



Michigan Expositors Summit

Equipping Church Leaders for Expository Excellence

April 3rd, 2025

Hosted by

GRACE BAPTIST CHURCH

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Michigan Expositors Summit



TODAY'S SPEAKER:

Michael Wittmer (PhD, Calvin Theological Seminary) is Senior Pastor of Cedar Springs Baptist Church near Grand Rapids and a professor of systematic and historical theology at Cornerstone Theological Seminary. He is a dedicated pastor, scholar, and blogger who writes accessible books on theology and Christian worldview for the church.

TODAY'S SCHEDULE:

8:30-9:00	Registration & Refreshments
9:00-10:00	<i>Session 1: Helping Our Congregations Understand Pluralism</i>
10:00-10:10	Break
10:10-11:10	<i>Session 2: Helping Our Congregations Critique Pluralism</i>
11:10-11:20	Break
11:20-12:20	<i>Session 3: Preaching Christ in a Pluralistic Society</i>
12:20	Lunch

Helping Our Congregations Understand Pluralism

A. Our Cultural Moment

1. Culture



2. Church



B. Soteriological Options



Universalism Pluralism Inclusivism Exclusivism

Everyone will be saved regardless what they believe or how they behaved.	Everyone who obeys their religion is saved, for each religion supplies an independent road to the ultimate reality.	Everyone who obeys the general revelation they have are saved through Jesus, whether or not they know about him.	Only those who know and follow Jesus are saved.	
			Soft	
			Optimistic	Hard
			Pessimistic	

C. **Universalism:** everyone is saved

1. Because of divine love and sovereignty: Karl Barth, Robin Parry
2. Because of human freedom: Origen, Rob Bell

D. **Pluralism:** every major religion can save you

1. 2022 Lifeway Research State of Theology report: Evangelical Christians strongly agree that “only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God’s free gift of eternal salvation.” Yet only 38% of Americans with these evangelical beliefs disagree with the statement: “God accepts the worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.”

2. Do different religions worship the “same” God?

a. Reference and Sense

b. Christianity and Judaism

c. Christianity and Islam

E. **Inclusivism:** anyone who responds to the revelation they have will be saved, whether or not they believe in Jesus

1. C. S. Lewis, Christopher Wright, Vatican 2 Roman Catholicism

The New Catechism of the Catholic church: “Those who, **through no fault of their own**, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience—those too may achieve eternal salvation.”

2. Richard Mouw, *Divine Generosity* (Eerdmans, 2024)

Calvinism → Generosity → Many Saved → Inclusivism

“I argue for...a genuinely **Calvinist** affirmation of **salvific generosity**” (16)—a “more generous distribution of God’s saving mercies” (2)—that leads to “an **expansive** view of how many will be saved in the end” (8) and seems to require soteriological **inclusivism** (123: “I don’t see how we get to that large number without including huge numbers of adult human beings who have died without ever hearing the gospel proclaimed”). Thus, “a person can be genuinely grounded in Christ ontologically without having adequate epistemic access to the truth claims that provide the explanatory basis for that grounding” (72).

F. **Exclusivism:** salvation only comes through believing in Jesus (Romans 10:8-17; 1 Thessalonians 2:16; John 3:1-18; entire book of Acts)

Helping Our Congregations Critique Pluralism

A. Pluralism Is Hinduism

B. Five Religious Contenders

1. Buddhism

2. Hinduism

3. Judaism

4. Islam

5. Christianity

a. Necessity of the cross and resurrection (*2 Cor 5:21; Rom 4:25; 1 Cor 15:17*)

b. Necessity of faith in Jesus (*Rom 10:8-17; John 3:1-18; 1 Thess 2:16; Acts*)

C. Three Questions That Make Pluralism Implausible

1. Do we have a revelation?

a. Faith is a commitment to knowledge (vs. spiritual but not religious)

b. Scripture is self-authenticating

Calvin, *Institutes*: “Indeed, Scripture exhibits fully as clear evidence of its own truth as white and black things do of their color, or sweet and bitter things do of their taste” (1.7.2). Scripture “carries with itself its own credibility in order to be received without contradiction, and is not to be submitted to proofs or arguments” (1.9.3).

c. Spirit witnesses to Scripture's inspiration

Calvin, *Institutes*: "The testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason. For as God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded" (1.7.4).

d. We must use Scripture as God's Word

2. What are we saved from?

a. Felt needs?

b. Sin (*Rom 6:23*)

c. Death (*1 Cor. 15:26*)

d. Hell (*Rev. 20:11-15*)

3. What are we saved to?

a. Power?

b. Principle?

c. Peace?

d. Person

Preaching Christ in a Pluralistic Society

1st Century Greco-Roman Society: Pluralistic

Paul's Doctrine/Theory: Romans 1:18-32. What everyone knows about God.

1. Almighty (*1:20*)

2. Righteous (*1:32*)

Paul's Sermon/Application: Acts 17:16-34. How to use this information.

1. Care about others (*Acts 17:16-21*)

2. Ask questions, listen to their questions, put a pebble in their shoe (*Acts 17:16-21*)

Epicureans: agnostic, materialists, pleasure

Stoics: pantheists; divine is a fiery, rational force; fatalists

3. Look for a point of contact (*Acts 17:22-23*)

“Very religious”

“Altar TO AN UNKNOWN GOD”

4. Share the hard parts. Remember the resistant material (*Acts 17:24-31; 1 Cor 1:18-25*)

a. God is the Creator (v. 24)

b. Your worship is wrong (v. 24-25)

Exodus 20:11: God made the world

1 Kings 8:27: God does not dwell in temples made by hands

Psalms 50:9-12: God does not need our bulls for everything belongs to him

c. You're not special (v. 26)

d. You're inconsistent: Is God unknowable or not far away? (v. 27-29)

Epimenides, the Cretan, addresses Zeus:

"They fashioned a tomb for thee, O holy and high one—

The Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, idle bellies!

But thou art not dead; thou livest and abides forever,

For in thee we live and move and have our being."

Aratus of Cilicia, a Stoic philosopher, writes about Zeus:

"Let us begin with Zeus; never let us leave him unmentioned, O mortals. All the roads are full of Zeus and all men's meeting-places; the sea and the harbors are full of him. In all our ways we all have to do with Zeus; *for we are also his offspring.*"

Truth: God is both transcendent and immanent; high above us and here with us.

e. You're inconsistent: Are we God's offspring or is God like precious stones? Are we God's offspring or do we make God? (v. 29)

f. Repent of your ignorance (v. 30)

g. God will judge the world (v. 31)

Aeschylus: "Once a man dies and the earth drinks up his blood, there is no resurrection."

h. God raised Jesus from the dead (v. 31)

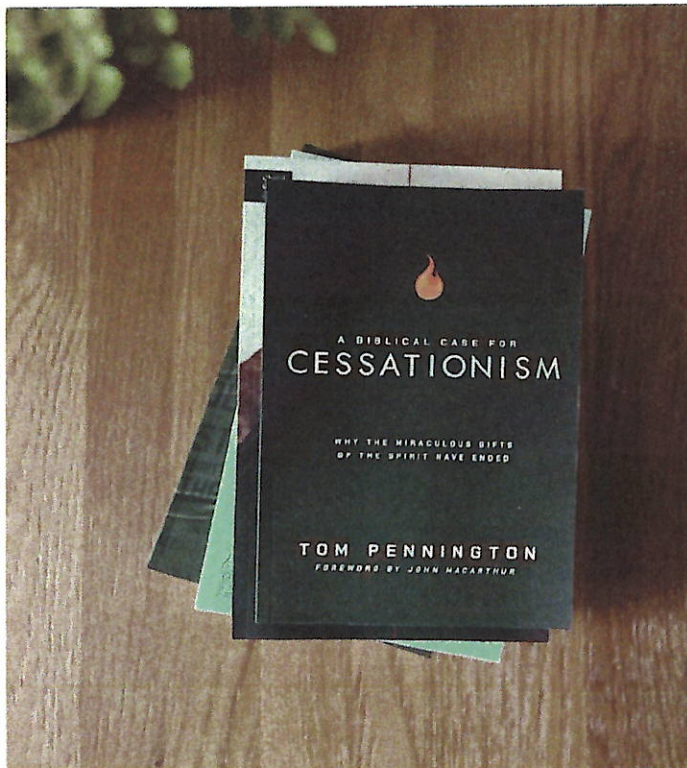
5. Leave the results to God (*Acts 17:32-34*)



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SAVE THE DATE FOR MES '26!

Thursday, April 16th, 2026