

# Cultural Barriers to Belief

## Gordon Kaneda

- ✚ The most difficult people group in the world to share Christ:
  - ▶ Muslims
  - ▶ Hindu
  - ▶ **Japanese**
- ✚ Protestant Christian population in Japan: less than 1% of the whole population.
- ✚ Average size of a church in Japan: attendance of approx. 40.
- ✚ Number of churches: increasing (+104)
- ✚ Average church attendance: decreasing

### THREE BARRIERS TO BECOMING A CHRISTIAN

#### 1. BARRIERS OF IGNORANCE

##### A. Who is God, anyway?

*When we mention “God” it could mean any “god” to Japanese!*

- ✚ When we introduce our “God,” they have no clue what kind of God we are talking about, because in Japan, there are more than 8 million gods!
  - ▶ god of war
  - ▶ god of water
  - ▶ god of business
  - ▶ god of food
  - ▶ god of romance
  - ▶ god of health
  - ▶ god of farming
  - ▶ god of education
  - ▶ god of safety
  - ▶ god of violence
  - ▶ god of life (pregnancy)
  - ▶ Animism
    - spirit of mountain
    - spirit of ocean
    - spirit of tree
    - spirit of field etc.
  - ▶ horse head
  - ▶ fox
  - ▶ raccoon
  - ▶ cat
  - ▶ fish
  - ▶ dragon
  - ▶ MATERIALISM
- ✚ The "Four Spiritual Laws" is a great tool, but we need to explain what kind of God is the One that we're talking about.

### How can we deal with this?

Explain which God we are talking about. It's better if you can explain in their terms.  
i.e.) To the farmers in rural Japan, we can say,  
"God who created the sky and mountains and fields and..."

### B. What is Christianity, anyway?

***Not many Japanese have any knowledge about Christianity. (With all due respect, frankly, even in the West most people don't know much about Christianity.)***

- ◆ Many Japanese think Christianity is a "Western Religion."
- ◆ Many Japanese think when they become Christians, they "can't do this, and they can't do that" (full of negative rules).
- ◆ Here are some questions/comments I've heard:
  - ▶ Can Christians eat meat?
  - ▶ Can Christians drink coffee?
  - ▶ Are you pro...pro...whatever...? (protestant)
  - ▶ Can pastors get married?
- ◆ Many of their prejudices are incorrect, but based on their incorrect picture of what Christianity is, people tend to stay away.

### How can we deal with this?

→ Friendship Evangelism. Take your time and let them see Jesus in you.

## 2. BARRIERS OF FAMILY

### A. What about Grandma?

***Japanese worship ancestors, and they are very important to the family.  
When people come to know that Christians worship only God...***

- Ⓢ Ancestor worship involves:
  - ▶ Offering incense at Funeral, Memorial Services, Grave visits.
  - ▶ Praying to their ancestors.
- Ⓢ Common response is, "Do I have to cut off my relationship with my Grandma?"
- Ⓢ Especially non-believing families can be very offended by this.
- Ⓢ Yuko said, "I thought I had to give up being Japanese if I were to become a Christian."  
>>> This could be a typical impression of Japanese towards "becoming Christian."
- Ⓢ Burning Butsudan event. When I told the story in our church, one of the ladies who recently came to know the Lord couldn't say a word but gasp. She was like, "Isn't that

an insult to ancestors???"

How can we deal with this?

Let them know that they can still remember and respect their ancestors without worshipping them.

When explaining what they shouldn't do at funeral/memorial service/grave yard, also explain what they can do such as:

1. Instead of giving incense, they can stand there and pray for the family.
2. Instead of feeling guilty, they can boldly explain to the family why they won't participate, but make sure they show their compassion for the family.
3. Instead of not going to the grave yard, they can go and clean the tomb stone with a positive attitude.



## THREE BARRIERS TO GROW AS CHRISTIANS

### 3. BARRIERS OF JAPANESE CHARACTERISTICS

#### A. Where is God?

*They use “KEIGO (terms of respect)” to God, which can create a distant God.*

- 🕒 When Japanese talk to older people or to the people in higher position, they use “KEIGO.” To God, as an expression of reverence and respect, they naturally use KEIGO.
- 🕒 When Japanese use KEIGO to God, people don't feel God as friendly and close as American Christians do.

#### How can we deal with this?

Honestly, I don't know... I keep my language as simple as possible.

Use of KEIGO to a certain extent is good, because we should show some sort of “reverence” as we come before God.

Encourage people to pray informally! “Formal prayer only” will keep the distance and won't help people to become intimate with God.

#### B. Where is Joy?

*Generally, Japanese are shy. They don't show emotion especially in public. Japanese Christians won't show joy as much as American Christians. Not because they are less joyful, but they are not used to showing emotion like Americans do.*

- 😊 Church atmosphere is somewhat quiet instead of expressive, serious instead of joyful, which makes it less attractive to non-believers (especially young people).
- 😊 Christians are shy instead of bold, which hinders the love of Christ being seen.

#### How can we deal with this?

If you observe people, they do laugh their head off in an informal setting.

Let them see the difference in their expression. If they are full of joy, but don't show it as much as when they are having fun with friends, what would God think?

Encourage them to release their emotion before the Lord.

**In order to do so, pastors must release their emotion before the congregation!!!**

## 4. BARRIER OF PRESSURE

### A. Where is my support?

***Japanese Christians are the MINORITIES. When they go to work, when they go to school, when they hang out with their friends, it is very normal to be the only Christians in the group.***

- ✳ Many Christian in Japan are discouraged in this world because they are the *minorities*.
- ✳ Being minorities, many Christians feel discouraged to boldly share their faith, sometimes even to act like Christians.
- ✳ Even in their homes, they are often minorities which is also discouraging. For many, church is the only place where they can meet Christians.
- ✳ This is far from an ideal situation for Christians – especially new Christians – to grow.

### How can we deal with this?

Apparently we can't make them "majorities" so somehow they need to learn to live as "minorities."

Here are things what we can do:

1. Encourage them to be involved in peer Christian group.
  - ▶ Church's Men's group, Youth group, Women's group etc.
  - ▶ VIP club (working men)
  - ▶ KGK, Campus Crusade for Christ
  - ▶ Hi-B.A. (High School)
  - ▶ Bible Camp
  - ▶ JCFN
2. Let them know that they are "the chosen ones" among the difficult people.
  - >>> God trusts you enough to send you into one of the most difficult place to share Christ. That means God will enable you and use you for His work.
3. Have them involve their church friends when meeting with their secular friends. That way, they will have at least one person on their side 😊
4. Pastors, show your understanding towards their difficult situation. Being a minister is very different from working in a secular world. In the world, there are very different pressures from that of ministers.
5. Pray for them daily. (For protection of their faith, for courage and wisdom, for God's intervention as they witness to the world!)

## CONCLUSION

Of course, these are not all barriers that are there. However, these are part of the most common cultural barriers we see among Japanese.

This is nothing new to God! Paul had visited Athens – the place full of different culture and different religion. When Paul preached the gospel, many responded indifferently. Paul's preaching was foreign to these people, and Paul was facing the cultural barrier.

Well, the question is...are any of these barriers unbreakable? The answer is a big "NO." None of these barriers are higher than the wall of Jericho. Remember...there are Christians in Japan. They are the living proof that these barriers are breakable!

Satan has built many barriers. But we have Almighty God and nothing is impossible for Him. As we take appropriate approaches to these barriers, God will take the walls down like He did in Jericho! Praise the Lord!

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**Subject:** Niigata-Nagano Earthquake Report #3

### **Niigata Nagano Earthquake Report #3**

On the second morning after the 6.8 earthquake off the coast of Niigata, communities are struggling to cope with the aftermath of the disaster. Nine elderly people are dead and over a thousand are being treated for

injuries. Over a thousand homes are unlivable and basic services such as water, electricity and gas are out in many areas. Many are crowded into shelters in the city of Kashiwazaki where most of the heaviest damage was sustained. Recent reports of minor radiation leaks from the nearby nuclear power station also are causing concern.

CRASH has made contact with most of the churches and ministries in Kashiwazaki and many of them have also suffered damage from the quake, including the Kashiwazaki Seiko Kirisuto Kyokai that has been destroyed, the Church of Christ, and the Niigata Bible Institute and Campground. Thankfully, none of the staff of these ministries are reporting injuries.

Kashiwazaki-city and Kariwa-mura have opened volunteer centers, but as of yet they are asking non-local volunteers to hold off until they are better organized to handle them.

Meanwhile Christian relief is beginning to make its way to the area with reports coming in from the Japan Salvation Army that they will be providing meals on the 18th and the Nippon Kirisuto Kyodan that they will be setting up a volunteer center at their evangelistic point in the city.

CRASH is cooperating with a number of churches and missions to coordinate teams going to volunteer in Kashiwazaki. From Monday a large joint team will begin operations in Kashiwazaki to help the churches and ministries there regain their ability to minister the love of Christ to their neighbors in this difficult time.

Anyone interested in joining this team or having information of volunteer needs in the Kashiwazaki area please contact us immediately.

Donations for CRASH can be sent to,

Postal Furikae Account Number 0 1 9 0 — 8 — 6 6 4 3

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Grace Christian Fellowship

Designate as for "CRASH".

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