

## SHARING WITH THOSE WHO WORSHIP SNEEZY by Bob Waldrep

**Christian:** You believe that one of the seven dwarfs is god.

**Church of Sneezy Member:** I do not!

**Christian:** Yes, you do! I know you do because your Church teaches that!

**Church of Sneezy Member:** It does not!

**Christian:** It does! We had a guy come to our Church and he said that is what your Church believes?

**Church of Sneezy Member:** And I am telling you I have been a member of the Church of Sneezy for five years and I have never heard anyone say that.

**Christian:** And I am saying you are lying and must be an idiot to belong to that church!

**Church of Sneezy Member** (As he walks away): Oh yeah! Well you're just an unloving, judgmental moron!

That certainly went well, didn't it? As far as I know, no one has yet formed the "Church of Sneezy", however the above conversation is not very different from those regularly occurring between Christians and members of other religious groups. And, like this conversation, they rarely last very long and seldom prove worthy of the time devoted to them in the first place.

Before entering into such conversations, Christians would do well to ask themselves the following questions. First, why am I having or why do I want to have this conversation? And, secondly, why should I be having this conversation in light of my own faith?

Asking ourselves the first will help us examine our motivation for having this

dialogue. Are we simply having it to win a debate – to prove the other person's religion is false or inferior? If so, we need to find a better reason.



Asking ourselves the follow up question helps us find that better reason. This question puts the conversation in perspective as to how our own faith should/would govern or shape our conversation. In other words, were this conversation to be motivated by or driven by my Christian faith what would it look like. Hopefully, the answer to this question will advise us that sharing the hope of the gospel should be our prime motivator – not winning a religious debate or proving someone wrong.

Having considered these questions and gained the proper perspective, is there a way we can have more productive conversations with those of other religions? And, if so, what steps can we take to better ensure a more positive result? Through years of having such conversations, here are five practices I have found useful.

- Be gracious - Recognize a person may not know what their religion actually teaches.

- Be a learner – be willing to listen
- Be a sharer – be willing to discuss what you know
- Be patient – don't close the door to future conversations.
- Determine to share the gospel.

These points will be further illustrated through conversations with members of the Church of Jesus Christ Latter-day Saints (Mormons/LDS). This group is used to help clarify these points as Christians seem to be especially susceptible to the idea that Mormons are simply members of another Christian denomination. This makes it particularly difficult when engaging them in dialogue.

### Recognize a person may be a member and yet be unclear as to what his religion actually teaches.

In the fictional conversation between the Christian and the Church of Sneezy member, the "Sneezyite" repeatedly said his Church did not teach what the Christian claimed – even asserting he had never heard it taught in the five years he attended. While the Christian may be correct about what the Church teaches that does not mean the member of the other Church knows his Church teaches it nor that he believes it himself. For all we know, he was on vacation the day that particular doctrine was covered.

Yes, in some cases, they do know what they are denying is actually true; they simply aren't willing to admit it. Without question, some religions actually encourage members to intentionally misrepresent some of their beliefs.

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Often times such groups justify this as actually benefiting the person being deceived by removing an obstacle – in this case, the truth – that might keep them from joining the Church. The Moonies refer to their practice of this as “heavenly deception”. Mormon missionaries have also been taught not to “cast their pearls before swine” – to hold back information about some of the more incredulous teachings of the Church, such as God once being a man on another planet.

That is correct. The Mormon Church holds that the Mormon god was once a man on another planet where he proved himself worthy of becoming a god himself. According to LDS teaching, after being granted god status, this man, become god, was sent to a place called the preexistence where he is said to have created this universe. There, he also began procreating with his goddess wife/wives to produce spirit-children who would one day be sent to inhabit the bodies of humans while still in the wombs of their mothers.

Without question, this seems bizarre to Christians. It would seem bizarre to

most Mormons, as well; as these teachings are, for the most part, understood only by the select few Mormons (estimated at about 20%) who are allowed to go into Mormon Temples. If one is talking to Mormons who are not Temple Mormons, they will probably say the Church does not teach these things and are most likely being truthful – due to their limited knowledge of the Church. However, a Temple Mormon might also tell you the same thing. The difference is he is intentionally trying to keep this truth from you – not wanting to “cast pearls before swine.”

One might rightly ask, “How could someone be part of a Church and not know these things?” Keep in mind that, though it may seem counter-intuitive, just because a person belongs to a religious group does not mean he, or she, knows and can accurately communicate the beliefs and doctrines of their religion. Most Protestants and Catholics also know very little about the doctrinal teachings of their Church so why subject those of other religions to a higher standard?

If a person says their group doesn't

believe a certain thing, even though you know it is a Church belief, give them the benefit of the doubt – don't assume they are lying to you. But, what if they are – how can we tell this isn't simply a smoke screen? The best way is by allowing the other person to talk. Don't make the conversation one-sided, listen to what they have to say. This leads us to our next point of discussion.

**Be a Learner – Ask questions that allow the other person to share their own faith beliefs.**

Don't be argumentative or combative about their faith. Instead find out what they believe. It may not be what their religion teaches.

The best way to do this is to ask questions. Again, using the Mormons for illustrative purposes, state, “I think it is fascinating to learn about other religions. As a Mormon would you mind sharing with me some of the things your church teaches. For example, what do you believe about who God is?” Or, you might ask them what they believe about Jesus, or how someone gets to heaven, etc.?

No matter what you ask, allow them tell you all they want to share. Do not

**Culture Tracks**

**2017 Pew Report indicates growing opportunities for encounters with those of other religions.**

Estimated natural increase (births minus deaths) 2010-2015, in millions

	Europe	Middle East- N. Africa	North America	Asia- Pacific	Latin America	Sub-Saharan Africa
<b>Christians</b>	-5.6M	+0.9M	+5.8M	+17.7M	+32.6M	+64.5M
<b>Muslims</b>	+2.3	+32.1	+0.3	+79.5	*	+38.2
<b>Unaffiliated</b>	+1.4	+0.2	+2.4	+16.8	+3.1	+2.2
<b>Hindus</b>	*	+0.1	+0.2	+66.5	*	*
<b>Buddhists</b>	*	*	+0.2	+11.7	*	*
<b>Folk</b>	*	+0.1	*	+9.6	+0.3	+3.3
<b>Other</b>	*	*	+0.1	+1.0	*	+0.2
<b>Jews</b>	*	+0.4	*	*	*	*

\* Indicates absolute value of natural increase during period was less than 100,000 people

interrupt or break in to “teach” them what their church really believes.

In other words, if he expresses a view of God that you know is not compatible with Mormonism, resist the desire to interrupt and teach him about what Mormonism actually teaches; there will be a better time for it. Instead, let him continue to tell you about his beliefs. In so doing, you allow him to teach you about his religion which accomplishes two things.

First, by allowing them to “teach” you about their religion – without interruption – you earn the right to be heard and given the same courtesy when talking. By listening to them you also have the opportunity to later compare and contrast what you believe and what they have said they believe with the official teachings of their Church. Oftentimes the adherent will find that you and he are more alike in your beliefs than are he and his Church. So, by taking the time to first be a learner, you become a more effective sharer.

### **Be a Sharer.**

Instead of being critical of their religion tell them about your own faith and contrast it with what they believe or what their religion teaches. The time may come when the discussion centers upon or brings up inconsistencies in their religion; however, don’t make this the starting point as it will likely end the conversation. And, when/if you do get into a discussion of their beliefs, don’t be so aggressive in your approach that you come across as “Rambo-Christian.”

I once met a Mormon couple whom I learned, by asking questions, were relatively new to the LDS Church. As such, I knew this meant they were unaware of what their new religion really taught. Rather than debating them and trying to prove they were being deceived I first took on the role of a learner.

I asked if I was correct that the Mormon Church believes God was once a man on another planet. (Note, I didn’t

tell them this is what the Mormon Church taught, I asked them if I was correct to believe this about their Church. In so doing, I left room for them to correct me based on their own understanding or – If knowledgeable Mormons – to affirm, or lie about what I asked.)

They expressed shock that anyone could believe that and assured me their Church did not teach such a thing. I told them I was glad to hear that and asked about a few of the other more bizarre beliefs of Mormonism and in each case was assured their Church did not teach the things I presented.

## **Too often it seems sharing the gospel is not even part of the objective of our religious conversations**

I then asked them if a church did teach such things could it be considered a Christian Church. They agreed with me that it could not. Note, at this point I am still simply a learner – an inquirer trying to determine what the LDS Church teaches. Also make note that we have determined that we are actually in agreement on several points.

Later we met again, and this time I became the sharer. I provided them with documentation that proved the Mormon Church taught the very things we had discussed. After reviewing the documentation, they made an informed decision to leave the Mormon Church having concluded it definitely was not a Christian Church.

It turns out this was a Christian couple who had been attracted to the Mormon Church based on its strong emphasis on family. They were baptized into the Church thinking it was just another Christian denomination not having any idea what its core doctrines truly were.

Had I begun our conversation by at-

tacking their Church they probably would have shut me out and we would have had a far different result. This leads us to the next point in our discussion – as much as it depends on you, try to keep the lines of communication open.

### **Don’t Shut Down the Conversation.**

Just as we want to begin our conversation in such a way that it will not quickly shut down, we want to leave the discussion in such a way that they are willing to revisit the topic. Note that in the example of the Christian couple who became Mormons, it was the second meeting in which I contrasted their beliefs with those of the Mormon Church.

What I didn’t tell about this encounter is two Mormon missionaries were also present at the first meeting. They too were denying the strange teachings of Mormonism I was asking about. However, in their case, they knew what I asked about was true but dared not affirm it in front of this couple. Rather than press the case, which I knew the missionaries would try to turn into an argument (possibly ending any future discussion), I chose to leave it on a positive note and told them I would love to get back together and talk more.

In other words, I left the door open for further dialogue. My goal was not to win a debate with the Mormon missionaries or try to discredit them in front of this couple. My goal was to share the hope of the gospel – the truth that sets us free. If we simply win the debate but have not shared the gospel, what has actually been accomplished?

### **Be sure to share the gospel.**

This is the guiding principle as to why you had the conversation in the first place. If sharing the gospel is not the prime consideration, why even have the conversation?

Too often it seems that sharing the gospel is not even part of the objective of our religious conversations. Or, if it is, it quickly fades as the discussion de-

volves into a heated discussion – an argument – about which religion is true. This is not to say it is never appropriate to discuss the errors, deceptions, false beliefs, etc. of another religion; however, it should be done in the context of furthering the opportunity to more effectively communicate the gospel. If I convince someone their religion is false – even to the point they leave it – what good is that if I do not share with them the good news of Jesus’ love for them?

After sharing the documentation with the Mormon couple I learned they were believers by sharing the good news with them. Don’t take for granted someone is a believer – determine from the outset that you will share the gospel with them.

As part of a church outreach program, my wife and I once met with a young lady who had visited our church. As we spoke to her she shared that her grandfather had been a preacher, an uncle was a missionary, her father was a leader in a church, and how several other close relatives were in various ministry positions. With such a spiritual lineage, I concluded she was surely a Christian.

Yet, we had determined we would share the gospel with all we encountered through this outreach. As I began to share with her she very quickly expressed her desire to know Jesus. I don’t know who was more surprised, me or my wife. As this young lady asked Jesus to be her lord and savior it instructed me that we must never shy away from sharing the gospel.

We have been called to share the gos-

pel, not lead people to Christ – that is the responsibility of the Holy Spirit. So, do not be discouraged if the person you are sharing with does not immediately respond. Consider those in other religions may be particularly guarded against so quickly embracing a new religion, having just realized they had been fooled by the one group. We must remember that despite this, the Holy Spirit may very well be using our encounter to open their eyes to the truth and hope of the gospel – so share it.



In his second letter to Timothy, Paul provides excellent advice for having a conversation with those with whom we may disagree.

24 The Lord’s bond-servant **must not be quarrelsome, but be kind** to all, **able to teach, patient** when wronged, **25 with gentleness correcting** those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, **26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil**, having been held captive by him to do his will. 2 Timothy 2:24-26 (Emphasis added)

Note how Paul’s words provide a pre-

scription for sharing hope with those in other religions. Instead of arguing for the sake of arguing, show them kindness. Approach areas on which you disagree with gentleness and patience. Make it your objective to do this so they might better hear and respond – to be free from the snare that holds them captive.

Paul reminds us that our sharing is not for the purpose of winning a debate or proving their religion false. Rather, we share with the hope God will lead them to knowledge of the truth – that they will come to their “senses and escape from the snare of the devil.”

We would do well to remember, all who know Christ were also once so ensnared. Though we may not have been part of another religion, we were all held captive until Christ set us free. What greater cause might we have than to see another come to this same freedom in Jesus. Let us keep this in mind as we engage those of other religions in conversations about our own faith.

How different would the conversation with the Church of Sneezey member have been if these words Paul wrote had been considered? Or, perhaps more importantly, how different will your conversation be the next time you share with someone who worships “Sneezey”?

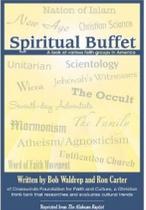


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