



the **HIDDEN DANGER** of
SYNCRETISM

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The Hidden Danger of Syncretism

Certain sections of this eBook are excerpts from *And Beginning with Moses* by John R. Cross.

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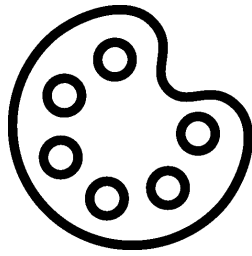
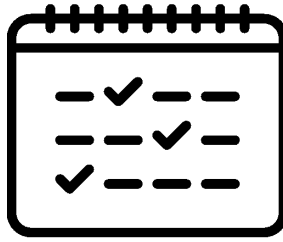


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WHAT'S YOUR SYNCRETISM SCORE?

Imagine for a moment that you've signed up for a new Bible study. As you get into class and settle into your seat for the first session, the leader hands out copies of a pop quiz! He asks you to take a look at five statements and gives the following instructions:

Compare each statement to what the Bible teaches and select the ones that are true and those that are false. State your reasons.

Okay, ready? Here are the statements. (Yes, seriously, take a moment to do this exercise.)

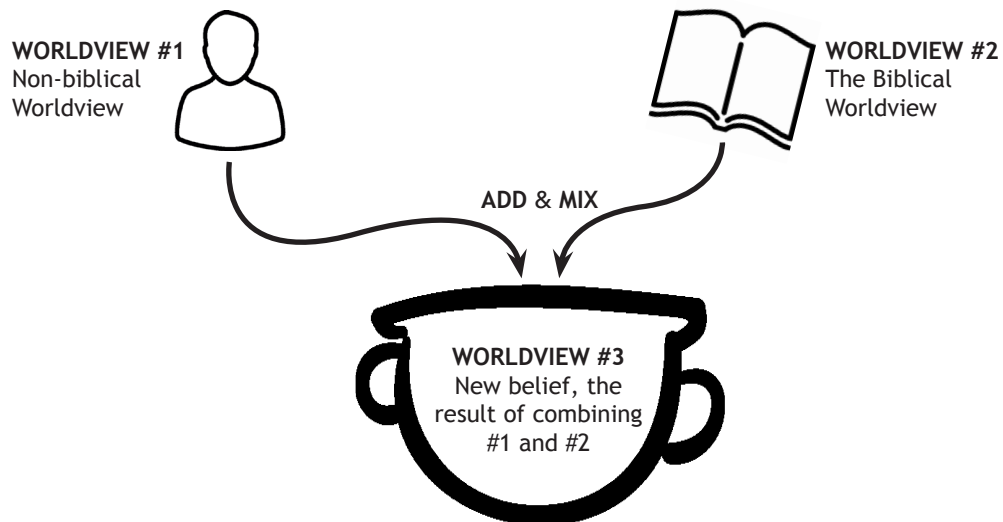
POP QUIZ: The Five Statements

1. Love means being tolerant, accepting and non-judgmental.
2. God helps those who help themselves.
3. Just do what you feel is right. Your instincts will agree with the Bible.
4. It is wrong to say anything that might offend others.
5. Since God loves us, and we are the King's children, he will give us what we ask. He has promised.

Done? According to the Bible, which ones are true? Which are false?

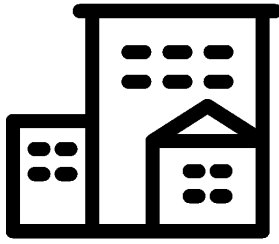
Would it surprise you to learn that... none of the statements are true when compared with the Bible?

Several are completely contrary to what Scripture teaches. Other statements mix truth and error. You may be inclined to think there is some element of truth in each statement and therefore the whole statement is valid. This is because today's world is flooded with ideas that sound positive, affirming and culturally acceptable. The problem is that these notions do not reflect the truth that we find in Scripture. This mixing of non-biblical ideas with biblical truth is called syncretism.



To elaborate, syncretism happens when someone mixes what they think the Bible says with their inherent culture-influenced worldview. Combining these two very different views leads to them adopting a third, mixed belief system that is unlike the first two.

As believers, we need to recognize that syncretism is a very real problem. Like a ship that sails unwittingly into an underwater reef and gets shipwrecked, syncretism often creeps up on us in hidden ways that are very harmful for our spiritual journey.



WHAT SYNCRETISM LOOKS LIKE IN OUR WORLD

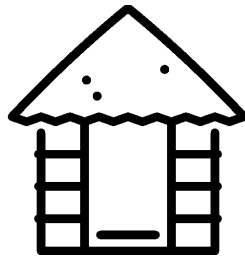
Here's a fictitious but typical example of Tyler whose worldview is the result of blending ideas:

Tyler grew up in a home that took the Bible seriously. His parents conducted family devotions, they made him attend Sunday school and then youth group when he was older. When he graduated from university, it wasn't that he left the Bible behind; he simply got busy with life. From his college friends, he bought into the idea that religion was for the weak and so he sought to be successful in his own strength. He began to stop thinking of God as a person and more like a universal force that would help those who helped themselves. His girlfriend told him, "The universe conspires to do you good." He liked that quote and has made it his life motto.

Although he doesn't use the word karma, he believes that good things happen to those who do good and conversely, the evil that people do will come back to bite them. When two of his close friends had an unexpected pregnancy, he wasn't judgmental but made himself available to help the couple. He remembered Jesus saying not to judge others and to love others as yourself. So he did his best to be supportive. His friends decided to go for an abortion because they weren't ready for a family and Tyler supported them through that time.

At his girlfriend's suggestion, Tyler joined her for some meditation and yoga classes. He feels that these sessions help him to relax and allow him to think about God. He feels closer to his childhood faith through these classes and knows God speaks into his life through them.

This description of Tyler is one of syncretism. He has mixed commendable scriptural injunctions with non-biblical ideas, resulting in a completely different belief system. People like Tyler are very common in today's world. They don't have an understanding of the gospel message and instead create their own belief system.



WHAT SYNCRETISM LOOKS LIKE ON THE MISSION FIELD

As we look around the world, we find that syncretism is very pervasive. It is found not only in our milieu, but all across the globe. Here is a personal encounter related by John R. Cross. It is a striking example of what syncretism can look like on the mission field:

The old, seemingly springless Land Rover rolled to a stop in the middle of the mission compound. It had been an exhausting trip. We had travelled inland from the coast as far as we could go and then back the same day. Jouncing over rough logging roads in the heat of sub-Saharan Africa did not leave one with gobs of energy. My arms felt like they had spent the day wrestling with a bull elephant instead of the steering wheel. But as we unfolded ourselves from the interior of the Rover, the compound seemed strangely silent. Those who came out to greet us wore sober faces. It had been an exhausting day for them too, but in a different way.

Early that morning as the dust settled after our departure, the tribal village had begun to seethe with emotion. A small delegation showed up at the missionaries' house and warned them to stay indoors. It seemed that the chief had been sick; nothing life threatening, but a little under the weather. An old lady—known as a prophetess—had discerned the source of the chief's fever. God had apparently told her that three different young men had worked sorcery on him. The guilty three were brought before

the village leaders to see what they had to say about it. Vehemently, the accused denied such an allegation. Many in the village did not believe them. Others defended them. Feelings were running high. The delegation made it clear to the missionaries that they were to stay out of sight. This they did, but they also peered through the cracks in their tribal house to see what would happen next.

What they witnessed next was ancient by origin, going back deep into tribal roots—it was a trial by ordeal. The accused were stripped and made to drink a foamy poison, pounded from the bark of a sasswood tree. Then the fluid was poured—forced would be a better term—into every orifice of the body. It was a disgusting, crude, vulgar process. One victim immediately threw up the repulsive liquid. He lived. But as the missionaries peered between the cracks in their home, they watched the other two men stagger around the village until they collapsed. They were dead by noon.

As the sun set, this was the somber report that greeted us. I remember being somewhat dumbfounded. Was not this a village that claimed to be “Christian”? Missionaries had “evangelized” these people decades ago. Indeed, the whole country was speckled with church steeples. Even the local taxis and stores had Bible verses plastered on them. Many a mission leader would have flaunted this country as a mission’s success story. But here was a trial by ordeal—a poisoning of three healthy men with sasswood.

Although I knew that this particular form of trial by ordeal had a long history in West Africa, one would think that when the people overwhelmingly accepted Christianity, such rituals would have been relegated to the dusty past. Not so.

The next day, I, along with several others, informally interviewed members of the village. I remember the church pastor explaining to us in detail how the poison was made and administered. He was very matter-of-fact—it

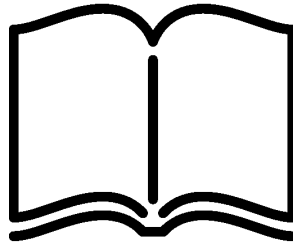
obviously being the accepted way to deal with such problems. When the pastor explained how the two men died, I asked him if they had indeed been guilty of sorcery. He was strong in his affirmation. He assured us that they were guilty, not only because they had died, but also because they had been fingered by God himself through the church prophetess. He even doubted the innocence of the man who survived.

As I listened to the story, I could see the telltale traits of a problem that has plagued missions for centuries. It was syncretism.

Decades ago, the villagers were taught the Bible by a missionary who did not know their heart language—he spoke the trade language only. Typically speaking, tribal people do not understand trade languages very well, so the message they heard was not clear to them.

Nonetheless the villagers enthusiastically embraced “Christianity.” They simply added what they thought the Bible said to what they already believed. They combined the two and ended up with a third religion, a syncretism of two very different worldviews. This new religion had an abundance of outward Christian trappings—pastors, prophetesses, prayer, church meetings and steeples, with Bible verses plastered on everything from truck bumpers to store fronts—but inwardly the people retained much of their original tribal beliefs. Trial by ordeal was dramatic evidence of something amiss, but there was much, much more. For example, further questioning revealed that the Bible verses were simply fetishes to ward off evil spirits. The prophetess was a reworked edition of the tribal sorcerer. On and on it went. The evidence for a mixing of belief systems was everywhere. Syncretism was rampant.

This experience is a dramatic one demonstrating how a lack of scriptural understanding led to the local people mixing biblical truth with their old beliefs. Like Tyler, there was no true understanding of God’s Word and his gospel message.



WHAT SYNCRETISM LOOKS LIKE IN THE BIBLE

Syncretism is not new. The ancient Israelites en route from Egypt to the Promised Land had problems in this area too. God asked them a rhetorical question.

Did you present Me with sacrifices and grain offerings in the wilderness for forty years, O house of Israel? AMOS 5:25 NASB

The answer was, “Yes, they did.” They could make a legitimate claim to be following the true God. But there was something more. The next verse explains what they carried in their bags. God said:

You also carried along Sikkuth your king and Kiyyun, your images, the star of your gods which you made for yourselves.

AMOS 5:26 NASB

These were pagan Assyrian gods. Israel was attempting to worship God and idols at the same time. They were mixing two belief systems, resulting in a hybrid system.

This problem of mixing seems innate to the human heart. When, centuries ago, Gentiles settled in the heartland of Israel, the Bible says:

They worshiped the LORD, but they also appointed all sorts of their own people to officiate for them as priests in the shrines at the high places.

2 KINGS 17:32 NIV

Today in the Middle East, we still find the ancient high place altars that were used as a place of immorality and child sacrifice that were often part of idolatrous worship. The Lord said,

They have built the high places of Baal to burn their children in the fire as offerings to Baal—something I did not command or mention, nor did it enter my mind.

JEREMIAH 19:5 NIV

Rightly so, such decadence had not entered God's mind, but man's mind seemed quite adept at mixing this evil and God's good. The Bible says,

They worshiped the LORD, but they also served their own gods in accordance with the customs of the nations from which they had been brought.

2 KINGS 17:33 NIV

This is syncretism. Syncretism's tenacity is illustrated in that, even after these Gentile settlers in Israel had been instructed in true worship,

They would not listen, however, but persisted in their former practices. Even while these people were worshiping the LORD, they were serving their idols.

2 KINGS 17:40-41 NIV

Centuries later God had the Apostle Paul write...

...I do not want you to become sharers in demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:20-21 NASB

Syncretism has plagued the church since its earliest days. Paul wrote the book of Galatians to sort out the confusion caused by those who were trying to mix religious legalism with the truth. The books of Colossians and 1 John were written for similar purposes, this time having to do with a mixing of Gnosticism and the Bible. In the centuries that followed, people syncretized true Christianity with ancient Roman, Egyptian and Babylonian paganism, creating various mixes dominated by error. Mohammed syncretized Arab tribal beliefs with Judaism and a Christian cult to form Islam. These religions in turn have syncretized to form others. The same is true of cults as well. The list is long. It seems very human to believe a mangled and mixed message.



POP QUIZ REDUX

Before we look into the root causes of syncretism, let's dissect the first two statements from the pop quiz. We'll apply the light of Scripture on them to see how they have mixed biblical ideas with pagan (or non-biblical) ones. In doing so, it will help shed light on how syncretism occurs.

STATEMENT 1: LOVE MEANS BEING TOLERANT, ACCEPTING AND NON-JUDGMENTAL

There is a misconception in popular culture that to love someone means to accept the choices that they make without question. This is not what Scripture teaches. It's true that the Bible says that God is love (1 John 4:8), but it also states that the Lord is a righteous and just God.

*Splendid and majestic is His work, and His righteousness
endures forever.*

PSALM 111:3 NASB

For the righteous LORD loves justice.

PSALM 11:7 NLT

God cannot tolerate evil and sin. His...

...eyes are too pure to look on evil; [he] cannot tolerate wrongdoing.

HABAKKUK 1:13 NIV

In his righteousness, God set the standards of right and wrong. Loving someone does not mean being tolerant and accepting of their sinful choices that cause hurt to themselves and others.

There is a further misconception that to love means to be non-judgmental. Scripture says that God will judge the world.

He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness. PSALM 96:13 NIV

The same God also requires us to discern—to be able to “judge”—the difference between right and wrong. For example, we are told...

Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment. JOHN 7:24 ESV

In loving someone, while it is not our place to “judge” because God is the one to whom a person is ultimately accountable, yet, we have the responsibility to clearly understand and therefore determine the nature of a person’s choices as right or wrong by God’s standard.

Therefore, in loving someone, we are told to...

...speak the truth in love. EPHESIANS 4:15 NLT

STATEMENT 2: GOD HELPS THOSE WHO HELP THEMSELVES

In trying to get people to work hard or avoid laziness or an attitude of helplessness, we sometimes hear people admonish others with “God helps those who help themselves.” This is not an uncommon statement for believing parents to make to their children.

Yet we do not find this in the Bible. Instead, we find God encouraging people to seek him, to ask of him and to look to him for help.

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. PSALM 46:1 NIV

Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. HEBREWS 4:16 NIV

We do not find God asking people to turn to “self-help” or “self-empowering” techniques. Instead, God warns against pride in ourselves because people who think they are self-sufficient do not seek God. They feel they have no need for God.

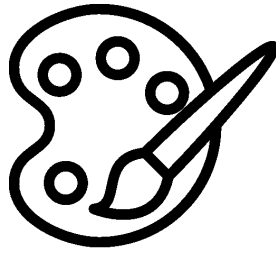
God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

1 PETER 5:5 ESV

A better phrase is, “God helps those who cannot help themselves; he helps those who look to him for help.”

*But as for me, I am poor and needy; come quickly to me, O God.
You are my help and my deliverer; LORD, do not delay.*

PSALM 70:5 NIV



ROOT CAUSES OF SYNCRETISM IN OURSELVES

In dissecting the two statements, you may have caught a glimpse of syncretism in action. At first blush, those two statements sound like they come right out of the Bible. They use familiar terminology from the Bible. But the ideas that the statements are propounding are not biblical.

So what causes us to mix biblical truth with pagan ideas to form new ideas that are in conflict with what Scripture teaches? We want to focus on two major causes.

1. LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF SCRIPTURE

The first root cause of syncretism in ourselves is a lack of understanding of the Word of God. As Christians, we are at great risk of syncretism when we are not clear about the gospel. Unless we have solid foundations on fundamental truths such as substitution, justification, redemption, propitiation and sanctification, we can easily be swayed into believing half-truths or complete fabrications. We are at risk of focusing on extra-biblical concepts and rituals in place of truth.

2. LACK OF DISCERNMENT

The second cause is not applying discernment when evaluating ideas that come from the world. In this postmodern world, ideas are being rehashed, mashed together, re-packaged and presented over and over again. Scrolling through our Facebook feed, it doesn't take long to encounter someone sharing a new way to live, to work, to raise children, to find peace, to be more productive, and so forth. Often,

we behave like a dry sponge dropped into the bowl of murky postmodern ideas. We read a blog post about improving our relationships or a magazine article on how to get ahead in our careers, and we absorb the advice and try to apply it without a second thought.

If we consider the case of Tyler, we can glimpse how these two root problems created syncretism in his mind. He hadn't read nor studied the Bible in a long time and when friends introduced pagan ideas to him, he simply absorbed them, mixing them with the minuscule Bible knowledge he had and formed a new worldview of his own.



HOW BELIEVERS CONTRIBUTE TO SYNCRETISM

Not only do we trip ourselves up with syncretism, but when we try to share the good news of Jesus Christ with others, we can also unwittingly contribute to syncretism in the minds of those whom we are trying to reach. There are three pertinent pitfalls that we must be alert to.

1. POOR COMMUNICATION

Miscommunication and misunderstandings can lead to syncretism. In the account of the West African tribe, the missionary who shared the gospel did so in the trade language and not the heart language of the people. The message that they received was not clear. While there are legitimate situations for teaching the Bible in a trade language, it must be done carefully with a mechanism in place to check for comprehension.

In our increasingly cosmopolitan world, believers are sharing the gospel with friends, co-workers and new family members, all of whom may come from different cultures and have different heart languages. If our gospel presentation is rushed, muddled or haphazard, how can we expect them to come away with a clear understanding? Therefore, clarity in communication and comprehension need to be top priorities.

2. TOO MANY ASSUMPTIONS

Syncretism can also stem from assuming too much about what our friends know. Oftentimes, believers or the material believers use, take for granted certain things. For instance, we may assume that our listener shares our understanding of the word “God,” that they have a biblical concept of “sin” or that “eternal life” is a desirable thing. These assumptions can lead us to communicate in a way that may not be clearly understood by the listener.

An analogy would be if someone said to us, “Wadhue will take your personal badness and be your tour guide in the afterlife.” Would we have any context to understand this statement in the way it was meant? What is Wadhue? Is it an animal, vegetable, mineral, human or something else? What is personal badness? Is that different from societal badness? What is badness? Is it saying something mean, doing something unlawful, thinking ill of someone or something entirely different? And we haven’t begun to puzzle over what a tour guide in the afterlife means.

John Cross was teaching a couple in an evangelistic Bible study once. Both were highly educated individuals. As the study progressed through creation, he brought out the fact that for someone to make this world, that individual had to be very intelligent, immensely powerful and everywhere present. As he continued with the lesson, all of a sudden the husband interrupted, “Stop, stop, stop. You are talking about God as if he were a being—like a person.” John acknowledged that to be true. The man then said, “I have never thought of God as being a person. I always thought of him as some sort of impersonal force.”

There are important implications to understand about his statement. For example, gravity is a natural force. If the person being witnessed to believes that God is some sort of force field like gravity, even the word “God” will cause confusion. Then even a familiar verse like John 3:16, “For God so loved the world...” would be a stumbling block. Most believers know exactly what this means, but this man, listening through the filter of his worldview, would hear something like this: “For gravity so loved the world...” This leads to confusion.

The danger in assuming too much is that the listener may accept what we say, but will combine our statements about God with his or her understanding of who (or what) God is, and the result will be confusion—syncretism. If, unaware to you, your listener has mixed gravity and God, there is no way that they will have a right understanding of the gospel message.

So, not only do we need to be clear on the gospel message ourselves, we must be conscious that we don't assume too much of our listeners' understanding of the Bible.

3. BEING BRIEF

To avoid syncretism, we need to move beyond the fast food, microwave oven and instant mentality. Modern pressures insist that everything we do be efficient, fast and explained in under 20 minutes (think of a TED talk for example). Often, we apply this same mindset to the Bible. We disregard the fact that anything worthwhile, anything of value, often requires people to slow down and take more time to process.

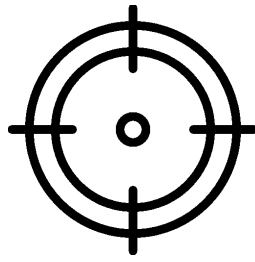
For example, when a couple buys a house, they typically do quite a bit of research and shop around before making a final decision. Most big decisions are not made in the spur of the moment. They are not usually made based on a minimum of information. For major decisions, going slow and being informed is the rule of thumb that people follow.

In contrast to this, believers show up and present a quick 15-minute summary of the gospel, hoping it will move the listener to make this life-changing decision immediately. Not only does this approach create a situation ripe for syncretism, we reduce the seriousness of the message. We make it cheap.

This does not mean we should never give a brief gospel presentation. In some situations, it may be the only option we have. Neither does it mean it never works. The Holy Spirit can work a miracle in any situation. Many of us know those who have become believers this way. However, in a biblically illiterate society like today's world, brevity should not be our standard procedure. Brevity is often accompanied by confusion.

There are further consequences. Some people erroneously think they have understood the message, resulting in an inoculation towards further investigation of the truth. Think of those who tried to understand what we were saying but because of a hurried approach, were confused and left thinking that none of it made sense. When someone else tries to share the good news, they would say, "No thanks, I've heard it before. It's not for me." When the eternal implications are considered, it should cause us to pause and ponder, *Am I sowing with care? Or, am I just blundering through for the sake of brevity?*

Syncretism is very dangerous. It perpetuates a false gospel. It behooves us to take great care in communicating a clear and accurate message.



BATTLING SYNCRETISM IN OURSELVES

So what can we do to combat syncretism? We'll look at it first from the perspective of guarding ourselves and then from the angle of sharing the gospel.

BATTLE TACTIC 1

As believers, we need to commit ourselves to a continuing study of God's Word, a study that moves beyond the superficial. We need to deliberately set aside time in our busy week for solid Bible study beyond our regular quiet times, to diligently and faithfully increase our understanding of God's revealed Word. Get yourself good books about the Bible from reputable authors so you can dig deeper into Scripture. Listen to sermons, lectures, or watch videos that provide good teaching.

BATTLE TACTIC 2

We need to consciously identify and reject pagan ideas. We live in a worldly pagan culture and like it or not, we are consciously and unconsciously absorbing all that it has to offer on a daily basis. Only by studying God's truths can we be more discerning of right versus wrong, truth versus error. Only then will we be able to identify and filter out what is contrary to God's Word.

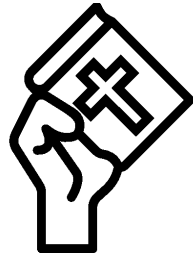
What this means is that in practice, we compare each new idea we encounter with what the Scripture teaches. For example, the Bible is the authority on the human condition and how humans should relate to one another. So every time you come across a blog post or magazine article on how to make your marriage work better,

you need to contrast this advice with what God's Word says about relationships. If you apply no discernment, or if your Bible knowledge is weak, what happens is that you may absorb the idea and you may mix it with some Scripture passage and produce something totally different. This is syncretism at work. But if we have a strong foundation in God's Word, we will find it easy to say, "This piece of advice runs in contrast to what the Bible teaches. I'll have to set it aside."

Not applying discernment puts us at risk of mixing worldly postmodern values with biblical values. We will find that we increasingly buy in to the latest fad. We grow comfortable living in the gray zone, even when the Bible is black and white. We avoid speaking about absolutes, even in biblical details. We downplay the importance of having a conviction. We adopt a postmodern view of Scripture that says it is wrong to take a stand on right and wrong.

Additionally, we live in a culture that does not believe that the Bible is the infallible Word of God. The worldly culture treats it like any other book written by man. Often this leads to God's truth being allotted the same amount of credibility (or lack thereof) as popular sayings, popular ideas, personal experiences and other "good thoughts." Believers are not immune to this. We need to be conscious of it and constantly curate what we take in.

Some may feel it is not a big issue mixing some worldly postmodern values with the Bible, but it is not right. God hates it. We end up having Assyrian idols in our spiritual luggage.



BATTLING SYNCRETISM IN SHARING THE GOSPEL

In sharing the good news, we need to take care to avoid contributing to syncretism. How do we avoid the pitfalls of communicating poorly, assuming too much and being too brief? The ministry of GoodSeed is laser-focused on training and equipping believers to share the gospel in a way that is clear, comprehensive and makes profound sense to the listener. We could say a lot¹ on the subject of battling syncretism, but for the purposes of this eBook, we'll discuss two ways.

1. BE AWARE OF THE WORLDVIEW OF YOUR LISTENER

No one comes as a blank slate. Each person has ideas about how the world functions and these ideas impact how they live. A worldview is essentially the glasses through which people interpret their lives. Their family upbringing, friends, the media, their religious beliefs, their education and a host of other factors influence their thinking. It's essential that we take the time and effort to share the gospel in a way that addresses our listeners' worldview.

For example, if you begin by explaining about God sending his Son into the world, your listener may not understand that you are talking about YAHWEH, the creator God of the universe. In their minds, because you haven't explained what the God of the Bible is like, they fill in the gaps about God and may think that God is a universal force, or worse, some other god that their family has traditionally worshipped. They are not thinking about the God of the Bible.

2. TAKE THE TIME TO FILL IN NECESSARY BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Bible is a big book! How much of it do we need to communicate in order to provide a clear understanding of the gospel? How can we ensure that we don't cause syncretism to foment in the minds of our listeners?

What we need to do is proceed carefully and provide enough biblical information to each concept or aspect of the gospel message. There are four key components of the good news that must be communicated clearly:

1. Who is God? What is his character? What is he like?
2. What is sin? Why is man considered sinful and alienated from God? What does it mean to be alienated?
3. What is the solution to man's alienation from God?
4. How do we appropriate this solution for ourselves? In other words, how can we be delivered from the problem of sin?

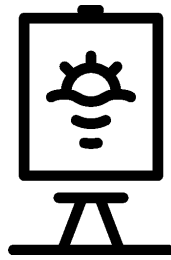
In any gospel presentation, we have to cover these four areas to at least communicate a clear, meaningful and biblical gospel. The gospel is richer than these four areas, but we cannot communicate less than these four points. Let's re-express the four questions into statements. We call these statements the Four Irreducible Minimums of the gospel.

1. A Holy God: God exists in all his majesty, being the Creator-Owner of the universe. He is a loving, caring God but equally he is also a holy lawgiver. His holiness demands that his Law be kept perfectly. He can have nothing to do with any lawbreaker. Only perfect people can live with a perfect God.
2. A Helpless Sinner: People are born into the world as lawbreakers, alienated from God. Each person is far from perfect. God's law says

that all sin demands the death penalty. Not only does each person die physically, but all face something the Bible calls the second death—an eternity of suffering in the Lake of Fire. Since all people are sinners, there is no way anyone can avoid death. Humankind is helpless.

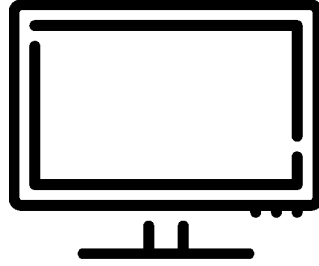
3. **A Sufficient Substitute:** Jesus, God himself, came to this earth to live as a man. He was perfect—sinless. Because he had no sin of his own to die for, he could die for someone else’s sin. In his love, he died in our place—taking the consequences of our sin on himself. As evidenced by Jesus’ resurrection, God accepted that death as an overwhelmingly sufficient payment for our sin—a fulfillment of the requirement of his holy Law.
4. **A Personal Faith:** People must believe that when Jesus died on the cross, he died in their place. They rest in the fact that he alone has saved them from the judgment on their sin. In him, their resurrected Saviour, they now have a perfection that is not their own, but is counted as theirs because they trust him. They will enjoy life with God both now and forever in Heaven.

1. For a comprehensive explanation of the gospel, we recommend reading *By This Name*. This book will strengthen your own foundation and as you read, you will also learn how to share the gospel in a way that overcomes worldview and syncretism problems. Learn more about [*By This Name*](#).



CONCLUSION

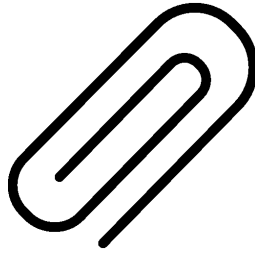
As believers, we must not be naive about the hidden dangers of syncretism both in our own lives and when we share the gospel of Jesus Christ with others. We need to dig deep into God's Word and apply discernment when evaluating ideas that the world pushes our way. And when we share the good news, don't be in a hurry to get to the cross and tomb. Take the time to build foundational understanding first. Whatever information you leave out will become gaps in the foundation. Error will seep into these cracks and take hold like hardened concrete. Syncretism sets in and creates confusion or worse, a false understanding of the Bible's life-saving message. We mustn't let this happen.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn how the architecture of [GoodSeed tools overcomes biblical illiteracy.](#)

Learn how to [lead a Bible study using Dynamic Reading-Leading-Modelling.](#)



APPENDIX: POP QUIZ ANSWERS

Here is commentary on the final three questions of the pop quiz. Read carefully to see how these statements are actually syncretized and learn what the Bible actually has to say about these ideas.

STATEMENT 3: JUST DO WHAT YOU FEEL IS RIGHT. YOUR INSTINCTS WILL AGREE WITH THE BIBLE

It is a popular belief that if something feels right, then it must be right. Even among believers, some hold to the idea that because they are followers of Christ and the Holy Spirit dwells in them, whatever they feel to be right, is right.

The Bible teaches that we are all sinful and have sinful inclinations and instincts. Our thoughts, feelings and attitudes are all marred by sin. Even as believers, sanctification is an on-going process where we learn to submit to God's loving correction.

Feelings should not be the measure we use to determine right and wrong. This is not what the Bible teaches. Rather the Bible teaches that right and wrong is determined by our God who is holy. He has revealed his standard in the Bible to us. The Word of God alone, and not our feelings, should be the standard of measure for right and wrong.

The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?

JEREMIAH 17:9 NLT

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

PSALM 119:105 ESV

Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.

PROVERBS 3:5-6 NLT

STATEMENT 4: IT'S WRONG TO SAY ANYTHING THAT MIGHT OFFEND OTHERS

There is a perception that as believers, we should always be agreeable, loving and supporters of racial and religious harmony. This naturally means we should not say anything offensive to anyone. We should not hurt their feelings in any way because hurting them would be wrong.

Trying to mix this idea with the Bible leads believers to avoid talking about any controversial topics with the people in their lives. Unfortunately, the message of the gospel and the Word of God is offensive to many because it teaches that God, and not man, is the ultimate authority. That in itself is highly offensive to many people. They do not like to be told they are not in control.

Yet, the message of the gospel is exactly what people need to be given the opportunity to hear. Instead of avoiding offensive topics, we are told to communicate with gentleness and respect.

...always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

1 PETER 3:15-16 ESV

Scripture records many occasions when Christ made statements that offended people. For example:

At this point many of his [Jesus'] disciples turned away and deserted him.

JOHN 6:66 NLT

STATEMENT 5: SINCE GOD LOVES US AND WE ARE THE KING'S CHILDREN, HE WILL GIVE US WHAT WE ASK. HE HAS PROMISED.

Some people have the perception that loving parents have a duty to give their offspring both what they need and want. Transferring this idea over to God the Father, they therefore believe that as God's children, they have the right to "name it and claim it," when it comes to asking things from God. They wrongfully believe that God is much like a celestial Santa Claus or a spiritual vending machine who can be manipulated to give them what they want. They misunderstand verses such as the one below to mean that they have the right to demand of God anything and everything they desire.

And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. LUKE 11:9 ESV

They fail to recognize that verses need to be read in context. Here in Luke 11, Jesus is referring to the giving of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible teaches that God indeed loves us, but he will also discipline us. Giving us our hearts' desire is not his ultimate goal. Our hearts are sinful. We do not even know what we should ask for. God's ultimate goal for believers is to make us like Jesus.

This is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. 1 JOHN 5:14 ESV