When Worldviews Collide
Christians Confronting Culture

Ergun Mehmet Caner

Learning Activities by Dale McCleskey

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Contents

About the Author ........................................................................................................4
About the Study...........................................................................................................5

Week 1 — Six Degrees of Separation

What Differentiates Christianity from the World’s Religions? ..............8

Week 2 — Politically Correct, Biblically Corrupt

Worldview Overview and the Theology of the Coffeehouse ...............28

Week 3 — A Not-So-Brave New World

The Gospel According to the Global Culture ...........................................50

Week 4 — Hinduism

Atheism with 330 Million Gods .................................................................66

Week 5 — Buddhism

The Old New Age .........................................................................................84

Week 6 — Judaism

The Hollow Easter Bunny ........................................................................104

Week 7 — Islam

Medieval Mormonism ................................................................................124

Christian Growth Study Plan .................................................................143
Ergun Mehmet Caner (Th.M., Southeastern Seminary; Th.D., University of South Africa) is the dean of Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary and a professor of theology and church history at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. Elected dean in February 2005, Dr. Caner is the first former Muslim to become a dean of an evangelical seminary. His specific area of expertise is world religions and the world of global apologetics.

Along with his brother, Emir (a professor of history and a dean at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary), Ergun is the author of 11 books, including the best-seller Christian Jihad (Kregel, 2004), which examines the recent war in light of 1,300 years of Islamic-Christian conflict. In 2003 his book Unveiling Islam won the Gold Medallion Award from the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association.

In the war on terror, Caner understands both sides because he has been on both sides. He was reared the son of an Islamic leader. In 1982 he converted to the Christian faith after immigrating to this country. As a consequence of this conversion, he was disowned by his family.

Since the September 11 attacks, Caner has appeared on such national television shows as Fox News, various CNN broadcasts, MSNBC, The 700 Club, Zola Levitt, John Ankerberg, and others.

Caner and his wife, Jill, have two sons.

While Caner’s message in When Worldviews Collide is cutting edge, it is also personal and warm. As a former pastor, he illuminates challenging issues and questions with truths from God’s Word, especially from the Apostle Paul’s experiences with the early church. Throughout this eight-week study Caner reminds us that the harvest is great: “When Worldviews Collide brings evangelism into the global market, taking apologetics to a world of 4.8 billion people. If we were to live one hundred years, we would never be able to see the complete fruit of this work.”
About the Study

The world has come to us. No longer a homogeneous Christian nation, our land is the home of millions of Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, spiritualists, and atheists. Our culture constantly admonishes Christians to compromise our beliefs and exercise tolerance for belief systems that deny the truth of Jesus Christ and God’s written Word. How should you as a believer respond to today’s climate of religious diversity? Is it even possible to understand the beliefs and assumptions of these faiths? How can we share the good news of salvation with those who follow other belief systems?

*When Worldviews Collide* can equip you to confront your culture with truth and compassion. After completing this eight-week, interactive study, you will be able to—

- identify six ways Christianity differs from other belief systems;
- summarize the basic beliefs of four major world religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam) and several prevalent cultural philosophies;
- state biblical responses to non-Christian beliefs;
- identify ways to minister and witness to followers of other belief systems.

The Bible-study framework for this course is the Book of Acts, especially the Apostle Paul’s defenses of Christianity. Review the contents page (3) to get an idea of what you will be studying. You’re in for a life-changing ride!

This study consists of eight group sessions. After the introductory session, in which you will hear Ergun Caner’s dramatic conversion story, your group will follow this format in the seven remaining group sessions:

1. **Greeting and prayer.**
2. **Review.** On DVD the author reviews the material you studied during the previous week in your member book.
3. **Group discussion.** Your leader will guide the discussion and help you make appropriate applications to your life.
4. **DVD teaching segment.** The author previews the subject of the next week’s study in the member book.
5. **Closure**

Make a commitment to other members in your group to attend faithfully and to participate meaningfully. Prayerfully prepare and fully participate in the discussion and group activities. Use this experience to strengthen your relationships and your walk with the Lord, as well as to confront your culture as Christ would do.

This member book provides content for the study as well as activities to help you learn and apply the material. Completing home study between sessions will greatly enhance your learning experience. You
can expect to spend about 30 minutes each day as you complete five days of home study each week. Your member book also includes video viewer guides that you will complete as you watch corresponding DVD segments during the group sessions.

Leader help is available for facilitating a group study. When Worldviews Collide: Christians Confronting Culture Leader DVD and CD-ROM (ISBN 1-4158-2297-2) includes these items:

Leader Guide. The session plans in this leader guide provide step-by-step suggestions for planning and conducting eight group sessions.

Leader supplements. The CD-ROM provides leader supplements for additional study. These supplements are not required for the course, but they include additional statistics and articles that will equip the leader to lead from an overflow of knowledge and to answer questions. Copies may be made for group members as needed.

Session handouts. The CD-ROM also provides handouts for use during the sessions. The leader guide provides directions for using the handouts.

DVDs. Two DVDs feature the author, Ergun Caner, teaching the content of each session’s study and reviewing the previous week’s study in the member book. The DVDs also provide a church promotional segment; “A Word to the Pastor”; “From Ergun Caner’s Heart”; and “In Their Own Words,” multiple bonus segments featuring interviews with followers of non-Christian belief systems.

Depending on the amount of time your group has available, optional bonus interviews can provide information about followers of other faiths in their own words. Longer interviews with a spiritualist, Hindu, Buddhist, Messianic Jew, and Islamic imam may be used as the leader chooses and as the group desires.

Shorter segments of each interview are also provided and are suggested for optional use in appropriate sessions. These uses are described on the Leader DVD and CD-ROM cover.

For example, after hearing the author’s presentation on Hinduism, studying it during the week, and briefly reviewing it at the next group session, some groups may want to see the interview with Aruna, the young woman who practices Hinduism. Many of her thoughts will confirm what they have learned elsewhere and will add a contemporary flavor to the study.

You will often hear this thought from Dr. Caner in this study: “God commanded us to go into all the world. To some extent we did not, so He has brought the world to us. Our responsibilities and opportunities are great, and we must be prepared.” As you begin this study, ask God to speak to you about ways you can grow as a witness for Christ and as an apologist for biblical truth. You will find yourself observing current events from a new perspective, and you will develop a heart of compassion for followers of other faiths.
Agrippa said to Paul, “It is permitted for you to speak for yourself.”

Then Paul stretched out his hand and began his defense: “I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that today I am going to make a defense before you about everything I am accused of by the Jews, especially since you are an expert in all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

“All the Jews know my way of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem. They had previously known me for quite some time, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I lived as

GLOBAL SNAPSHOT

Most surveys show there are more than one billion Christians on the earth, but this includes many who are not believers in Christ alone as Lord.

Christianity is not a religion in that it does not offer people a way to approach God. In Christianity God approaches humanity.

THIS WEEK’S GOAL

After this week’s study you will be able to—

• identify six beliefs that separate Christianity from other systems;
• state implications of the belief that God is Father;
• explain why it is impossible to separate Christ from Christianity and why the resurrection is pivotal;
• identify the role of grace in salvation and in the Christian life;
• state why the world is our mission field.
a Pharisee. And now I stand on trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers, the promise our 12 tribes hope to attain as they earnestly serve Him night and day. Because of this hope I am being accused by the Jews, O king! Why is it considered incredible by any of you that God raises the dead? In fact, I myself supposed it was necessary to do many things in opposition to the name of Jesus the Nazarene. This I actually did in Jerusalem, and I locked up many of the saints in prison, since I had received authority for that from the chief priests. When they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. In all the synagogues I often tried to make them blaspheme by punishing them. Being greatly enraged at them, I even pursued them to foreign cities.

"Under these circumstances I was traveling to Damascus with authority and a commission from the chief priests. At midday, while on the road, O king, I saw a light from heaven brighter than the sun, shining around me and those traveling with me. When we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

"But I said, 'Who are You, Lord?'

"And the Lord replied: 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and stand on your feet. For I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and a witness of things you have seen, and of things in which I will appear to you. I will rescue you from the people and from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a share among those who are sanctified by faith in Me."

"Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. Instead, I preached to those in Damascus first, and to those in Jerusalem and in all the region of Judea, and to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works worthy of repentance. For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple complex and were trying to kill me. Since I have obtained help that comes from God, to this day I stand and testify to both small and great, saying nothing else than what the prophets and Moses said would take place—that the Messiah must suffer, and that as the first to rise from the dead, He would proclaim light to our people and to the Gentiles."

Acts 26:1-23

Are You Religious?

In light of today's prevalent notion that all religions are created equal, this passage raises some interesting questions: Why would Paul have endangered his life and endured persecution if all religions are the same? Was he a natural fighter? Was he just a sectarian and a racist who needed an enemy? Or was the gospel of Jesus so radically different and exclusive that Paul willingly faced death to preach Christ?

How do you think Paul would be treated today in our culture? Would he be castigated for being narrow-minded? Would he be seen as a self-loathing Jew who was now committed to persecuting his own people? Would other religious groups rise up as self-proclaimed victims and assert that Paul was guilty of hate speech?
In his brief ministry, from his first missionary journey in A.D. 48 until his martyrdom by Nero in A.D. 68, Paul was hunted, hounded, stoned, threatened, tried, whipped, and imprisoned. He wrote 14 books, started churches on two continents, and preached in a myriad of cities. He addressed murderous barbarians in Crete and the philosophical elite in Athens. He stood before governors, councils, and King Agrippa. He was imprisoned twice in Rome, once under a type of house arrest and then in a dungeon on death row.

In this passage Paul gave the Corinthian church a moving summary of his life as a witness for Christ:

[I have suffered] far more labors, many more imprisonments, far worse beatings, [and was] near death many times. Five times I received from the Jews 40 lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. I have spent a night and a day in the depths of the sea. On frequent journeys, I faced dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own people, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the open country, dangers on the sea, and dangers among false brothers; labor and hardship, many sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, often without food, cold, and lacking clothing. Not to mention other things, there is the daily pressure on me: my care for all the churches.

2 Corinthians 11:23-28

Quite a ministry résumé, isn’t it? Would it not have been easier for Paul to let religious people in the various belief systems remain religious? If Paul had just made a few appearances and complimented the religious groups for their sincerity, he would have become a respected leader in the community.

Yet Paul knew a secret: Christianity is not a religion.

Read that again. It is not a misprint. It is a central precept of Christianity.

Christianity is not a movement of ethical prescriptions or philosophical beliefs that mark humanity’s search for God. The core essentials that compose our faith are marked by clear distinctions that segregate us from the rest of the world. This week you will examine those six degrees of separation.

One of those differences drives us back into the world. We are called to reach every single breathing soul on the planet. It is our call and our life. As you study this week, focus not only on the doctrinal differences but also on the central command of the One who is our Redeemer: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you.” (Matt. 28:19-20).

Christ did not call us to conquer the lost. Christ called us to win them to Him.
Day 1: God Is Father

As Paul stood before King Agrippa, he faced not only the indictment of a political world but also the skepticism of an unbelieving religious world. He had already addressed philosophers in Athens, and it had been clear that his listeners did not recognize the God he was preaching (see Acts 17). Yet his message never changed. Paul had also given other clear sermons and defenses on his way to Rome:

- Paul had given a farewell sermon to the leaders of the Ephesian church (see Acts 20:17-35), where he spoke of the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit (see vv. 21,23).
- Paul had addressed an unruly crowd in Jerusalem, as well as the Council there (see Acts 22:1-21; 23:1-10).
- When Paul arrived in Caesarea, he had preached to the governor, Felix (see Acts 24:10-21).

Now Paul stood before the king, who was visiting the governor. In Acts 26:6 Paul summarized the indictment against him: “I stand on trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers.” Who was this God Paul preached? It was the Lord who directly addressed him: “When we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me in the Hebrew language, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” But I said, “Who are You, Lord?” And the Lord replied: “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting”’” (Acts 26:14-15).

Did Paul mislead? Surely he did not mean that he was speaking directly with God (theos) and the Lord (kurios), did he? And surely he did not mean to call Jesus Lord, did he?

Yes, he did.

Paul was illustrating the first clear point of demarcation between Christianity and every major world religion:

World religions speak of a God who is judge.
Christianity preaches a God who is Father.

No other system except Christianity speaks of an intimate, personal relationship between the Creator and humans. Hinduism teaches an impersonal litany of gods who are removed from the earthly plane. The belief system of Buddhism denies a personal being. Islam offers a god who is judge and creator. But no other belief system speaks of God in intimate terms.
“All those led by God’s Spirit are God’s sons. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father!’ The Spirit Himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God’s children, and if children, also heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ—seeing that we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.” Romans 8:14-18

Read Romans 8:14-18 in the margin and underline the terms of intimacy.

Did you notice the intimacy with which we approach God? The primary distinctive is found in the term Father. The concept of God as Father is profoundly different from that of all other religions, and it speaks volumes about His nature and His relationship with humanity.

At what point do you first remember hearing or realizing that God is Father?

What practical difference does viewing God as Father mean to you?

The Romans passage also tells us that the Holy Spirit testifies that we are God’s children. Islam calls this idea blasphemy. Other systems call this teaching futile. Yet Christianity hinges on the central tenet that we enter a relationship with God that transcends a Judge-penitent relationship. Once born again, we become His children.

The inference here is a great insight. God deals with us lovingly, as a father to his children. As our divine Parent, He intercedes in our lives from His love for us. This love surpasses any other type of relationship. He is Father. Consider that:

*In your darkest hour the Father soothes your sorrow.*
*In your worst pain the Father is the Balm who heals.*
*In your secret anxiety the Father calms your fear.*
*In your brokenness the Father comforts your heart.*

The average person on the street would be bewildered by your prayer life. Why, they would ask, if there is a God, would He be concerned about your pitiful little life? In a world consumed by hunger, disease, disaster, and war, why would God care about one person’s problems? Such a claim seems somewhat narcissistic, does it not?

How would you answer the objection that God doesn’t have time for your problems?

Is it too much to expect God to care about us? Not if He is Father!
On any given day I deal with a myriad of phone calls, messages, letters, and appointments. Because we have been on the frontlines of the Christian-Islamic debate in the media, my office receives about 40 inquiries a day from around the world. As the dean of a seminary, I have many responsibilities that often keep me sequestered in my office until well past dark. Add to that my teaching responsibilities, the speaking, the travel, and the writing, and I feel that I have more on my plate than I can fathom. Maybe you can relate to this schedule!

Yet my entire world pauses when my son Braxton calls. Regardless of where I am or what I am doing, I stop it all and attend to him. It will be the same when Drake gets a bit older as well.

Why would my sons’ concerns take priority? Because I am their father. Regardless of whatever the world may call me, no word carries as much inherent purpose as father. It is a man’s highest calling.

When I became a Christian in 1982, my father, a devout Sunni Muslim, immediately disowned me. Overnight I went from having an intimate relationship with the man who was my hero to being a virtual orphan. His rejection deeply affected me. As I studied for the ministry and pastored churches, I avoided even the consideration of marriage. Until I was almost 30, I refused to imagine such a life. When I met and married Jill, my sweet, understanding wife discovered that she had married a man intractably opposed to having children. I was not obnoxious about it. I was simply resolute. No children.

You see, I was terrified of being a father.

I couldn’t bear to face the possibility of hurting my children the way my father had hurt me. Even as a pastor, I did not understand intimacy. Then my first son was born. When he began speaking at about one year of age, I heard that word Papa. My world has not been the same since.

Describe one of your fondest memories of your father or of a father figure.

God’s love for us as Father far exceeds any earthly comparisons. He is not just our Father but also Abba Father. The term Father is the Greek word Pater, but the addition of the Aramaic term Abba brings a deeper dimension to our relationship with Him. The word Abba is an intimate term designating a child’s love for his parent. In my Turkish culture the equivalent is Baba, or Papa.

God does not act in our lives because He is beholden to abstract principles or laws. God acts in our lives because He is our Father. No other religion speaks of such intimacy. There is no such thing as a Muslim being indwelled by God as a temple. A Hindu does not come before one of his millions of gods in intimacy.

That is one reason Christianity is not a religion. The truth that God is our Father makes Christianity a personal relationship.
“‘I now send you, to open their eyes that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a share among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.’”
Acts 26:17-18

This week go to someone with whom you have wanted to share Christ and ask for help with an assignment. Ask to interview him for a class in which you are studying the distinctives of Christianity, with the first one being God as Father. Interview the person and record his thoughts about God as Father.

**The Personal God**

Many faiths view God as impersonal and unknowable, so the idea of God as Father is foreign to them. When you share with Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists, emphasize the intimacy and personal relationship that can be experienced with the God of Christianity. Be prepared to share what the Bible teaches about God’s nature, but also explain the nature of your personal relationship with God by identifying ways you experience His presence and love.

**Day 2: Christ Is Savior**

The second clear line of separation between Christianity and other belief systems is that while every other system offers teachers and guides, Christ is Savior. As Paul recounted the vision he experienced at his salvation, he stated that the One who spoke to him was Jesus (see Acts 26:15). The message Christ gave to Paul is also clearly different from the message of any other belief system: the God who created also redeems.

Read in the margin Christ’s words to Paul. Fill in the blanks to record the three components of Christ’s message to Paul.

1. The world can turn from _______________ to _______ and from the ____________ of Satan to God.
2. The world can receive ______________________ of sins.
3. The world can be ______________________ by faith in Christ.

Paul was not called to present a new belief system. Paul was called to share Christ. Every other belief system offers teachings and concepts that can be separated from its founder. Remove Buddha from Buddhism, and you still have the four Noble Truths that guide a person from suffering to nirvana. Remove Muhammed from Islam, and Islam still teaches that followers have every word Allah gave in the Qur’an. In contrast, remove Jesus Christ from Christianity, and the entire system of faith collapses.

How would you explain the previous sentence to a new Christian?
At the center of the Christian belief system is Christ Himself. Some mainline churches have attempted to maintain a cohesive belief system while abandoning a belief in the historical Jesus. They may try to maintain unity under a golden rule or overemphasize a search for social justice while minimizing their allegiance to the God-Man who literally came to the earth, physically died and shed His blood, and conquered death by His bodily resurrection.

Is it possible to separate Christ from Christianity? Not according to the Bible. Flowing like a current throughout the Scriptures is the central fact that our salvation and eternity are tied to Christ’s nature and being.

If Jesus is not who He said He is and did not do what He said He did, then we have no hope and no salvation. Consider the following scriptural evidence.

**Jesus Does Not Give Peace; He Is Our Peace**
- “He is our peace, who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph. 2:14).
- “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely. And may your spirit, soul, and body be kept sound and blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:23).
- “Since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1).

**Jesus Does Not Provide Hope; He Is Our Hope**
- “If we have placed our hope in Christ for this life only, we should be pitied more than anyone” (1 Cor. 15:19).
- “God wanted to make known to those among the Gentiles the glorious wealth of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27).

**Jesus Does Not Give Love; He Is Love**
- “The grace of our Lord overflowed, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 1:14).

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**Exclusivity: An Open Debate?**

To Jesus’ claim of being the one and only way to God, many in our society would echo the sentiments of this newswriter, Antonio Walker: “Christianity … has to recognize that 70 percent of humanity professes or is influenced by other religions, and that this percentage is likely to increase. … Christian churches should make every effort to show generosity to other religions by ensuring whenever possible—and it is almost always possible—that no emphasis is placed on questions that separate religions.” Walker is exhorting Christians to set aside the exclusive and unique nature of Jesus and His salvation.
When Worldviews Collide

• “Hold on to the pattern of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 1:13).

**Jesus Does Not Provide Salvation and Life; He Is Salvation and Life**

- “This is why I endure all things for the elect: so that they also may obtain salvation, which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory” (2 Tim. 2:10).
- “From childhood you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15).

If these verses do not cause you to praise God, then perhaps this verse will: “He made the One who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). In other words, those previous statements emanate from the core nature of our Lord in redemption:

*Jesus literally became sin for us so that we can become the righteousness of God through Him!*

No other belief system simultaneously presents God as both Judge and Advocate. All other systems provide a path, a guide, or a journey. In Christianity Jesus is that Path. That is the essential difference between Christianity and other faiths. It is also the reason Jesus so plainly stated:

“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).

**After reading the above Scriptures, what would you add to your explanation to a new Christian that Jesus is essential to Christianity?**

Share Jesus’ Uniqueness

**WITNESSING TIP**

Christianity is unique among the world’s religions because Jesus is unique. As the one and only Son of God who died for our sin and rose from the dead in power and victory, Jesus is the center of human history and the perfect revelation of God (see Col. 1:15-17). Only Jesus is qualified to save and to be our hope for heaven (see Rom. 5:1-2). When you witness, be ready to share the unique, biblical message of Jesus and what He means to you.

**Day 3: Grace Brings Redemption**

The third clear line of separation between Christianity and the world’s religions is God’s provision of salvation. Although Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam discuss human sin, none of them offers a remedy that involves grace. The vital difference between Christianity and all other belief systems is grace.