



# The Investigator's Gospel

## Session 19 – Part 2 – The Faith of a Foreigner

### Sikhism

Estimates state that Sikhism has some 25 million followers worldwide. More than 90 percent of Sikhs are in India, but there are also sizable Sikh communities in the United States, the United Kingdom and particularly Canada (roughly 500,000 people). Within India, the Sikh population is predominantly found in the northwestern and northern states. Only in the state of Punjab, Sikhs constitute a majority (58% of the total, per 2011 census).

The Golden Temple, also known as Harmandir Sahib, meaning "abode of God" or Darbār Sahib, meaning "exalted court", is a Gurdwara (Sikh temple) located in the city of Amritsar, Punjab, India. It is the holiest Gurdwara and the most important pilgrimage site of Sikhism.

**The following is from the article by B. Singh, "I'm a Sikh, and This Is What I Believe"**  
**From the website <https://www.imb.org/2018/01/26/im-a-sikh-and-this-is-what-i-believe/>**

*"Jesus isn't the only way to God, and it's offensive to tell me that. There were plenty of gurus who taught what Jesus taught. You can follow any of their examples and be just as good a person as Jesus tells you to be."* That's what I used to believe, and that's probably what the half a million Sikhs in America believe today. Yet the faith I had in my gurus' teachings unraveled when I was overwhelmed by my sin. The Holy Spirit got my attention when I heard that the reason behind Jesus's death and resurrection was the sin I couldn't shake or fix by being a devoted, religious person.

My decision to follow Jesus didn't follow a gospel presentation specific to how Sikhs may best receive the gospel. But now having been a Christian for nearly twenty years, I desire for my Sikh friends and family to know Christ. If you have Sikhs in your community or will encounter them on a mission trip, there are a few things to keep in mind.

### Sikh Belief and Practice

Sikhism first emerged in India when its first guru was unhappy with the options of Islam and Hinduism. He and future gurus developed a subtle blend between the two. This is a summary of the key points of their faith.

- **God** - Sikhs believe there is one God who is all good, all knowing, and embodies truth. He is eternal and the sustainer of all things.
- **Scripture** - Ten gurus have revealed all there is to know about God, humankind, and salvation. The first nine gurus were men, and the tenth and final guru is the Sikh holy book, Granth Sahib. Although these gurus were not incarnations of God, Sikhs believe they were without sin.

- **Worship** - The Sikh place of worship—a gurdwara—has a copy of the Granth Sahib. Sikhs come to the gurdwara to worship this guru, to fellowship with one another, and to provide meals and lodging to anyone—Sikh or not—who comes to visit.
- **Salvation** - Three components are required to obtain a relationship with God and end the cycle of reincarnation:
  - Devoted meditation on the name of God because his name represents greatness, holiness, and everything else we strive to attain. This serves as the sanctification process by which Sikhs align their mind to that of God.
  - Service to the final guru (the holy book) and the Sikh community.
  - Although grace is God's to give out as he pleases, it's believed that enough grace can be earned through meditation and service.

### **Concepts or Practices Sikhs Don't Acknowledge**

Sikhism was born in the land of Hinduism, so it's often confused as another version of it. This is what sets Sikhism apart from Hinduism and other major religions.

- **Multiple Gods** - Sikhs would reject the claim that their religion is polytheistic. They believe in one God despite their belief that their gurus were sinless yet not God himself. (Ironically, the Sikh pictured above is hanging images of revered Sikh and Hindu figures.)
- **One Way** - Although most Sikhs follow only their ten gurus, they would not tell someone of another faith that their beliefs are wrong. Sikhs don't necessarily hold to the exclusivity of any one faith.
- **Evangelism** - Sikhs don't believe it is their duty to evangelize non-Sikhs. They believe their divine role is to serve the needy, serve their community, and meditate.
- **Idols** - Sikhs do not believe God can be represented with shapes or images, so they reject any form of idol worship.

### **Five Symbols Important to Sikhs**

Sikh religion and culture are very intertwined. Although there may be religious undertones to the five objects they have adopted, those objects are commonly understood as symbols of Sikh heritage and values.

- **Uncut hair** symbolizes spirituality and sets them apart in society. This is the main reason Sikh men wear turbans—their hair can be multiple feet long.
- Most Sikh men carry a small dagger to symbolize their role to protect society against injustice.
- Sikhs wear a steel bangle that symbolizes oneness with God. It also serves as a reminder to think before acting.
- Both men and women carry a comb to symbolize the importance of hygiene and discipline.
- Sikh men wear short trousers or underwear underneath their outerwear to symbolize self-control and chastity.

## **World Religion in the Days of Jesus**

Jesus' world was very much like our multi-faith world today. In addition to Judaism, the faith from within which Christianity was founded, there were many other religions:

**Cults of the Roman State** - The Roman state cults were adopted from the Eastern pattern of deifying emperors and honoring the gods of individual cities. The cult of the emperor, which began with Augustus, was organized by the state and used primarily to reinforce and test political loyalty. Statues of Augustus were erected and rituals were developed to honor him, but the cult generated little religious feeling or personal belief.

**Mystery Religions** - The pagan mystery religions are so named for their focus on secret knowledge and rituals available only to initiates. Mystery religions had become quite widespread by the time of Christ, but their characteristics are not entirely known due to their secretive nature and the lack of writings associated with them. What is known of the mystery religions has primarily been deduced from artwork, remains of temples and other archaeological discoveries.

**Greek Philosophy** - especially of the Platonic and Stoic varieties. Hellenistic thinking would become a significant influence on Christian thought, for most of the early church fathers were Greek-speaking Gentiles who had been trained in classical philosophy.

## **Jesus and Other Faiths**

Jesus' response to people of other faiths was to treat them with respect, while at the same time calling them from their religion to follow and believe in him. The early Christians followed the same practice, as illustrated by Paul, in his visit to Athens and his appeal to those who worship The Unknown God (Acts 17:16-31) to turn to the Resurrected Jesus as the only path to the only true God.

It is important to remember that the message of Jesus, and of the Apostles and Missionaries who carried his message throughout the world, was offered to people of varying faiths. Every person to whom the message of salvation in Jesus Christ was presented practiced a faith of their own. Atheism as we understand it was largely unknown until comparatively recent times. The thought that people of differing faiths did not need to hear the message of Jesus is completely foreign to Jesus and those who carried on his ministry.

**The claim of Jesus as “the Way, the Truth and the Life,” and that “No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6) is exclusive, and does not allow for other paths or “doors” to God. The claim of the early church that “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12) actually led to Christians being convicted as “Atheists” by Rome, who insisted upon the recognition of the panoply of Roman gods, which Christians refused to do.**

## **Tolerance**

The Canadian insistence upon “tolerance,” combined with the modern philosophy of relativism (truth is relative, and cannot be exclusively claimed), leads to charges against Christians in today’s society as being intolerant and bigoted. The attempt by Christian organizations to maintain traditional Christian teaching and values is regularly challenged in our courts (particularly in the areas of sexuality and gender identification).

**What Society Says:** *It doesn’t matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere.*

**What Jesus Says:** *(Matthew 28:19) Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*

**What the Bible says:** *(1 John 3:23) And this is God’s command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.*

**What Living Faith says:** *(9:1.1-9:1.3)*

*As God sent Christ to us, so Christ sends us into the world. We are here to proclaim Christ in word and deed.*

- ***Mission is evangelism**, the offer of salvation to all people in the power of the Holy Spirit, to be received through faith in Christ. It asks people to repent of their sins, to trust Christ, to be baptized, and to enter a life honouring Jesus as Lord.*
- ***Mission is service**, a call to help people in need and to permeate all of life with the compassion of God.*

### **The Christian Mission and Other Faiths – Living Faith 9.2**

*Some whom we encounter belong to other religions and already have a faith. Their lives often give evidence of devotion and reverence for life. We recognize that truth and goodness in them are the work of God's Spirit, the author of all truth. We should not address others in a spirit of arrogance implying that we are better than they. But rather, in the spirit of humility, as beggars telling others where food is to be found, we point to life in Christ.*

*We witness to God in Christ as the Way, the Truth, the Life, and invite others to accept from him the forgiveness of God. We are compelled to share this good news.*

### **From the sermon of February 9 – Zion Presbyterian**

The positive examples set by those of other faiths can often challenge us to do better, to try harder, to deepen our commitment. Sometimes, it is the example within the family of faith which can inspire us: the way a neighbour or friend from another Christian denomination practices their faith can cause us to think about how our Presbyterian expression of faith can be enriched...

Through the faith of others, may God both inspire and challenge us to be stronger disciples, and faithful followers of Jesus.