

Is Jesus Really The Only Way?

Our culture says all religions lead to God. We as Christ's followers can't afford to be confused about this issue.

How would you answer if you knew millions were watching?

A certain amiable TV talk-show host has a worldwide audience. Whenever his guest is a well-known Christian, the big question will always surface eventually: "Now, you're not saying—are you—that only people who believe in Jesus are going to heaven?"

His question points out the growing hostility in our culture to the assertion that Jesus alone brings forgiveness and salvation. Last year the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life reported that about 65 percent of Americans believe many religions can lead to eternal life. The "One Way Jesus" signs from the '70s have been supplanted by more nebulous notions of a "generic faith" and "spirituality." Pluralism is clearly in vogue.

It's that little word "only" that stirred the ire of both religion and government toward first-century Christians. And it is this same confession that faith in Jesus is the only way to right standing with God that often sparks anger against Christ's followers today.

Of course, there is no new discovery to support the pluralists' claim that many paths lead to God. But there is a new, brazen arrogance among them that their views are a needed upgrade to the "outmoded" precepts of Scripture. This anti-evangelical sentiment is emboldened when believers counter it with either equally mean-spirited denunciations or docile silence. Neither response from us will win the day.

Ten years ago in *The Missions Addiction* I warned that this would be the watershed theological issue for the entire

evangelical movement (including Pentecostals and charismatics) in this decade. Obviously, the issue is of utmost importance for the future of evangelism and missions.

Do All Roads Lead to God?

Suppose I ask you to call me on my cellphone. I give you the number but either you don't like the set of numbers I give you or you just get the sequence wrong. You may sincerely want to reach me. You may show deep fervor while pressing the wrong numbers. You may even "connect"—but you won't connect with me.

Only the single prescribed way to reach me will work. In the same way, Jesus has provided the only way for us to reach God, and only His single prescribed way will work.

Some time ago I was sharing my faith in Christ with a college student. At first, the young man retorted with an air of intellectual sophistication, "Well, all religions ultimately lead to God." But he was taken back when I challenged him to drive that assumption through the grid of inquiry to its logical conclusion.

This catchall cliché, though often gullibly ingested, does not hold up under scrutiny. Logic itself and the universally accepted principle of noncontradiction preclude its validity.

I could ask three equally sincere guides, "How do I get to Toledo, Ohio, from here?" The first responds, "Stay on this road." The next counsels, "You're going the wrong way. Turn around." The third says, "Take any road you wish; just let your conscience (your feelings, your traditions, a guru, or a transcendental experience) be your guide."

These three guides cannot all be right. At least two will be wrong. Yet a person must violate the foundational principle that there's only *one* right way in order to embrace the faulty notion that all religions lead to God.

Though various faith systems do share some common values, irreconcilable differences divide them on many essential issues, including how people encounter God. Even a cursory reading of the sacred books of different religions shows that these faiths are not saying the same thing, nor are they offering equally valid ways to God.

Christians assert that Jesus is completely unique. He claimed to be the only way to God (see John 14:6) and stated that truth is revealed by obedience to Him (see John 7:17). Either Jesus brings us to God as He said, or He does not.

If Jesus told the truth about Himself, He should be received and worshiped. If He lied or was delusional about His identity, He is certainly not a great moral teacher. Thus the sidestepping suggestion that Jesus is merely a “great teacher” or a “great prophet” is not a viable intellectual option.

Christianity welcomes examination of its claims. Other religions require blind acceptance of suppositions.

God-initiated grace, as well as Christ’s substitutionary atonement and resurrection, are truths found only in the Christian faith. The gospel is gloriously unique. It is the power of God for salvation—not for everyone automatically, but for all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (see Rom. 1:16; 10:9).

The story of Cornelius dramatically illustrates this truth. Cornelius was devout, prayed often, gave generously to the poor and even had an angelic visitation. Yet God went to great lengths to get the gospel to him so he could come to faith in Christ and be saved!

The biblical account clearly shows that Peter did not consider Cornelius forgiven of his sins until he believed the message of the gospel. In fact, the angel instructed Cornelius to send for Peter “who will tell you words by which you and all your household *will be saved*” [future tense] (Acts 11:14, NKJV,

emphasis added).

The belief that any road will get you to God and to heaven is obviously appealing—especially in today’s “politically correct” climate. But we are not authorized to amend Scripture; we are authorized only to proclaim it.

In 1829 a man named George Wilson was convicted of robbing a federal payroll from a train. He was sentenced to death by hanging. But three weeks before the time set for his execution, he was pardoned by President Andrew Jackson.

For some strange reason Wilson refused the pardon. His case went to the Supreme Court. The court rendered this verdict: “A pardon is a deed, to the validity of which delivery is essential, and delivery is not complete without acceptance. It may then be rejected by the person to whom it is tendered; and if it is rejected, we have discovered no power in this court to force it upon him.”

God paid our penalty when His Son took the guilt of our sins upon Himself on the cross. Pardon for our sins has been tendered by God Himself. But the delivery of the pardon is not complete until it is accepted.

Salvation is for everyone—everyone who accepts God’s pardon. This inclusive offer of grace is activated exclusively through repentance and faith in Christ. It’s this exclusive component that is an affront to many today because it flies in the face of our permissiveness. It makes us deal with our shortcomings not as mistakes but as sins against God.

We are sinners because of the wrongs we have committed. But we are also sinners because of who we are—children of Adam. We are born with a proclivity to sin.

To nonbelievers, it can seem intolerant to suggest that only one way leads to forgiveness, heaven and a relationship with God. Yet in one of the most loving verses in the Bible Jesus issues eternal options: Those who put their trust in Him have

everlasting life; those who do not will perish (see John 3:16).

In subsequent verses Jesus restates that His death opened the door to God and salvation for the entire world but that this salvation is realized only by those who put their faith in Him. Remember, these are the words of a merciful Redeemer, not some vindictive, angry preacher.

This foundational tenet that Jesus is the only way is woven through the entire New Testament. Responding to a very clear question regarding what is necessary for salvation, Paul gave an equally clear answer: “ ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved’ ” (Acts 16:31). Peter said, “ ‘Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved’ ” (Acts 4:12). John wrote that the “water of life” is offered to all but not all receive it or even want it (see Rev. 22:17).

The Lausanne Covenant, a document adopted by 2,300 Christian leaders at the International Congress on World Evangelization held in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974, states, “To proclaim Jesus as ‘the Savior of the world’ is not to affirm that all people are either automatically or ultimately saved, still less to affirm that all religions offer salvation in Christ. Rather it is to proclaim God’s love for a world of sinners and to invite everyone to respond to Him as Savior and Lord in the wholehearted personal commitment of repentance and faith.”

We need to say it compassionately and unambiguously: Those who turn from their sins and place their faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ are declared righteous by God and when they die, they go to heaven. Those who reject God’s offer of salvation through His Son are, according to Scripture, “condemned already” and when they die, they are eternally separated from God in a terrible place the Bible calls hell. This is why we are compelled by both a holy imperative and a sense of urgency to engage in evangelism and missions.

Jesus is the only way of salvation, the only mediator between God and humanity (see John 14:6; 1 Tim. 2:5). No one can be saved in any way other than by Jesus Christ and His gospel. The Bible offers no hope that sincere worshipers of other religions will be saved without personal faith in Him.

Those who wish to escape Christ and His cross find He is too colossal to evade. Whether or not people believe in Him, they must deal with Him.

Amazing Grace

After the fall of communism in the former Soviet Union, I was privileged to preach evangelistic meetings in Minsk. I'll never forget seeing hundreds rush to the front each night when I issued an invitation to turn from sin and receive Christ as Savior and Lord.

After one meeting a burly Belorussian man came to me with tears in his eyes. He gave me a big bear hug and said in broken English, "This is the most wonderful story I have ever heard!" I assured him (through my tears) that it's the greatest story I have ever heard as well.

God put down a massive roadblock to stop humanity's mad rush toward perdition. He sent His Son, whose sacrifice paid the penalty for our sins. This is God's amazing grace.

There's a reason we call this message "good news"! We were without "hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). Then Jesus changed everything.

Jesus taught that a true shepherd would leave all the sheep that were safe to go after one that was lost. He said it is "not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one . . . should perish" (Matt. 18:14). Peter reiterated this truth, stating that God is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).

God is “rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us” (Eph. 2:4). In a jaw-dropping prophetic picture, when His people had been infected by poisonous snakes, God directed Moses to make a serpent out of brass and place the serpent on a pole.

As many as looked on it in faith lived. The venom was removed and they were healed. Jesus said, “‘As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life’” (John 3:14-15).

Here We Stand

It should be stated clearly that the character of God is not on trial. Our faith is on trial. Our hearts are on trial. Our belief in the Bible is on trial, but God’s justice is not.

Pondering His mercy puts the whole issue in a new light. Because God is perfectly holy, the wonder is not that some will be lost. The greater wonder is that anyone from rebellious humanity is saved! Only Christ’s sacrifice on the cross could reconcile us to God.

People’s final destiny is not an easy issue. It’s emotionally disturbing. God’s love meant it to be that way. We are to be disturbed enough to act. There is an avalanche of biblical evidence that faith in Jesus alone is the only avenue to salvation. Fully coming to grips with it could forever change our priorities.

God has “appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained” (Acts 17:31). That Man is Jesus Christ. Scripture describes a coming apocalypse “when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from

the glory of His power” (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

We are on a rescue mission with eternal consequences. If people are lost outside of Christ (and they are), and if faith in Jesus Christ is the only avenue of redemption (and it is), what could possibly be a higher priority than spreading the gospel as far as we can as fast as we can?

Partial truth is not the truth. In fact, because of its insidious mixture, it is the worst kind of error. God’s love is inclusive. His love *does* reach everyone, everywhere. But His offer of salvation has exclusive terms. The salvation He made possible becomes actual only in response to living faith in Jesus Christ. God respects our freedom to choose.

Martin Luther put it plainly: “If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved.”

The battle rages around the uniqueness of Jesus as the one and only Savior. This is the point the world and the devil are attacking. Let’s rise to the challenge and faithfully, winsomely, and graciously confess Christ to our confused yet seeking generation.

David Shibley is the founder of Global Advance (), a ministry that provides on-site training and resources for thousands of church and business leaders in underserved nations. The author of 15 books, David and his wife, Naomi, have been married for 37 years. They have two married sons and four grandchildren.