



WHICH RELIGION IS TRUE?



INTRODUCTION

Christianity is well known as a religion that makes exclusive claims. By exclusive we mean that it “excludes” other belief systems as false. Jesus claimed to be the only way to the Father (John 14:6) and other New Testament passages echo this teaching (see Acts 4:12). But how do we know that Christianity is the one true religion when there are so many other beliefs out there? And *if* Christianity is the only true religion, what about all those sincere people who believe something different? The question we want to answer, therefore, is this: *Is there a way we can determine which religion is correct?*

The reason Christianity’s exclusive claim is so controversial today is because of an idea known as *Religious Pluralism*, which is the belief that **all religions are basically the same and equally true**. Essentially, the foundational doctrine of Religious Pluralism is that no religion can be considered superior to another. In practically every secular university, Christian students can expect to be told, in one way or another, “Your religion may be fine for *you* and bring *you* satisfaction, but don’t come in here and say that other religions or holy books are wrong.”

Before we begin to specifically respond to this issue, we need to make two important observations. First, just because people disagree over an issue does not mean there are no right answers, nor does it mean we should just conclude that both views are correct. Second, the difficulty of finding the truth is no excuse for not looking. People often confuse the difficulty of finding truth with the possibility of finding it. Today we will outline some basic ways we can arrive at religious truth.

THE REAL QUESTION

The four points we will cover for the remainder of this discussion are intended as a way to clarify what this issue is really about. It is **not** about whether someone is sincere in their faith. It is not even about whether their religion makes them a better person or gives them hope. *The real question is if their religion is true*, and we’re going to use the acronym **TRUE** to help us an-

swer this important question. At the end of this *Truth Notes* you will have a thorough understanding of what each point is all about and how this leads us to a logical conclusion in the end. Let’s begin. . .

TRUSTWORTHY OBJECT

With this first point, we are referring to the two essential parts of correct faith – the subject doing to the trusting and the object of his faith. A person’s subjective and sincere faith in their religion is important, but the real question is whether their faith is in something trustworthy. By “trustworthy” we mean that it is logical, corresponds with the facts, and can be demonstrated to be objectively true through the use of evidence. If a religion cannot meet these requirements then all the wishing and sincerity in the world cannot make that religion true. *So people of various beliefs can be genuine and wholehearted in their faith, yet sincerely wrong because sincerity and truth don’t always go together.*

Unfortunately nowadays, people misunderstand it when Christians question the truthfulness of another religion. “These are sincere people!” they are told. But questioning the truth of someone’s religion is not the same as questioning the sincerity of their belief. As Paul Copan observes:

“Someone can be a sincere ‘flat-earther,’ but this doesn’t alter the fact that that person is wrong. Beliefs are simply not to be *equated* with truth or reality; rather, they are to *conform* to truth.”

And Michael Green adds:

“Now, of course, sincerity is vitally important. Everyone dislikes a hypocrite. But sincerity is not enough. I may sincerely believe that all airplanes at London Airport will take me to America, but I would be wrong. I may sincerely believe that lots of cream and chocolate is the best way to recuperate after a heart attack, but I would be wrong. . .Sincerity is absolutely essential but, by itself, absolutely insufficient.”

Even the argument that a person’s birthplace determines their religion misses the point. While someone’s birthplace may explain the *source* of their belief, it says nothing about the *truthfulness* of their belief! When it comes to truthfulness, not only does Christianity claim to be objectively true, it can be demonstrated to be a trustworthy object in which to place one’s faith.

REAL ISSUE

The second point in our acronym focuses on something that almost all religions acknowledge: **everyone does bad things**. This is called sin. To use Jesus' analogy, we are all spiritually sick and in need of a physician (Luke 5:31). And every single person, despite appearances, will die from this spiritual sickness unless they find a cure.

What is the cure? What is it that makes us right before God and removes our guilt? That's the real issue that a religion must deal with— not your goodness, but your badness, your sin. This means it really doesn't matter whether your religion makes you a better person, but only whether or not it makes you right with God the way God has provided—Jesus! Only He can deliver us from this disease because He is God's perfect substitute. He is the right medicine.

While it is important that we do good things, all the good we do will not take away our disease, and it surely won't take away our guilt. Every other belief system – except Christianity – involves some

form of salvation by works. The problem is, you don't get rid of guilt by doing good things; you get rid of guilt by being forgiven. Only in Christianity are we forgiven and saved by grace (getting something we don't deserve), rather than by our works.

What this means is that those who don't receive God's antidote will perish, not because of God but because they didn't accept the cure for their disease. Their sincere belief in their religion, the sacrifices they make for that religion, and even their change of behavior does not remove their guilt before a holy God. The Christian gospel, therefore, is truly "good news" because it's the solution to our problem, the cure for our disease of sin.

Religion is not a matter of finding something you like or that suits you (like a preference of ice cream), but it's a matter of finding what cures your disease, whether you like it or not. *Jesus is the only way because He's the only antidote.*



ULTIMATE IDENTITY

Religious pluralists will often claim that all religions are "basically the same," since they all promote some concept of a Supreme Being, give us moral values to live by, and ultimately make us less self-centered. They claim we just need to forget all the differences and focus on what these religions have in common. But let's think about this claim that religions are "basically the same."

Imagine claiming that aspirin and arsenic are basically the same. In a sense, we could argue that they have quite a lot in common. They both come in tablet form, they both begin with "a" and are spelled with seven letters. They even both do something to your body when swallowed. But despite these similarities, *it's the differences that matter.*

One will help you, the other will kill you!

In a similar way, it's the differences between religious beliefs that really matter, and the one difference that is more crucial than all others is the **ultimate identity** of God. Why? Because God has revealed Himself as a Person, and a person is

someone in particular. That is, part of what makes up a person is the fact that there are certain things that are true about them and certain things that are not true. If we begin ascribing to God certain qualities that are false, then our view of God's ultimate identity is false. And if two people have opposing/conflicting views about what God really like, *then they are not talking about the same Person.* For example, the Hindu says that God is impersonal while the Muslim says that God is a person. Christians claim God became a man in the person of Jesus Christ while Jews deny this claim. Although one of these beliefs may be true, it is clear that they cannot all be true. You see, just because various religions use the same label of "God" and may have some similarities, this doesn't mean they are talking about the same "God." The differences are too significant.

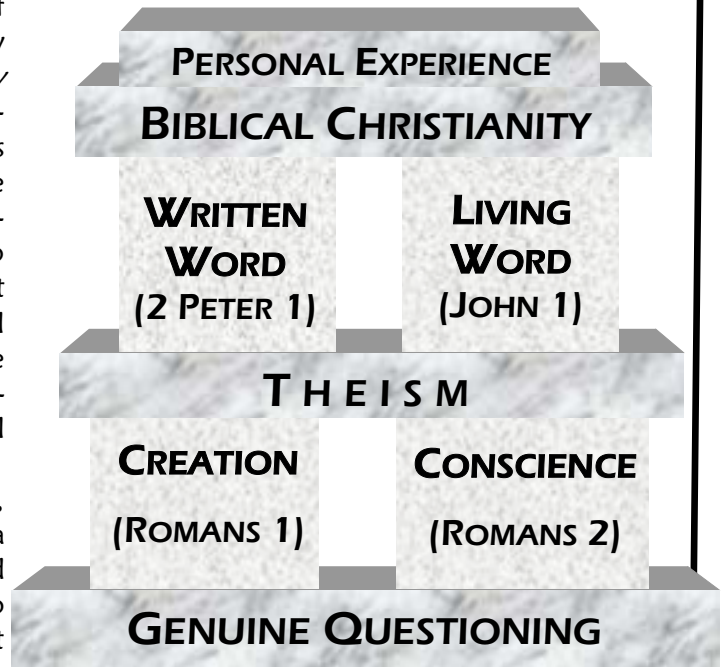
So can we determine what God is really like? Has God revealed His ultimate identity to man? The Christian believes that God has revealed Himself in several ways to all men, as the diagram on the next page illustrates. We can use each "pillar" of God's revelation to construct a type of building that demonstrates the truth of Christianity and provides a trustworthy object in which we can intelligently place our faith. (continued next page. . .)

<ULTIMATE IDENTITY cont'd>

We begin to construct our building with the basic and genuine question, “*Is there a God?*” It is foundational that we at least consider the possibility that God exists. Is there any way that God, if He *does* exist, has revealed Himself to us? Thankfully, God has revealed Himself through His **Creation** and through man’s **Conscience**. These two objective pillars cover what is known as General Revelation, leading us to some sort of **Theism** (belief in God). But demonstrating that a theistic worldview is correct hasn’t proven which religion is true yet. Can we narrow our search down even more to one belief that rises above the others?

Fortunately, God has chosen to *also* reveal Himself in a very specific way, called Special Revelation. By means of these next two pillars we can now *objectively* demonstrate that Biblical Christianity leads to the ultimate identity of God. The Bible (the Written Word) is the *only* religious book worth placing our faith in. The hundreds of specifically fulfilled prophecies, for example, demonstrate the Bible’s supernatural origin. No other religious book has such evidence. And Jesus Christ (the Living Word), through supernatural acts, fulfilled prophecy, and his resurrection from the dead, can be verified as God in the flesh. These two strong and objective pillars are what set Christianity apart from all other beliefs.

Therefore, when it comes to God’s ultimate identity, we must remember that “God” is not just a label, He is a *Person* who has clearly revealed to us His character and commands. When the pluralist claims, “We all worship God our own way,” you can simply respond that what matters is whether or not you worship God His way!



EQUALLY EXCLUSIVE

The final point in our acronym is really just an observation. To be exclusive means to *leave out*, or *exclude*, other points of view, a position that is very unpopular today. But as the religious pluralist claims that all religions are basically the same (thus we Christians are the ones being so intolerant and exclusive), this fails to take notice of something: the claims of all major religions are not complimentary, but rather *competing* claims. That is, they are **equally exclusive**.

As an example, let’s take the basic beliefs about how to reach a final spiritual destination. The Muslim must follow the Five Pillars of Islam to reach Paradise; the Buddhist must follow the Eightfold Path to reach Nirvana; the Mormon must go through the steps of exaltation to become a god himself; the Christian must trust in Jesus Christ alone to reach heaven. As you can see, each of these beliefs about only one topic are

mutually exclusive. That is, the Muslim claims that “this is the only way,” while the Buddhist, Mormon and Christian make the same claim. But according to the Law of Non-contradiction, these claims can’t *all* be true at the same time. This does not mean, of course, that none of these religious claims are true, only that they can’t all be correct in their claims about God or the afterlife.

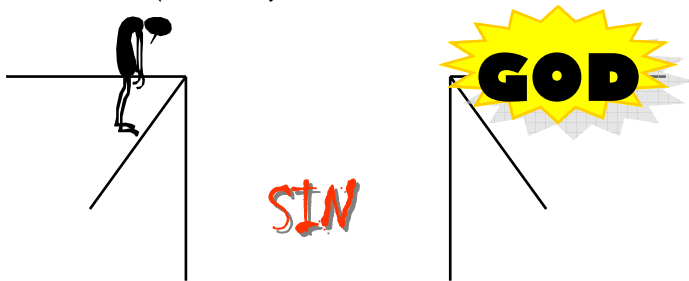
Furthermore, what is usually overlooked is the fact that the religious pluralist falls prey to his own argument against exclusive religions like Christianity. This is called a *self-refuting argument* because it fails to meet its own requirements. How is the pluralist’s argument against exclusivism self-refuting? Because he is claiming that only *his* view of religion is correct while the exclusivist is wrong, meaning he is excluding any view that disagrees with his own. So it turns out that the pluralist is just as exclusive and intolerant as the Christian! In the end, what really matters is finding out *which exclusive view is actually true*.

UNDERSTANDING THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

To conclude, we're going to use one more acronym to help us better understand and share Gospel message of salvation — **S.I.N.** (because *sin* is the real issue) explains why Jesus is the only way to heaven:

S STANDARD OF PERFECTION

God's standard is righteousness because He is holy (Mt 5:48) and sin cannot exist in His presence. He demands perfection. People must see that they have sinned against God, just as David did ("Against you, you only have I sinned" – Ps 51:4). They will never accept grace until they tremble before a just and holy God, knowing they will give an account for every careless word out of their mouth (Mt 12:36).



I NABILITY TO SAVE OURSELVES

Because "all have sinned", we have a serious problem - we are sinners who can't save ourselves, and God, because He is holy, must punish our sin! It is not wrong beliefs that disqualifies us for heaven, but wrong behavior!

Some will argue that, although they ARE sinners, they are relying on God's goodness to pardon them ("He's a God of love, right?"). What they don't realize is that the very thing they are depending on to save them is the very thing that will condemn them. Why? It's because God is good that He will punish those who are guilty. We are completely helpless on our own.

So what is the solution to our problem? If sin separates us, who can connect us? What is the cure for our disease? The only cure is Jesus! Why? Because . . .

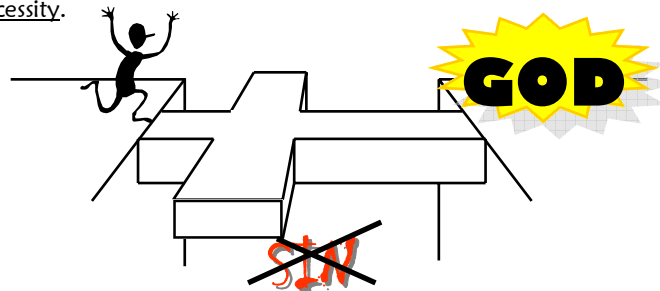
WHY CHRISTIANITY?

1. It can be demonstrated through science, reason, revelation and personal testimony that God exists
2. The Bible documents are reliable historically and archaeologically
3. Fulfilled prophecy has shown that the Bible is supernatural
4. Through fulfilled prophecy and miracles, Jesus Christ demonstrated that He was God in the flesh
5. The sign of authenticity of Christ's identity was given through His physical resurrection from the dead
6. Jesus—God in the flesh—affirmed that the Bible is the Word of God
7. Therefore, whatever is opposed to biblical truth is false (i.e. other religious claims are false)

N O ONE ELSE SOLVED OUR PROBLEM

Jesus is the only source of salvation for 2 reasons:

1. He was the only one who didn't have the same problem as us (He was without sin). We can't save ourselves because *we* are sinners. Buddha, Mohammed and Confucius can't save because they had the same problem. Jesus is the only one without our same "sickness."
2. He therefore is the only one who *could* pay the penalty for our sin. There is no forgiveness possible unless we let Jesus pay for our sin. And if you don't let Him pay for your crimes, you pay for them yourself. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Jesus took upon Himself our sin and punishment and credited His righteousness to us. So saying that Jesus is the only way to heaven is not just a matter of believing the right thing - it's a matter of necessity.



Once a person realizes their true predicament and that Jesus is the only possible cure, they will be grateful for the sacrifice and free gift, and they will be ready to make a *lasting commitment* to the cure. Christ is the only Person capable of solving their problem because He was the only sinless Substitute.

In summary, claiming that Jesus is the only way to heaven now makes sense in light of man's situation and is not just a trivial detail of theology. He is the only way because He alone solved our problem, and the problem itself is what condemns people to hell. Anyone who makes the decision to reject Christ is therefore self-condemned because *their own sickness is what damns them*, unless they accept God's Cure.

TruthQuest Apologetics Institute

For more information, contact
Chris Sherrod at 706-561-7954 or
csherrod@edgewoodbaptistchurch.us



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