

Is Jesus Christ the Only Way to God?

Critical Question #3

Jesus is Unique

- In His Own view of Himself
- In His miracles
- In His resurrection
- In His death
- In His call

“The idea of a great and moral teacher saying what Christ said is out of the question. In my opinion, the only person who can say that sort of thing is either God or a complete lunatic....”

CS Lewis

Tolerance or Truth

One thing Christians are accused of today is a narrow-minded intolerance: their unremitting claim that Christianity is the only true religion on the entire planet because Jesus is the only way to know God and have eternal life. But is this confidence in exclusivity sort of like a married man boasting, “I have the most beautiful wife in the world”? You might smile politely at his admirable affection, though behind his back you glance at his wife and say to yourself, “Oh, that’s nice.” It becomes obvious to you that his perception of his wife’s unchallenged beauty is altered by his obvious romantic blindness. And good for him! Such exaggeration is forgivable, because such is the stuff of good marriages; even if it’s not reliable information about wives and their beauty.

But is *that* kind of romantic exaggeration the same as Christians exaggerating the superiority of Jesus? Why must one religion be right at the expense of another, especially when other religions inspire moral excellence and sacrificial devotion on the part of millions across the globe and throughout history? Isn’t *that* the kind of exclusivity that leads to intolerance and, if we’re honest we have to admit, even to some of history’s most senseless wars?

Besides, America is built on the foundation that all religious beliefs are equal. Is that not what makes America great? So why must we say that one religion is right and therefore,

all the others are wrong? Why must Christians be so offensive and divisive when they say, “Jesus is the *only* way to God”? With almost 6 billion people in the world, why must there be only one right way?

First of all, religious diversity does not demonstrate that all religions are equally true. There is still only one reality and therefore, one truth. Either there is a God, or there is not. If God exists, he is a certain kind of God which rules out any other kind of god. And either Jesus is the *only* way to God, or he is not. The Bible gives five critical reasons why Jesus is the only way to God.

His Own View of Himself Makes Jesus Unique

Jesus’ claims about his personal identity were so extreme that there can be no middle ground with him. Many may be surprised to learn that believers are not the source of Christian exclusivity, but rather Jesus himself is. For example, does this sound arrogant and exclusive to you? Jesus said; “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matthew 28:18). What kind of a claim is that for someone to say about himself?

Or consider this claim. Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). That’s a bold and very exclusive statement to make about oneself. How can someone say that he himself is the only way to God? That is why there is no middle ground with Christianity. Either these claims about

himself are true, or Jesus Christ is dangerously egotistical and someone to run from. He certainly is not someone to follow.

But it gets even more exclusive. Consider this statement, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life” (John 10:27-28). He *himself* will give eternal life to those who follow him? Is he serious? Has any other major religious figure ever claimed anything like that? Or did they ever say, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies” (John 11:25-26)? Talk about self-confidence in one’s own importance!

In addition to that bold claim, Jesus said that people would die in their sins if they didn’t believe in him (John 8:24). What kind of a warning is that for someone to make? This is not the warm, all-inclusive kind of message people want to hear.

Jesus does not stop there. Unlike any other major religious leader, Jesus actually claimed to be the same as God!

- Jesus believed he would, at the final judgment, be the judge of everyone who has ever lived (Matthew 7:21-23; 25:31f; John 5:22).
- Jesus believed he himself should be honored as much as God (John 5:23).
- Jesus believed that to see him was to see God himself (John 14:9).
- Jesus believed to know him was to know God (John 8:19).
- Jesus believed he could

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”

Jesus Christ

“After more than 700 hours of studying this subject and thoroughly investigating its foundation, I came to the conclusion that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is either one of the most wicked, vicious, heartless hoaxes ever foisted upon people, or it is the most important fact of history”

Josh McDowell

More than a Carpenter

- forgive sin (Mark 2:5, 10).
- Jesus accepted worship and being called “God” (John 20:28-29).
- Jesus believed he could hear and answer prayers (John 14:14).

That’s why it’s all or nothing with Jesus. There is no legitimate half way. He cannot possibly be a good, moral teacher and make these claims, unless he really is God. He is either dangerously insane or Jesus really is God! There cannot be anything in between.

Author C.S. Lewis clearly defined everyone’s dilemma regarding Jesus’ claims this way:

“...Claims which, if not true, are those of a megalomaniac, compared with whom Hitler was the most sane and humble of men. There is no half-way house. ...The idea of a great and moral teacher saying what Christ said is out of the question. In my opinion, the only person who can say that sort of thing is either God or a complete lunatic.... We may note in passing that He was never regarded as a mere moral teacher. He did not produce that effect on any of the people who actually met Him. He produced mainly three effects—Hatred—Terror—Adoration” (God in the Dock, “What Are We to Make of Jesus Christ?” para. 3). “But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.” (Mere Christianity, bk. II, chap 3, para. 11, 13).

His Miracles Make Jesus Unique

It is because of his many miracles that Jesus had such

a large public following in his day. The kind of miracles Jesus performed included giving sight to a person who was born blind, enabling a life-long paraplegic to walk, raising someone to life who had been dead and buried for four days, and turning 180 gallons of water into premium wine at a wedding party. Only God can do these kinds of miracles, and that was the point. Jesus said that the miracles he did were “signs” that he was God (John 10:38).

His Resurrection Makes Jesus Unique

The greatest miracle that demonstrates the exclusivity of Jesus is his own resurrection from the dead. When the apostle Paul (one of the primary authors of the New Testament) discussed the resurrection of Jesus, he pointed out, “There are almost 500 living witnesses of his resurrection, most of whom are still alive today; you can go and ask them!” (1 Corinthians 15:6).

Then there are the questions: “What caused Christianity to get started? Why did it spread so fast?” The rapid and massive growth of the Christian faith is perhaps the most compelling reason to believe in the credibility of the resurrection event. For example, Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians is accepted as one of the earliest New Testament writings, having been written only sixteen or seventeen years after the resurrection (about 49-50 A.D.). Even at this early date, Paul could assume his readers knew about the resurrection and believed it to be a historical fact. Any credible authority would agree that myths or legends can not develop this quickly after the supposed event. This is especially

true on such a widespread geographical scale.

Another evidence of the resurrection is the psychological change of Jesus’ disciples. It is striking to any historian. ABC News anchor Elizabeth Vargas recently hosted a 20/20 news special called “Resurrection”. In it the question is asked: *What really happened after Jesus’ crucifixion?* In an interview, Vargas admits she personally was surprised to discover, as she puts it, “I didn’t know that for centuries historians could actually verify that there was this really dramatic change in the disciples’ behavior and nobody can really explain that. And that nobody did argue that really the tomb was full, they all agreed the tomb was empty, even nonbelievers” (www.beliefnet.com/story/166/story_16681.html) Why *did* these men change? Why did they undergo so much hardship, persecution, and eventual martyrdom, for their claim that Jesus rose from the dead?

Consider James, the half-brother of Jesus. Josephus (the first-century Jewish historian who wrote in about 90 A.D.) records that James was stoned to death in 62 A.D. for his religious faith in his own brother! Yet the New Testament gospels record that during Jesus’ life, James was a skeptic who opposed Jesus. So what was it that caused his radical change? What could cause a *Jew* like James to believe that his own *brother* was God and even to die for such a belief? Only the resurrection of Jesus and the subsequent bodily appearance to James adequately explains *this* kind of transformation (1 Corinthians 15:7).

If the disciples had deceitfully tried to spawn a new faith on the world, would they have gone on to give

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Apostle Peter

their very lives for it? Clearly, they were convinced that Jesus rose from the dead, for purposefully deceitful schemers do not make willing martyrs. One who denies the resurrection should have at least a reasonable explanation for the disciples' transformation that does justice to the historical facts.

Again, this is what sets Christianity apart from any other religious belief. If Jesus' resurrection is true, then its implications are also true for everyone. Conversely, if it is untrue, it should be untrue for everyone. There can be no legitimate middle ground. Christianity should be either of infinite importance, or it is of no importance at all.

His Death Makes Jesus Unique

Let's not lose sight of *why* Jesus is the only way to God. Jesus is the only one who actually does something about sin which is the fundamental problem of humanity. All other religions tell their followers not to sin (an ultimately fruitless injunction) or to atone for one's own sin or to see sin simply as an illusion. Christianity alone deals with sin by removing its stain upon a person's soul. Only through Jesus' death is sin's penalty completely paid and God's wrath satisfied.

Of course, if Jesus is not the only way and if we are able to reach God by some other path, then his death on the cross was unnecessary. Why would God become human to suffer and die needlessly when other options are also available?

Jesus alone truly deals with the human problem of sin and the demands of God's perfect righteousness. That's why the apostle Peter believed in the exclu-

sivity of Jesus when he said, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

His Call Makes Jesus Unique

If Jesus' claim of exclusivity really is true, the greatest decision any human being will ever face, is who they believe Jesus really is. Dealing with an historic religious figure (even one as unique and as audacious as Jesus) seems a bit odd, doesn't it? We don't normally think or talk in terms of having to deal with, say, a Buda or a Mohammad. Unlike any other religious figure, we can reject Jesus and even try to ignore him, but if he *is* whom he claimed to be, we can't avoid him.

We must respond to the radical view Jesus had of himself. Jesus said; "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). That statement is exclusive, intolerant, and inflammatory, unless it's true! Jesus' teaching has always forced people to either crown him or kill him. Those who wanted to kill Jesus understood better what he was saying than those who try to pretend that he was just a good, moral teacher. Jesus' claim to exclusivity forces us to either make him the center of our lives or reject him completely as a fool. There is really nothing in the middle. Jesus repeatedly made it clear that coming to him—believing in him and living for him—is the *only way* to truth, to life, and to God.

Either this is true for everyone, or it is not true for anyone. Whether Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists or whoever, Jesus is saying that they must believe in him or

they cannot have God at all! With Jesus, there is no middle ground. If Jesus is the path, then there is no other path.

It really does seem so offensively narrow-minded and insensitively exclusive, doesn't it? But the real issue is not whether Jesus' claims are *offensive*, but whether his claims are *true*. Religious truth claims, by definition, are going to be exclusive. But Christianity is also the most *inclusive* religion. The Bible says; "Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18). So what qualifies one to be a Christian? The only answer is: be *unrighteous*! That's everybody! We don't have to complete Twelve Steps, or fulfill the Ten Commandments, or offer Five Daily Prayers, or live 5 or 500 lives before we can break out of the bondage of bad karma. Christianity *excludes* ONLY those who don't want to be included.

To be *included* in Christianity, all we have to do is admit we're unrighteous and need and want the righteousness of Jesus to bring us to God. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, we can find real hope, real meaning, real purpose, real morality, real personality, real significance, real forgiveness, real life, eternal life, and real relationship with the God of the universe!

Jesus' power over death

John 11:1-27¹

[1] A man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. This was the same Mary who massaged the Lord's feet with aromatic oils and then wiped them with her hair. It was her brother Lazarus who was sick. [So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Master, the one you love so very much is sick."

[4] When Jesus got the message, he said, "This sickness is not fatal. It will become an occasion to show God's glory by glorifying God's Son."

[5] Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, [6] but oddly, when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed on where he was for two more days. After the two days, he said to his disciples, "Let's go back to Judea."

[8] They said, "Rabbi, you can't do that. The Jews are out to kill you, and you're going back?"

[9] Jesus replied, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in daylight doesn't stumble because there's plenty of light from the sun. Walking at night, he might very well stumble because he can't see where he's going."

[11] He said these things, and then announced, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep. I'm going to wake him up."

[12] The disciples said, "Master, if he's gone to sleep, he'll get a good rest and wake up feeling fine." Jesus was talking about death, while his disciples thought he was talking about taking a nap.

[14] Then Jesus became explicit: "Lazarus died. And I am glad for your sakes that I wasn't there. You're about to be given new grounds for believing. Now let's go to him."

[16] That's when Thomas, the one called the Twin, said to his companions, "Come along. We might as well die with him."

[17] When Jesus finally got there, he found Lazarus already four days dead. Bethany was near Jerusalem, only a couple of miles away, and many of the Jews were

visiting Martha and Mary, sympathizing with them over their brother. Martha heard Jesus was coming and went out to meet him. Mary remained in the house.

[21] Martha said, "Master, if you'd been here, my brother wouldn't have died. [22] Even now, I know that whatever you ask God he will give you."

[23] Jesus said, "Your brother will be raised up."

[24] Martha replied, "I know that he will be raised up in the resurrection at the end of time."

[25] "You don't have to wait for the End. I am, right now, Resurrection and Life. The one who believes in me, even though he or she dies, will live. And everyone who lives believing in me does not ultimately die at all. Do you believe this?"

[27] "Yes, Master. All along I have believed that you are the Messiah, the Son of God who comes into the world."

The Crucifixion of Jesus

Luke 23:32-47¹

Two others, both criminals, were taken along with him for execution.

[33] When they got to the place called Skull Hill, they crucified him, along with the criminals, one on his right, the other on his left.

[34] Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them; they don't know what they're doing."

Dividing up his clothes, they threw dice for them. The people stood there staring at Jesus, and the ringleaders made faces, taunting, "He saved others. Let's see him save himself! The Messiah of God—ha! The Chosen—ha!"

[36] The soldiers also came up and poked fun at him, making a game of it. They toasted him with sour wine: "So you're King of the Jews! Save yourself!"

[38] Printed over him was a sign: this is the king of the Jews.

[39] One of the criminals hanging alongside cursed him: "Some Messiah you are! Save yourself! Save us!"

[40] But the other one made him shut up: "Have you no fear of God? You're getting the same as him. We

deserve this, but not him—he did nothing to deserve this."

[42] Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you enter your kingdom."

[43] He said, "Don't worry, I will. Today you will join me in paradise."

[44] By now it was noon. The whole earth became dark, the darkness lasting three hours—a total blackout. The Temple curtain split right down the middle. [46] Jesus called loudly, "Father, I place my life in your hands!" Then he breathed his last.

[47] When the captain there saw what happened, he honored God: "This man was innocent! A good man, and innocent!"

The Resurrection of Jesus

Luke 24:1-12¹

At the crack of dawn on Sunday, the women came to the tomb carrying the burial spices they had prepared. They found the entrance stone rolled back from the tomb, [so they walked in. But once inside, they couldn't find the body of the Master Jesus.

[4] They were puzzled, wondering what to make of this. Then, out of nowhere it seemed, two men, light cascading over them, stood there. The women were awestruck and bowed down in worship. The men said, "Why are you looking for the Living One in a cemetery? He is not here, but raised up. Remember how he told you when you were still back in Galilee that he had to be handed over to sinners, be killed on a cross, and in three days rise up?" Then they remembered Jesus' words.

[9] They left the tomb and broke the news of all this to the Eleven and the rest. [Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them kept telling these things to the apostles, but the apostles didn't believe a word of it, thought they were making it all up.

[12] But Peter jumped to his feet and ran to the tomb. He stooped to look in and saw a few grave clothes, that's all. He walked away puzzled, shaking his head.

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