

## **Skeptical: "Isn't it Narrow to Believe that Jesus is the Only Way?" 6/2/19**

Before we answer this question, we really need to understand the underlying assumptions and context in which this question is asked. One of the key foundations that promotes a peaceful multi-cultural society like the one we live in is religious tolerance- respecting all faiths and people's worldviews, even if you think they are wrong. They have a right to express their faith in this country and it ought to be constitutionally protected. If you are a Christian, you ought to be advocate for this. But there has been a massive redefining of religious tolerance over the last 20 years, that has subtly crept into our collective values. Not just that we should respect all religious views but that **every religious belief ought to be accepted as equally valid and true paths to God. called "Religious Inclusivism"** No one should claim that their religious views are more coherent, true or superior than anyone else's. This worldview is the dominant cultural narrative. **70% of Americans believe that all roads lead to God- 2011 Gallop Poll.**

**My position is that all great religions are fundamentally equal. -Mahatma Gandhi**

**I am absolutely against any religion that says one faith is superior to another. I don't see how that is anything different than spiritual racism. -Rabbi Shmuley Boteach**

**One of the biggest mistakes humans make is to believe there's only one way. Actually, there are many diverse paths leading to God. -Oprah**

I want to evaluate this worldview today, because I believe many people have sort of accepted this idea without really thinking about it critically. It sounds really loving and tolerant. It will help you navigate office conversations without arguments. And this definitely gets us off the hook for that scary word, Evangelism... I can say I worship Jesus, you worship Allah, you got Buddha, or the great spirit in the Sky...it's all the same- so let's join hands and sing kumbaya.

### **4 Challenges to Religious Inclusivism**

#### **1) No one actually believes all religions are equally valid and true.**

What about the many pagan religions that practiced child sacrifice and cannibalism? Or the fundamental version of Islam that ISIS adheres to that says all infidels should be killed or converted and if I die in Jihad, I will have 72 virgins in paradise? Are these equally true and valid? Anyone who has actually studied Scientology, do you want to say that they believe it is equally valid as a path to God? Or only the ones that are coherent and civilized and not extreme to us that are equal. So then what are we doing? We are evaluating some as more valid than others...then what criteria are you using to make that decision? OK well its just the great religions of history that are all equally valid paths, they are basically all the same anyway.

#### **2) Every religious system claims exclusive truths about itself.**

Ravi Zacharias- **"We tend to think that all religions are fundamentally the same and only superficially different. It is actually the exact opposite. They are fundamentally different and at best only superficially similar."**

Islam: Koran- Ali 'Imran 3:85

"Whoever prefers a religion other than Islam, it shall definitely not be accepted from him; and in the hereafter, he shall be among the losers."

Hinduism: Bhagavad Gita 9:3-4

"Those who are without faith in my teaching, cannot attain Krishna. I permeate all the universe in my unmanifest form. All beings exist within me. If you do not accept this view, you will never achieve Hindu salvation."

Buddhism: Dhammapada 20:274-275

"This is the only path, there is no other for the purification of insight...Walking upon this path you will make an end of suffering."

Judaism:

In the Jewish tradition, exclusivity manifests in the concept of the "chosen people", in which anyone who does not accept the teachings of Jewish monotheism is excluded from the messianic "world to come."

Steve Turner- "Creed", sarcastically points this out. *We believe that all religions are basically the same, at least the one that we read was. They all believe in love and goodness. They only differ on matters of creation, sin, heaven, hell, God and salvation.* Therefore:

### 3) Law of non-contradiction

2 contradictory beliefs cannot both be right at the same time. If we are going to claim we are rational people, then let's be consistent. Ex: Math  $2 \times 2$  always equals four.  $2 \times 2$  can't equal both 4 and 6...just ask your third grader! Jesus claims to be equal to God, resurrected from the dead and the only way of salvation. Koran calls this blasphemy and worthy of death. One is true and the other is false or they are both false, but they cannot be both true.

### 4) Religious Inclusivism is an exclusive belief system.

Let me just pick on Oprah for a moment, In saying that all religions are equally valid and true, she is making a truth claim, that she is right and all other religions are wrong. She is touting a superior and more enlightened belief that excludes the beliefs of every other religious belief.

Now there may be an objection to that. You might say, well it's not that they are all equally valid and true, but that none of them have all the truth, they just have a piece of it. The common illustration is the story of the blind men and the elephant. A king blindfolds several men and leads them to an elephant and has them touch various parts of the elephant. One man feels the trunk and says, "This creature is long and flexible like a snake." And the second, feeling the leg says, "Not at all- it is thick and round like a tree trunk." You get the idea. Each could only feel part of the elephant- none could envision the entire elephant. In the same way it is argued the religions of the world each have a grasp on a part of the truth about spiritual reality, but none can see the whole elephant or claim to have a comprehensive vision of the truth.

Here's the irony of the illustration, **who is the king who thinks they have the vantage point to see the elephant? Apparently, it is the religious inclusivists.** How could you possibly assert that no religion has the truth unless you yourself have the superior vantage point? So this view sounds great on the surface, and it might get you through Thanksgiving but it just doesn't hold up logically or rationally.

So now let me answer the question: **"Isn't it Narrow to Believe that Jesus is the Only Way?"** Yes. Christianity is an exclusive belief system. It claims the Bible is God's Word and ought to define our morality. Jesus claimed to be God in the flesh, to be raised from the dead, to have the cure to the sin problem of the human heart, to bridge the gap between God and man. If this is true, then he speaks with authority, whether we like the exclusive nature of it or not. It means Jesus speaks with authority when he says:

**Matthew 7:13-14**

*Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.*

**John 14:6**

*Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

**Acts 4:12**

*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name [Jesus Christ] under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.*

Three Objections

**#1 Isn't it unloving and offensive to tell people that they are lost without Jesus and he's the only way?** Illustration- Airport.

**#2 I like to think of God as loving and accepting of all beliefs...** III- Mod Pizza- kids love it because we get to have what we want... I fear that many approach a version of Christianity like this...I will take what I like from the Bible and discard what I don't like. Some have settled for an accommodating belief system that fits our sensibilities and what we want to be true. And in doing so we get a god that we really like. He never seems to disagree with me, he is always supportive of my decisions, and he is cool with all my friends and their beliefs. What if I told you that Shannan and I had the perfect marriage. We always got along, agreed about everything, never got mad at each other and she loves every decision I make, even when I say I want to buy a motorcycle and go across the country for a couple months. You would say to me, someone's not being honest and we are concerned for Shannan. If you are never mad at God and he never disagrees with you, are you sure you have a real God or just the one you have made in your own image?

Truth can set you free...its true, Jesus said it. But sometimes we choose comfort over truth...because if we believe all this, following him is going to get harder in some ways...God says things you may not like about your sex life which may need to get reorganized, what you do with your money, how you conduct business...try being an authentic Christian living out your faith at Concord right now. That's difficult. You will never regret it and you will experience the greatest joy and adventure in following him- but it won't be easy. Are you following the real God of the Bible?

**Objection #3** but doesn't this kind of exclusive religious belief lead to marginalization, demonization, war and oppression? Case in point- the crusades, Jihadists crashing into buildings? Actually, I think a strong case can be made that religion can be a threat to peace when people think their beliefs are superior and begin to think they are inherently better than those of different religions. However, I believe true, authentic Christianity has a unique ability to do the opposite- to create peace and help a society thrive.

The Greco-Roman world's religious views were open and seemingly tolerant- everyone had his or her own god. By contrast, Christians insisted that there was only one true God, the dying Savior Jesus Christ. And yet, the seemingly inclusive framework was the one was harsh and marginalizing. Keller:

"The early Christians mixed people from different races and classes in ways that seemed scandalous to those around them. The Greco-Roman world tended to despise the poor, but Christians gave generously not only to their own poor but to those of other faiths. In broader society, women had very low status, being subjected to high levels of female infanticide, forced marriages, and lack of economic equality. Christianity afforded women much greater security and equality than had previously existed in the ancient classical world. During the terrible urban plagues of the first two centuries, Christians cared for all the sick and dying in the city, often at the cost of their lives. Why would such an exclusive belief system lead to behavior that was so open to others?"

Every religion boils down in some way to say, do these things, behave this way, lead a good life and God will accept you. In a way each religion says, be good enough and then you will earn it. You will deserve what you get. Can you see how that can lead to superiority and marginalization? But Christianity says the opposite. It says, none of us are good enough, none of us can perform well enough. Jesus is the only one who every lived perfectly holy and died as our substitute for sin. God's grace does not come to people who morally outperform others, but to those who admit their failure to perform and acknowledge their need for a Savior. This humility, saying I'm not any better than anyone else, must lead to tenderness, grace, forgiveness. Not arrogance and insensitivity. The message of the gospel that we are all sinners and lost without Jesus will offend, but we should never be offensive in our actions. But this also means that while our beliefs may be exclusive, the gospel of Jesus is the most inclusive message in the world because there are no qualifications of who can access it! it is open for all people, people of every culture, every religious background, the greatest and the least of sinners, the rich and the poor, the educated and the uneducated...you can be in an executive round table making billion dollar deals or in a back alley with a needle in your arm. Jesus says to the

prostitute and the thief and the religious Pharisee...Come unto me all who are weary and I will give you rest.

But you know another reason why within our beliefs we have the greatest motivation for practicing sacrificial love, generosity and peace-making? We have a savior who literally gave his life for his enemies and prayed for their forgiveness. Communion