



What's Up With: Christianity Being So Exclusive?

Bible Teacher Timothy Ateek

Many make the claim that Christianity is exclusive and that this is a reason for their unbelief. In fact, they are right, in a sense. Jesus is the only way to the Father. But at the same time, Christianity is categorically different than every other major world religion. So Christianity is also the most *inclusive*, because through the person and work of Jesus Christ, God is inviting the world to come back to Him!

1. What comes to mind when you hear the word “exclusive”?
2. **Read John 14:6.** Christianity is for everyone, but is also exclusive: How are both statements true?
3. The two most common arguments against the exclusivity of Christianity are “All religions are basically the same.” and “All religions are right.” What did you learn in T.A.’s message that helped you see and understanding the flaw(s) in one or both of those statements?
4. T.A. encouraged us to be able to say, no matter what we believe, that we have come to our belief through careful consideration. If you would consider yourself a Christian, why do you believe what you believe? If you would not consider yourself a Christian, what reservations do you have?
5. T.A. makes a compelling case for the authority and trustworthiness of Scripture. Which reason for the trustworthiness of the Bible did you find most compelling and why?
6. There are at least three truths about Christianity that make it categorically different from every other major world religion. Therefore, all religions *cannot* be basically the same.
 - (1) *God came to us.* (See John 6:38 & 10:30-33)
 - (2) *God is both the just and the justifier.* (See Romans 3:23-26)
 - (3) *The message isn’t “do”; the message is “done.”* (John 6:28-29)

What do these three truths teach us about how while the Christian faith is admittedly exclusive, it is uniquely beautiful and compelling?

Challenge: If Christianity truly is exclusive, and Jesus is the only true Way, Truth, and Life, what does that mean for our friends, family members, neighbors, and people all around the world who do not know Jesus? Did you know that 68% of people who attend Faithbridge said that they came to church because a friend or family member invited them? Write down three specific names of people in your spheres of influence who do not know Jesus and extend an invitation this week to one of the Christmas Eve services at Faithbridge.

Prayer: Partner up with someone in your group, and share the names that came to mind for the challenge. Then spend time praying for those people by name and for the opportunity to extend an invitation to not only our Christmas Eve services at Faithbridge, but a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ. Use the following prayer points to guide you. And remember, it is God who does the work in a person's heart, we just simply make the introduction.

- Praise God that despite our sin and rebellion, our flaws and our failures, He *wants* a relationship with every man, woman, and child in the world.
- Confess your need for Him, and confess where you have been hesitant to share this Good News with others.
- Ask God to be stirring in the hearts of those whose names came to mind as people you know and love who do not know Jesus. Ask Him to be drawing them to Himself and stirring an interest for the things of God.
- Ask God for opportunities and courage to make the invitation.

STUDY DEEPER

How an Exclusive Gospel is Good News

By David Platt

Soon before Jesus was betrayed, arrested, and crucified on a cross, He said:

I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (Jn 14:6)

That is an astounding claim. I would say that is the most astounding claim anyone has made in all of history.

The Way

In a world of many different ways and religions, Jesus was claiming to be the way to God. Jesus taught that God created all people everywhere, but all of us have turned to our own ways. Our stories look different, but we are all united by our sin (Rom 3:23). We have sinned against God and are separated from Him. Not only are we separated from God by our sin, but also we stand guilty before God, under His judgment (Rom 1:18–3:20). And Jesus says He is the only way to be saved from this judgment. If you do not believe in Him, you remain under God's judgment (John 3:18).

Jesus is denouncing a theory of religion that is common in the world today. This theory says that all people are at the bottom of a mountain and God is at the top. One person chooses his own route to go to the top of the mountain, while someone else chooses another route to the top. But it doesn't matter in the end, because we will all end up in the same place. This idea assumes that all religions are fundamentally the same and equally valid. Religion is just a matter of personal preference. Like choosing a flavor of ice cream, you choose the religion you like best.

The idea that Jesus is the only way to God sounds offensive to people.

The Truth

Jesus claims to be not only the way, but also the truth. We live in a world where faith is often perceived as being tied to your culture or tradition. If you were born in India, then you are likely to be Hindu. If you were born an Arab, then you are likely a Muslim. If you were born in some parts of the America, then you are likely to be an atheist, and if you were born in other parts of America, then you are likely to be a Christian. However, in a world that often sees faith as a matter of taste or tradition, Jesus says faith is a matter of truth.

All religions cannot be true at the same time. For example, Muslims deny that Jesus died on the cross, while Christians believe that Jesus did die on the cross as the Bible says. Regardless of which side you believe, both sides can't be right. Someone is basing his or her beliefs on a lie, and eternity is at stake.

According to the Bible, the only way to be brought back to God is through Christ's work on the cross. Jesus, the perfect Son of God, went to the cross to die because death is the payment for sin. But Jesus never sinned—so why did He die? He died to take the punishment we deserve (1 Pet 2:24; Rom 3:21–26). He died for sinners like you and me.

But after He died, Jesus did not stay in the grave.

The Life

Jesus rose bodily from the dead, just as He said He would. He conquered sin and death by His resurrection (1 Cor 15). All other religious leaders have died, including Muhammad, Confucius, Buddha, and even Moses. These leaders' deaths marked the end of their story. However, the death of Christ, in a sense, marked the beginning of a new story. Jesus was claiming to be not only the way and the truth, but also the life. Three days after Jesus died, He rose from the grave in victory (Jn 20). He is the only person in history who has conquered death.

While on earth, Jesus was always talking about life, even eternal life. He encountered people who had longings for peace, comfort, meaning, and joy. Like you and me, these people wanted life to its fullest. Jesus said the following to a Samaritan woman at a well who had had five husbands:

Everyone who drinks of this water [the physical water at the well] will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. (Jn 4:13-14)

To a crowd of hungry people, Jesus said,

I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. (Jn 6:35)

To a people living in the darkness of sin, he said,

I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. (Jn 8:12)

To a people whose joy and peace were continually being taken from them in this world, he said,

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. (Jn 10:10)

Jesus was saying that life, true life, eternal life, is found in being restored to a right relationship with God.

The Wrong Question

Sometimes people hear Christ's claim to be the way, the truth, and the life, and they ask "Why would God only make one way?" To answer this question, it will be helpful to step back and look at the bigger picture.

Even if you are an atheist, agnostic, or a follower of another religion, just imagine that the following is true: there is one true God who created the world and everything in it. He made man and woman as the crowning glory of creation, to know and love Him and to love one another. They were created for life with Him forever, but if they disobeyed, they would die (Gen 1–2).

Then imagine that this man and woman decided they would be better off on their own, and so they disobeyed God, knowing they would die if they disobeyed Him. Yet the Creator set in motion a plan for them to be restored to life in Him (Gen 3).

As men and women grew and multiplied, God took a smaller group from among those whom He created and entered into a covenant with them. He gave them the privilege of spreading His love to all peoples so that others might also have eternal life in Him. Then imagine those who had received this covenant saying they would rather worship other gods. Even when the Creator sent messengers to turn them back to Him (the biblical prophets), the people rejected, stoned, and imprisoned these messengers.

Then imagine, centuries later, this Creator committing the ultimate act of condescension and coming to His creation in the flesh (Jn 1:1–3, 14). The Creator, in the person of His Son, came to love and care for His creation, healing people who were sick and bringing good news of the Creator's love (Luke 4:18–19). Then imagine the creation taking the Creator Himself and betraying Him, arresting Him, mocking Him, beating Him, spitting in His face, and then nailing Him to a cross (Matt 26:47–27:56). The cross the most cruel form of death imaginable in that day.

What if, after all of that, the Creator were to say that anyone who would believe in Him and what He had accomplished on the cross, would have eternal life? What if He said, "I have paid the price for your sin. You will be forgiven of your sins and have eternal life if you will trust in me."

If that story, which is a brief summary of the gospel, is true, then it doesn't really make sense to ask why there is only one way. Because of our sin, the question should be, "Why is there any way at all?"

The reason we want many ways to God is because we want to be in charge. We want to make our own way. But the God of the universe is saying in His grace, "I have made a way for you." He has not left you alone—He has come to you. Jesus died on the cross for you (Jn 3:16); He has risen from the grave so that you might have eternal life (Rom 10:9–10). Believe in Jesus as Savior and submit to Him as your Lord. This is the way of eternal life.

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