe that is what happened in the person of Jesus. We believe that God became flesh in Jesus so that we might know him and understand Him more clearly. But that looks quite a bit different than the way God is manifest in the different gods and goddesses in the Hindu faith.

Probably the most distinctive difference that I sensed between the Hindu faith and the Christian faith in terms of God is that in the Hindu faith God is unknowable. The myths say God is the great transcendent, beyond all things knowable, and so the myths and stories of the gods need to somehow paint a picture of who God is.

We find in our scriptures is that God created human beings from the very beginning to be in a relationship with him. God desired us to know

him from the very beginning. God did not **have** to create humankind but God created humanity and made us in God's image so that God might have a relationship with us, so we might be recipients of the divine love, God's love.

This is a very important and an essential belief of the Christian faith. The Bible is the story of God's interaction with humanity, and of giving his love, and of offering us guidance and truth, and finally offering his own son Jesus Christ. It's a very different picture than that picture of God who is so transcendent that we can't even begin to understand God. The God in our Bible longs to be known and wants to be known and wants to be a relationship with you and me. God wants you to experience his presence in your life.

Let's listen to Anand's description of his experience of God in his life.

VIDEO Hinduism 3

SLIDE 13 Hinduism with lilies

It's not that Anand does not have spiritual experiences when he prays and at other times. But this idea of connecting with God is only reserved for the highest of the holy people in Hinduism.

When I look at Christianity, the idea is that from the very beginning you are to have a relationship with God through Christ. The idea in the Christian faith is that even before you've experienced anything in terms of a relationship with God, God is wooing you and drawing you to himself. We have different spiritual experiences among us as Christians, but it's possible that when you sing songs of praise to experience God's love and grace holding you and keeping you. There are moments where you can feel God's love speaking to you in profound ways. When you spend time alone with God in prayer, we believe as Christians that we can feel God walking with us, and talking with you along life's narrow way. That's an essential part of the understanding of Christian spirituality—a relationship with God—and that is something only reserved for the highest of the holy people within Hinduism.

One of the key differences between Hinduism and Christianity has to do with our understanding of humanity.

SLIDE 14 The Human Condition and Salvation

In Hinduism your soul is a part of God, seeking to be set free. The problem is ignorance and the answer is spiritual knowledge gained through life after life after life of learning. Then there is the sense that justice and salvation are worked out by karma which says that if you do too many bad things then you pay for it in the next life, but if you do a lot of good things then you'll have a chance to move up in the progression of spiritual knowledge.

Christianity is very different. Though we believe our soul was fashioned and created by God, that we were created in the image of God, Christians understand that our soul is not the same as God. Our soul is distinct from God, just as a painting is distinct from the artist. All of creation is the artwork or handiwork of God, but it is not the same as God, just as the painting is not the same as the artist. God is not the same as creation, but it is the creator who stands separate from the creation. God is not in everything.

God's Holy Spirit dwells in us but that is distinct from your spirit. This is why we believe that our spirit, our soul is broken. My soul has many beautiful and wonderful attributes, but at the same time I have a propensity to do the wrong thing. The apostle Paul said it in a way that many of you have memorized Romans 7.

SLIDE 15 “The good that I want to do I cannot find the strength to do. The things I know I should not do I find myself perpetually doing. What a wretched man I am. How can I be saved from this?”

We know this is true because we read about it in the newspaper. The pastor of a local church in Craig abused the children in his care, and then took his own life. There was a fire started by someone that destroyed 10 families lives and homes in the Animas Valley. We argue and disagree over how to provide health care in our community. One political party wants to increase the number of troops in Iraq and one political party wants to decrease it. We see a whole host of problems and struggles that humanity has just by opening up the newspaper each morning, or clicking on our favorite news website. Even those who seem to be spiritually mature constantly struggle with being human. It is a lifetime struggle for us, to try and do the right thing in the midst of our humanness.

In the Christian conception of salvation, we also know that we cannot save ourselves. We are called to do good deeds but our good

deeds will not save us. The Scripture says that all of our good deeds are like filthy rags before the Lord. We have such a gap between the holiness of God and our own lives but our good deeds and our fulfillment of our duty cannot save us.

We have a strong focus on the grace of God. We recognize as Christians that God chose to do something about our human condition that separates us from God. We understand that God became one of us in order to redeem us and in order to save us. It is here that I find looking at Christianity through the eyes of Hinduism very informative. As I began to think about the idea of karma, I realized that we Christians believe in something like that. The apostle Paul says in Galatians that, "Whatsoever you sow, so shall you reap. If you sow of the flesh you shall reap of the flesh. If you sow to the spirit you shall reap the spirit."

The difference is that we Christians believe that God sent his son Jesus Christ among us in order to take upon himself all of the "bad karma" of the human race. That is a profound idea. While Jesus Christ, the only perfect human being who ever lived, was nailed to the cross he took upon himself all of the karma that was bad that you and I would ever produce. This was God's plan for salvation, knowing that you could never build up enough good karma to balance out the bad karma. You would never be able to bridge that gap.

Not only do we believe that God in Jesus Christ was the only holy and perfect human being who ever lived, but he was the only one with perfect karma. Do you know what he did? He credited to your account his good karma. See if you can follow me on this spiritual accounting.

With his death on the cross, he took away from you your bad karma, and he credited to your account his good karma, so that not by any works that you do but by his work you might be saved. The profound idea of Christianity is that you would be delivered so that you might not have to come back in cycle after cycle after cycle of learning, and of trying to get better and better and better. Instead, you have access to God, salvation and union with God, as a result of what Christ did.

This is very important for us as Christians. We know that in our life we don't become more holy because we try harder to be better people. We become holy because we invite the Holy Spirit to work inside of us, shaping and changing us over time. Then on the day of our death, when

we meet the Lord face-to-face, he begins to burn away the last remnants of our brokenness and sin.

This is a very different conception. We work hard over a multitude of lives to win our salvation through spiritual knowledge and trying harder to do good deeds, or God who takes upon himself the bad karma of the world and credits to us his good karma and good grace. This is a very interesting difference in our understanding of salvation.

Finally, there is the point of what happens to us after our death.

SLIDE 16 Life After Death

In Christianity, the Scripture says in the book of Hebrews that we human beings will die once and after that the judgment. Reincarnation is not popular in the Bible. The idea is not a Biblical idea. The idea in the Bible is that all of us have one opportunity to get it right and we will not have to come back again and again and again trying to figure it out. The beauty of reincarnation is that there is a hope for you to try it over and over and over again, and if you want to hold onto life you can come back again and again and again and do that. The sadness is that your hard drive is wiped away every time you start over.

The Christian idea is that after death we go to be with the Lord. We enter a place that we don't call Nirvana, we call heaven. It's a place where Jesus said that no one can even fathom the beauty and wonder. Jesus said, "My father has created for you a place where there is no more tears and sorrow and suffering or pain." He says, "I will be there with you. I am the resurrection and the life." The hope we have of being with those loved ones who have gone on before us is a part of the Christian idea of the Kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven. This is a very different idea of what we find in Hinduism.

I hope that when I die, and I hope it's decades from now, is that Tami and I at some point will be reunited in heaven, not perhaps as husband and wife but something different from that. We will explore the kingdom of heaven together, my soul mate and me. I hope that I will know my parents who have gone before me, and my grandparents, and I'll get to see all the things that Christ talked about. That brings me encouragement, especially to know that one day I will welcome my children to be with us.

Jesus' death and resurrection were meant to be a model that points us to what happens to us after we die, and we will not all have to try and come back in the next life and get it right, but that all that bad karma taken by Christ made it possible for me to enter into the kingdom of heaven for salvation, for release immediately upon my death. Not only that, but because of what Christ did for you and I, we get to be reborn every day and made new every morning!

I met a young man this week who was Hindu and became Christian after his family moved to America from India. He reminded me that Hindus have their share of hypocrites. "The caste system was religious racism and their was a reason we needed Ghandi just as you need Martin Luther King."

When I studied Hinduism this past week, and remembered what I had learned about them in seminary I was struck by the warmth and sincerity of those I have met who were Hindu. There are so many beautiful things about Hinduism, and so many beautiful people who are Hindus. I have actually built houses with Habitat for Humanity alongside a Hindu family and I was grateful for their gentleness and encouragement.

But after studying Hinduism I am more grateful than ever before for the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the God who longs for him to be known, and his love for us that sent his son Jesus Christ to carry what I could not carry and to offer me when I could not earn, so that I might be with him.

Let's bow in prayer.

Lord we give you thanks and praise for your great love for us. It's hard-pressed even to fathom what you have done and your willingness to take upon yourself are bad karma, and to credit to our account to, though we do not deserve it, you're good karma. We are grateful or that, in the words of the apostle Paul we are saved by faith through grace, not by our works, but that through our salvation you call us to live out our faith by our good works.

Thank you for the richness of your love. Thank you that you long to know us and be known by us, and on this day we commit our lives once more to you. Help us to follow you. Help us to know you, and help us to share your love with our friends of other faiths in a way that is respectful, that is encouraging, but offers them the good news of Jesus Christ. In his name we pray, amen.

Hinduism

Christianity and the Religions of the World

Ephesians 2

You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived...and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works.

Introduction: A Point of Clarification and a Disclaimer

The question: Does God work in the lives of, and ever provide grace to, those who cannot or have no opportunity to confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior?

The Disclaimer:

I. Hinduism from Historical Perspective

Both the Old Testament and the Hindu Vedas record pre-historic and ancient traditions.

Hebrew Timeline:

Abraham	Slaves in Egypt	Moses	David	Exile	Jesus
2000 B.C.	1600 B.C.	1200 B.C.	1000 B.C.	586 B.C.	5 B.C.

Hindu Timeline:

II. Four Essential Hindu Beliefs

- A. The Scriptures
- B. God's Nature and How We Know God
- C. About the Human Condition and Salvation
- D. About Life After Death

III. Essential Differences Between Christianity and Hinduism

- A. God
- B. The Human Condition and Salvation
- C. Life After Death

Conclusion

Monday, January 15 – Review your notes from yesterday’s sermon. As we have come to know more about our Hindu neighbors, this Study Guide is aimed at helping us understand our own faith better in the light of what we’ve learned. Today we’ll begin with a look at our own scriptures. Our Old Testament, what is often called the Hebrew Bible, was written between 1200 and 400 B.C. by most accounts, with many of the stories in the book of Genesis having been passed down orally for millennia before this. The stories record events from the beginning of human history. The Hebrew Bible tells one comprehensive story of God’s work among his people from creation to the period leading up to the time of Christ. There are four major sections – the Torah – the first five books which include the Law and the stories of the Patriarchs as well as God’s deliverance of his people from slavery in Egypt – the historical books outlining Israel’s history from the conquest of the Promised Land to the Jewish return from Exile and rebuilding the temple in the 5th century before Christ—then come the wisdom and poetic books including the Psalms and Proverbs. And finally there are the prophets. Our New Testament begins with the four gospels, moves to the historical book of the Acts of the Apostles, and then moves to the writings of the apostles, and finally the prophetic Book of Revelation. Today take your devotional time to walk through the entire Bible, pausing to read verses or sections from time to time, with the goal of seeing the grand sweep of the Bible’s history and salvation story.

Tuesday, January 16 – We learned of the Hindu concept of God this week – in some ways sharing attributes of the God of scripture, and in some ways different. In the Bible we are told not to form idols to represent God, in Hinduism this is encouraged. In the Bible God is clearly one God, in Hinduism there is one God, but thousands, if not millions of deities who represent God. In Hinduism God, the Ultimate, is unknowable and impersonal until revealed through the other deities. There is a sense in which God’s ways are unsearchable in the Bible, but the God of the Bible seems intent on revealing himself to us, and he is intensely personal. We are invited to enter a personal relationship with God. *Read Ezekiel 34* – a chapter which paints a powerful picture of the heart of the God of the Hebrew Bible and how God looks at humankind. As you pray, use Psalm 23 as your prayer today.

Wednesday, January 17 – Hinduism teaches that the human dilemma is ignorance. Christianity teaches that it is sin. If ignorance is our problem, then knowledge and wisdom are our salvation – but if sin is our problem, then we must look elsewhere for our salvation. *Read Romans 3:10-26 and Ephesians 2:1-9*. Hindus believe our bad karma – our sins – will lead to suffering in our next reincarnation – and that freedom from having to be reborn comes through doing enough good works to counterbalance our bad works (karma). How does Christianity offer a different picture of salvation?

Thursday, January 18 – Let’s take a look today at the promises of God for our life after death and the biblical view of heaven. *Read John 14:1-6 and Revelation 21*. How does this differ from the Hindu conception of what happens after death and of ultimately being united to God?

Friday, January 19 – The Hindu concept of how one lives is called “dharma” – it signifies “duty.” By performing one’s duty, good karma is built up, which can lead to salvation. Christians believe in living a life of love, not to earn God’s salvation, but in response to it. Both Hindus and Christians agree on the importance of a life of love. *Read I John 3:11-20 and 4:7-21*. Pray for God to help you live this life of love.