

How Can There Be Only One Way to God?

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, so we've had a couple of good conversations already, two weeks ago with you, last week with Jordan. And you guys have answered some of my questions, and I think I could say that I've reached a point where I'm sort of...

I have no problems on a personal level with what I'm going to call non-crazy Christians. Well, I'm very glad to hear that. Yeah, you should be. So yeah, so I have no problem personally with these non-crazy Christians.

If, you know, if Christianity works for you, that's great. If answering these questions the last couple of weeks has worked for you, then that's fine. But I really think you guys have got to let go of this Christianity is the only way business.

Like just, you've got to, you know, have your religion, be okay with it. If it works for you, that's really great. But like imposing it on others, let others have what they have.

So this is a problem you see in Christianity, like the whole exclusiveness of the beliefs? Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. I think given particularly how much you guys have admitted is a mystery and you don't know, to say there's only one way to God and we have it.

[1 : 0 9] So what, like exactly, what is the problem with saying that? Well, I think there's a lot of problems. It's exclusive. You've already mentioned. It's arrogant. It's intolerant.

I think it leads people, it opens doors for people to feel superior, self-righteous. You know, you let those seeds get out of control and they grow into marginalization, oppression, hatred, war even.

Come on. Come on. Steady on. No. No, I mean, it's true. It sounds extreme. But like if there was no religion, surely, the world would just be a more peaceful place.

If we could wave a wand and kind of remove these divisions, make all faiths disappear so that we could just sort of agree, rather than saying, I know the truth and you don't, we could, you know, we could avoid a lot of conflict.

We could just all get along. I just don't think that's true. And I think we have really robust case studies to show that. And so just in the last, say, 100 years, if you look at the communist China, Khmer Rouge, Soviet Russia, Nazi Germany in a kind of a different way, but all these regimes wanted to put really tight controls on religion.

[2 : 2 9] And the result is one of the great paradoxes of history. That some of the greatest losses of life has occurred at the hands of people who believed that religion was intolerant and wanted to stamp it out.

So you kind of add up the deaths under these regimes at their worst times in history, and you're looking at about 100 million people who died under these regimes.

Sure. I mean, like, religion's not the only ideology that causes pain, but, I mean, religion has caused a lot of wars. See, no, see, I disagree again, because, well, okay, I agree that religion causes some wars, but it's just not as much as you think.

And I'm not trying to scam out of this, you know, like, pretend it's not a problem. It is a problem. But you can get this encyclopedia, the set of encyclopedias called the Encyclopedia of Wars.

It's a three-volume set. I can't remember who wrote it. Sounds like a fun read. Oh, it's great. My kids love it. And it details every major war from about 8,000 BC.

[3 : 35] So that's about 1,700 major conflicts. And it says, of those, and this is not a Christian book, but it says, of those, 120 of them were based mostly on religious grounds, like the Crusades, right?

So Crusades. So Crusades, which was terrible. You've got about a million people died in Crusades. That's awful. The Inquisition, which is not a war, but people always want to bring it up.

Christian's bad, you know, because of Inquisition. But I'll just talk about it anyway. So you've got the Inquisition, which lasted some decades, and about 3,000 people died in the Inquisition.

So those are definitely religiously motivated atrocities, awful things. World War I, you've got about 35 million people died in World War I.

This is a political war, right? This is a war of power. People die at the hands of crazy people who twist religion for their own purposes.

[4 : 39] That's horrible. Some of these 120 wars are probably a result of that. But this idea that religion causes all the wars, which is this kind of people think is a truism, is actually, it's just not really true.

Okay, fine. So we say religion doesn't cause all wars. I mean, I feel like you're telling me it's a sort of lesser of evils, you know, smaller numbers and so forth. But you still have to acknowledge that death on any kind of religious grounds is bad.

Like, it's not good. Of course, yeah. And I think there's kind of a terrible irony in this, even if the religious violence is less than others, it's there, you know. And I think the terrible irony in it is that you're all fighting, but at the end of the day, you're all kind of saying the same thing.

No, no. Sure you are. I mean, you've talked to me a lot in the last couple of weeks about how the heart of this is love, forgiveness, be generous. Okay, okay. Yes. We, all the major faiths are the same.

No, that's not right. All the major faiths are very similar in terms of moral code. But that shouldn't surprise us. We talked about the first week that there's an order in the universe, there's some kind of moral order of the universe, and that's...

[5 : 51] So it's not a surprise that kind of thoughtful people will come to the same conclusions about morality. So, you know, that should be expected. But the morality stuff is just not central to the Christian faith.

And, see, at the center of faith, like, people's basic beliefs about God, the world, etc., they're very different. Like, the Christian belief that Jesus, that God became man in Jesus, and Jesus is 100% God and 100% man, and he died on a cross.

That's so central to Christianity. To Muslims, that is just blasphemy. To Hindus, it's like, yeah, perhaps we can take that on because there are thousands of gods.

Buddhists don't really have a concept of God at all. So to say that we're all saying the same thing, it really, it's just, it doesn't make any sense because we're so different. I mean, we can't all be right about these things.

And I think... See, I think we want to say they're all valid and they're all good and they're all true in their own way because we want to be kind.

[6 : 59] And we don't want to be intolerant and we don't want to offend anyone. But I think, ironically, what's happening is when people say that, is they're actually being really disrespectful to these individual faiths because they're not taking their beliefs seriously.

So I think... This sounds harsh. But I think when people say that, that you're all saying the same thing, I think it's... I mean, it's just illogical given the massive differences too. And it's a bit disrespectful so that you're not really taking them seriously.

Okay. Well, let me put it differently then. You know, both you and Jordan in the last couple of weeks have been pretty gracious in acknowledging that there's a lot you don't know, right? Like there's a lot of mystery in this stuff.

Yes. And yet, you know, are willing to make pretty strong claims about being right. You know, and so of course there are differences in the way that the different religions sort of express this.

But what if there are different perspectives of the same thing? I mean, so there's this like famous old parable, right? Of the three blind men and the elephant. Do you know it?

[8 : 00] There's these three blind men and they don't know what an elephant is and they're put in a room with an elephant. And one of them is feeling around and he feels the tail. And he says, ah, an elephant's like a snake, right?

And the other blind man is holding on to the other end and he's holding on to the trunk. And he says, ah, an elephant's like a tree. And it doesn't make sense. And the third blind man says, no, no, no, he's touching the elephant's side.

And he says, an elephant's like a wall. Are they all wrong? No, I mean, they all have a grasp. They're all partly right. You know, they all have part of the truth.

Just they can't see the whole thing. And I think, you know, maybe it would make a lot of sense for religious people to operate a little bit more like this. Just realize that you, maybe you're seeing part of it, but not the whole.

And maybe, like, that would make it a lot better. I don't want to sound like a jerk. But I just have to really disagree with you here.

[9 : 01] I mean, it sounds so nice what you're saying. But there is a fundamental flaw in it.

And that it's this. And I know this is not the way you mean this. And I know this is not the way most people mean it when they sort of use this analogy here. But that example puts you in a position of arrogance.

More arrogant than the Christians are. Ironically, I think. Here's what I mean. And how can you possibly know that no religion can... How can you possibly say no religion has a grasp on the whole truth?

Unless you put yourself in some kind of position where you're saying, I have this comprehensive knowledge of the truth. And I can see that you guys just have a little piece of it. It's like saying, if, you know, all the religions of the world have got a partial view on truth, why don't you just all get along?

Why don't you all agree with me? Why don't you all agree with me? What do I think? You're actually making this kind of comprehensive truth claim when you're doing that. So in the illustration, you've actually put yourself as a not blind person who can see the whole element.

[10 : 12] It's like when people say this. And I'm not trying to be ungracious. I'm just trying to have like a robust dialogue here. But when people say, it's like all the religions of...

It's like this big mountain. Truth is like this big mountain. The truth is on top of the mountain. And we're all taking these different paths to get up the mountain. Like it sounds really lovely. It sounds really nice. But as soon as you say that, you're saying, I can see the whole mountain.

I wish everyone was like me. Then we'd all get along. So you're making... You're saying something that you say no one should be able to say. You're saying something that you said is the cause of all the problems of religion. So I think the argument kind of collapses on itself.

I think the word is self-stupefying. I know it sounds very ungracious, but I just, you know... Okay. This is what I think. Let's assume I'm willing to accept that.

Okay. Even if you are right. Even if you're right about everything that you've said. Right? Christianity is right. Christianity is the only way. There's only one way. It's Jesus. Right. That still leaves you with a big problem.

[11 : 12] There's a lot of people in the world who are never going to hear of Jesus. Who've never heard of Jesus. Right. And to say there's only one way and it's this. It puts those people in a pretty bad position.

And, you know, you've talked a lot about love and forgiveness. And that seems really unfair. It doesn't seem very fair, does it? Yeah. And I have no answer for you on that. If Jesus is the only way and there are millions and millions of people who never get to hear about Jesus, what kind of shape are they in?

If we believe the Christian story, they get to heaven. What's their strategy going to be? What's God going to do with them? You know? And I just don't know. I have no idea. It's a mystery. But when we read about Jesus in the Bible, in the gospel stories, and we remember that this is what God is like.

So we read about how God interacts with people. And there is this overflowing, abundant grace and mercy. And we have this God in Jesus who is seeking out the people who are the least, like the tax collector who are like Nazi sympathizers of the day, and the prostitutes, and the lepers, the social outcasts.

And in those days, what would have been the ethnic outcasts. And Jesus seeks these people out and has nothing but love and forgiveness for them.

[12 : 42] And it's just so wonderful. I don't know what God will do with people that don't know Jesus, have never heard about Jesus. But I do know that we can trust God with that decision.

And he will make a way better decision than we would in the same situation. That's all I can say about to that question. Well, that's a big step of faith.

But thank you for sharing. Thank you. We'll talk next week. All right. The question we're talking about this evening is, how can you say that there's only one way to God?

Like, how can you possibly say that? That seems really exclusive and narrow-minded in many senses. How can you say there's only one way to God? Now, when people make this claim, there's a lot of wrong reasons that they can base this claim on.

And Christians themselves will give wrong reasons oftentimes. So it can be a superior sense of morality or merit. It's a wrong reason. It can be that some people want to include some in their friend group and exclude others.

[13 : 52] That's not a good reason. Some people believe that they possess kind of a special hidden wisdom and knowledge that they have and nobody else has. And they kind of want to hold on to that a bit tightly.

Some people have a fear of other religions. So they're reluctant to admit that there could be any sense of goodness or truth or maybe beauty in other people's religions and beliefs. And some people just have a fear of losing control.

So that's why they want to say there can only be one way to God. Now, what I want to say to you tonight is the Christian confession does not stand on any of those reasons when it comes down to it.

The Christian confession only stands on one reason and one reason alone. And that's the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. Everything hangs and falls on who he is in all of his uniqueness.

And that's why we're looking at Colossians chapter 1. So make sure you have your Bibles out. Because verses 15 to 20 are the earliest Christian song. And it's all about the uniqueness of Jesus Christ.

[14 : 56] And Paul cuts straight to the heart of the matter in verse 19. Look at verse 19 with me. He says, In him, meaning Jesus Christ, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

And then if you flip the page over to chapter 2 verse 9, he says the same thing in a little bit of different language. Paul says, In him, Jesus Christ, the whole fullness of deity dwells, and here's a major word, bodily.

So it's in the human body of this particular person, Jesus Christ, that all the fullness of God dwells. All the fullness. Notice how big that language is.

It's a sense of all of God's perfections. All of God's immensity. All of God's wonderful characteristics dwell in this human face and in this human person.

Jesus Christ, flesh and bone. And that means something very important for us this evening. It means that Jesus Christ is not one among many ways in which humanity can climb up to God.

[16 : 01] It means that Jesus Christ is exactly the opposite. He is the one way in which God has come down to humanity. In this flesh and blood. So if we want to deal with God, we have to deal with this human face and this human name.

Now you may be thinking to yourself, That's a really arrogant claim. If it's not true, it's ridiculously arrogant. You should throw me off the stage.

But if it is true, then it changes the whole game of this thing that we call life. It changes the whole game. And what I want to do in the next 8 or 10 minutes is simply unpack two ways in which it changes the game.

I think it shows us that Jesus is the Lord of creation and redemption. He's the Lord of creation first in that he has a unique ability to give life if he is really God.

Look at verses 15 to 17 with me. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were created through him and for him.

[17 : 15] And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Now one of the first things that probably jumps out to you is the amount of times the word all is repeated.

Five times. All things, all things, all things, all things, all things, all creation. There is a universal magnitude and scope of what is being talked about here. Nothing, this passage is saying, stands outside the creative power of Jesus Christ.

Let me put it another way. Every living thing that lives gets life from Jesus. And I mean everything. I mean the eagles and the pigeons that are flying in the air.

I mean the bumblebees that are flying on the flowers outside and the salmon that are on the sea. I mean every single human being all the way from downtown Manhattan, New York, to the Sahara Desert, to the tribal groups that live way north in BC beyond anything you can imagine.

I mean from the smallest subatomic particle that our microscopes can see, all the way from the largest galaxy that our telescopes can see. All of that is a creation of the Lord Jesus Christ and only exists in him.

[18 : 34] All things. And interestingly, Paul gives further clarity to how creative Jesus really is by a bunch of prepositions. I don't want to bore you with grammar here.

But let's look at some prepositions. Verse 16. For by him all things are created. I think that means all things came into existence by the personal agency and activity of Jesus.

By him. At the bottom of verse 16. All things were created through him. Meaning through his power. Through his energy. Through his wisdom. And then they were created not only through him, but for him.

Meaning somehow all of creation is made for Jesus Christ. He's the reason it exists. He's the goal. So, creation was actually made for him to display his beauty.

For him to proclaim his praise. For him so people could enjoy his presence. And then look at verse 17. The last preposition.

[19 : 40] Everything is created in Christ. So not only is everything created by him and for him, but right now in the present, the reason why we exist or anything exists is because Jesus Christ holds it into existence.

It's amazing. All things. By him, through him, for him, and in him. Which I think means, brothers and sisters, that every single ounce of goodness or truth or beauty that we see in the world, no matter where it's found, is a gift from the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

That's the Christian confession. I think one of the people that stated it best was a 19th century Catholic poet. His name was Gerard Manley Hopkins.

And he wrote this famous poem that many of you probably heard of called The Grandeur of God. And the first line of the poem, he's reflecting on the creation that Christ has created. And he says, the world is charged with the grandeur of God.

Notice the language charged. It's kind of like how you and me charge a cell phone. And that's the only way it works or exists or functions. Same thing with the whole entire universe. It is charged with the grandeur of God.

[20 : 54] Jesus Christ energizes it all. So, brothers and sisters, why is Jesus unique? Not because some humans long ago just randomly decided to venerate him and be like, he's our chosen way to God.

Rather because he's the Lord of creation. Nothing would exist if it wasn't for him. For his good will and his good pleasure. And nobody else can say that of themselves except for him.

Amazing thing about our passage, though, is that it doesn't stop at the uniqueness of Jesus as the Lord of creation. It goes still further. It says he's actually the Lord of redemption. Not only can he give life, he can defeat death.

And this is really amazing. Because we experience life in a whole bunch of ways, right? But every one of us could recognize that the life we live is one of brokenness and sin.

It's fractured and it's frayed and things are not actually the way they're meant to be. Verse 18, death is mentioned. Jesus Christ is described as the firstborn from the dead.

[22 : 04] Meaning he's defeated death. And what this acknowledges is that there is death in the world. Physical, emotional, spiritual, relational death. And we all experience it in our lives and we see it around the world.

And what death does is it destroys God's good creation. Pulls apart what God puts together. Father takes life where God wants to give life. And death is one of these things that kind of hovers over us, all of humanity, like a cloud on a Vancouver winter day.

Many of you want that cloud right now. But this is not a good cloud. Because the cloud of death is one that's ominous and unavoidable and it never goes away.

And the major question that I think every major human religion and every human person eventually has to answer is what are you going to do about death? What are you going to do about it?

Can you do anything about it? The Hindu faith thinks that it's a cyclical thing. You just keep dying and come back to life. Meaning that death is the everlasting curse. For the Buddhist faith, death is kind of ignored as a bit of an unreality.

[23 : 19] For the atheist faith, death is the ultimate reality. It's the last word. So, why not do what we want, eat and drink, be merry, and just... That's the end.

What you see here is that Jesus Christ, when he comes into the face of death, he actually defeats it. And that's where his uniqueness shines most brightest. He is the firstborn from the dead, the first one to have victory over it.

Verses 19 and 20 tells us how he does this. 19 and 20. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, here it is, making peace by the blood of his cross.

That's amazing. It's through Jesus' death that he defeats death. Let me explain how that works. What causes death is sin.

And sin is wanting to live separate from God, who is the source of life. When you want to live separate from the source of life, you end up dying. Because you have no life.

[24 : 31] And what happens here is Jesus Christ, when he climbs up on the cross, and makes peace through the blood of his cross, he is actually absorbing into his body all the hostility and all the sin that separates us from the source of life.

And he's taking it upon himself, and he's burying it in the ground. So that when he rises on Easter Sunday morning from the resurrection from the dead, he says, nothing now separates you from the source of life.

I've dealt with your sin. And so what we see here is that Jesus Christ comes to the creation that he has created, and he claims it for himself.

There was another 19th century thinker. He was Dutch Reformed, not Catholic. His name was Abraham Kuyper, and he famously said of Jesus Christ in this passage, there is not one square inch in the whole domain of human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not say mine.

It's not one inch of it that Christ has not claimed. And you see that in verse 20. To reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven.

[25 : 47] See, brothers and sisters, when Jesus Christ, when Christians claim that Jesus Christ is our only hope, that he's the only way, what we're claiming is not something that is really narrow-minded.

We're actually claiming something that is huge and expansive and has implications for all of creation. And we believe that literally all of creation hinges on the uniqueness of this Lord.

And if we bow before this Lord, we believe that it will change our lives forever. And that we will go from a place of suspicion and hostility towards him to a place of trust.

And from a place of cynicism and despair to a place of hope. And that's what we see in verses 21 to 23. Paul says, And you who were once alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in the body of his flesh by his death in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.

If indeed, here it is, you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel you heard.

[26 : 59] Something that at first sounds really narrow-minded about the uniqueness of this Jesus actually paradoxically ends up becoming the very foundation of the hope for humanity.

And that's why, that's why, when people ask us, how can you say there's only one way to God? We say, I don't know a whole bunch of things.

But one thing I know is that the uniqueness of this man, Jesus Christ, is what you need to know. I speak these things to you in the name of the Father and the Son, Holy Spirit.

Amen.