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IS CHRIST THE ONLY WAY?

BY ROBERT VELARDE 📅 JANUARY 1, 2009



If truth is relative, then no religion or idea can claim exclusivity because something could be true for one person, but not for another.

In This Series:

Is Christ the only way? Don't all religions lead to God? Are Christians really so narrow-minded and intolerant?

If you're Christian, you've probably encountered these or similar questions. If you're not a Christian, you may have asked some of these questions yourself. They are reasonable questions that deserve reasonable answers. This article will answer them by looking at the concepts of truth and tolerance, briefly exploring differences between competing religions and philosophies and looking at what the Bible has to say.

Truth, Tolerance and Hot Chocolate

If truth is relative, then no religion or idea can claim exclusivity because something could be true for one person, but not for another. We can see this when it comes to matters of taste, such as whether or not one person happens to like hot chocolate or not, but what about when it comes to ideas? Are ideas relative? If I say, "I really like hot chocolate," I'm making a claim about a matter of taste. Someone else might not like hot chocolate. But what if I say, "Jesus is Lord"? Someone else may disagree, and they are welcome to, but the claim, "Jesus is Lord" is a truth claim. I'm staking out an area of reality, so to speak, and saying that this bit of information is true.

But what do I mean by "true"? In short, truth is what corresponds to reality. If Jesus is Lord, then he is so no matter how I respond to the claim. In addition, I should be tolerant of those who hold to differing beliefs on this point and they should be tolerant of my belief. But tolerance does not mean that everyone is right. Tolerating different points of view does not mean that we give up our own truth claims.

Truth and Religion: Is It Like an Elephant?

When it comes to religion and philosophy, however, some people do not believe that any one belief is true. They might point out disagreements between adherents of Christianity or other religions and philosophies as an example of the futility of trying to say that any one belief system is true.

Or sometimes analogies are provided, with one of the most popular being that of the blind men and the elephant. Although there are variations of the story, the point of all of them is that some blind men examined different parts of an elephant and all concluded it was something different. One man touched the tail and described the elephant as rope. Another man felt the tusk and described the elephant as hard. Yet a third blind man felt the elephant's ear and said it must be a soft creature. "You see," says the person offering the example, "they all grasped parts of the same truth. Similarly, all religions are true in their own way."

But does this illustration hold up? Is it really the same as our hot chocolate example – a matter of taste? On closer examination we learn at least two key things about the example. First, there was a real elephant or truth to be grasped, yet all the men got it wrong! Second, knowing just a part of something is not the same as knowing the bigger picture. There really was a truth to be grasped – a real, live elephant – but all the men missed out on this fact.

Now let's take a look at a few religions and philosophies in light of the elephant illustration. Christian theism claims that there is only one God, personal and distinctly separate from His creation. Pantheism, found in forms of Hinduism for instance, claims that everything is part of the impersonal divine. Atheists claim there is no god. Are these three worldviews really describing different parts of the same thing? Since they flat out contradict one another, the claim that they are all describing different aspects of the same thing does not make much sense. After all, God cannot both exist and not-exist at the same time and in the same way. Neither can God be personal and impersonal, everything and separate from creation at the same time and in the same way.

If we look at the situation rationally, then either all religions and philosophies are wrong or one of them is true. This is not to say that there are no commonalities between religions and philosophies. But what

they have to say on the big issues such as the nature of God, the human condition, and the way of salvation or spiritual liberation, is very different.

Christianity happens to claim that on these key theological points, it is true. But Christianity is not the only religion or philosophy to make truth claims. Atheists, for instance, would claim that their denial of the existence of God is true (corresponds to reality). As a result, anyone who disagrees with their position is wrong. Consistent pantheists would have to deny that God has personality, instead clinging to the divine as being an impersonal force. By definition, pantheists, then, are staking out a portion of reality and essentially are saying that Christians and atheists are both wrong.

What if we apply the same sort of reasoning of those who offer the elephant example to mathematics? One person says two plus two is four, but another says the answer is five, while yet a third person says the answer is really seven. After all, isn't it narrow-minded and intolerant to demand that only one answer to the problem be the right one?

The Truth Claims of Christ

Now let's turn our attention to the truth claims of Christianity. In the Bible, Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father [God] except through me" (John 14:6, NIV). In Acts 4:12, the Apostle Peter said of Jesus, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

The question is not whether or not this is a "narrow-minded" position, but whether or not the claims are true. Jesus spoke of a personal creator God who calls everyone to repentance, offering redemption to those who will receive Him. This is not an intolerant or mean-spirited position to hold. If it's true, then sharing this message is the most natural and loving thing to do.

Sharing the Claims

The claims of Christ have their foundation in his identity and claims. His followers were aware of this, as the apostle Paul wrote, "And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith ... And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:14, 17). Jesus claimed to be God in the flesh, who came to earth to suffer and die for the our sins, to be raised again from the dead after his crucifixion. Again, we are dealing with specific truth claims about reality. If these claims are true, as Christians believe, then how we respond to them is not just an intellectual game, but is of significant and eternal importance.

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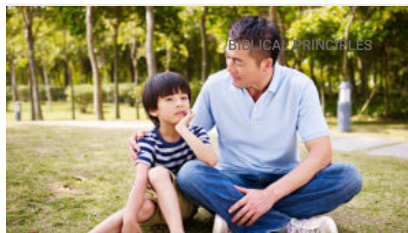


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