

## W.E.C. #6 – The Case Study of the Elephant in The Room

A common analogy that is often given in secular universities that deals with religious epistemology is the story of the elephant in the room

- The overall goal is to discredit Christianity
  - To make it seem narrow minded / uninformed / imposing / intolerant
- This illustration can trip many Christians up
- It can confuse them
- One thing it does for sure
  - It highlights the inconsistencies that unbelievers make when trying to discredit the Christian faith
  - On the surface it seems deep / authentic / even self-evident
    - But once you get past the surface – it has all kinds of faulty assumptions built into it

You have three blind people in a room with an elephant

- 1<sup>st</sup> blind person finds the tail –
  - life is like a rope
- 2<sup>nd</sup> blind person finds the nose –
  - life is like a hose
- 3<sup>rd</sup> blind person finds the leg –
  - life is like a tree
- All these are different experiences of the same truth
  - This demonstrates that each person's reason and experience (truth) are both valid
    - Yet different
  - You have your experience of truth and I have mine
    - Both are true - yet different
  - Either humanity can accept and respect each other's different faith journeys
    - Or they can fight and kill each other over their own person experience
  - Peace can only be brought about through unity
    - When we set aside our differences and unite together as one
    - Since we all are experiencing the same elephant differently
- Because everyone's experience is different:
  - We need to be more tolerant of each other's truth
  - Nobody has it all
    - To think this way is arrogant
  - The worst thing we can do is push our own individual ideas
  - This is what creates divisions / war / tension / struggles in life
    - Every religion is a path to truth and peace
- No religion is higher than truth
  - Christianity imposes its beliefs upon others
  - It forces a person to make a dogmatic statement about reality
  - When in all reality - It only has a small piece of the whole

### **Metaphysics of this analogy (how it views reality)**

- It's view of God:
  - A tail / a trunk / the skin / a body / are all part of the same God
  - They are being viewed all at the same time
- God is being understood and interpreted by the means of human experience
- No two people experience God the same
- Everyone has their own personal experience of Him
- The God of the Bible is not the God of reality
  - Because that God is too narrow
- Having too narrow of a view of God creates tension and is responsible for too many wars

### **Epistemology of this analogy (how it determines and verifies knowledge)**

- Experience – the sense of touch
- Reason – interpreting what they are feeling
- The individual is his own reference point = source of authority
- When the individuals come together:
  - They become the authority of what they experienced
  - Therefore: they determine who God is by way of consensus

### **Ethics of this analogy (what is right and wrong)**

- It is ok to have a different opinion about God based upon how you experience him
- Plurality of opinion is moral
- To have only one opinion is naïve / narrow minded / against scientific inquiry
- It is wrong to say your way is the only way
- It is wrong to only have one definition of God
- Each person defines God according to their own experience

### **The Christian Response: Correcting the problem with the analogy of the elephant**

#### How is the biblical God different from the elephant?

- The biblical God speaks
  - The elephant in this example is silent
- The biblical God defines Himself / who He is / His nature / His existence
  - The elephant is being defined by human authority and experience
- The biblical God is immaterial – incapable of being perceived by our senses
- This being the case:
  - How can any individual, or group of individuals, define and understand a God they cannot grab ahold of by sensory experience
    - Answer: they can't
  - This is why God must reveal Himself to humanity
    - Because humanity is incapable of knowing who God is apart from what we see in nature

- The elephant in the example is physical and only available through sensory experience
- Sensory experience is not how God is defined

How is knowledge and truth arrived from the Christian worldview?

- God is the ultimate source of knowledge
- The information we have in creation is from Him
- Information is immaterial and can only come from a transcendent immaterial source
  - Which is God Himself
- We as human beings do not determine God for ourselves
  - We simply discover what God has revealed in nature
  - We discover what God has revealed in His Word
  - We are not innovative here
  - We do not create or determine our own reality based upon our own sensory experience
  - Rather – our reason and sensory experience is to be interpreted through the lens of Gods Word
  - He is the foundation for truth - Not us

How do people come to know about God?

- God reveals Himself by the preaching of His Word through the indwelling Holy Spirit
- We do not know Him and cannot know Him personally outside of regeneration
- Every person knows “of” God - that He exists
- Every person knows this through creation
  - They see the design / the complexity / the immensity of the universe
  - The universe cannot create itself
  - Deep down every person knows this but chooses to suppress this knowledge
- Because all people choose to rebel against God in unbelief from the cradle to the grave:
  - God must reveal Himself to us – He must reach down and save us
    - And He does so through the preaching of His Word
  - It is through the means of preaching where God regenerates the hearts of those who believe

Can peace be brought by way of unity through the laying aside of our differences?

- Absolutely not - Why? – ***because if all religious views are equal and are to be tolerated, you cannot tell anybody they are wrong***
  - You have to tolerate Adolf Hitler and his beliefs concerning the Jews
  - You have to tolerate Jeffery Dahmer and his beliefs regarding cannibalism
  - You have to tolerate the radical Muslims who belief salvation can be attained by blowing themselves up in a terrorist attack
  - If all religions are equal – you have no basis to say anybody is wrong
  - Therefore – all religious beliefs are not equal and should not all be tolerated