

Is Jesus the Only Way to Heaven • Acts 4:12

We stopped by the car dealership because we wanted to see a model that had been advertised. The salesperson, whom we'd never met before, introduced himself. I told him what we wanted to see and he said, "Oh no, you don't want that model. Let me show you what you really want." He then showed us a car that was totally inappropriate and proceeded to explain that he could give us a really good deal on this other car because he had a quota to fill by the end of the month. He told us that if he could sell this one additional car in all probability he would win the prize for the salesman of the month. Well, we didn't stay very long. The salesman was really not interested in us or our needs. All he was interested in was himself and his needs.

That was just over three years ago. This past summer we were driving near that same dealership and decided we'd give them another try. It was a different salesman, different words but pretty much the same message. It was a real turn-off.

In much the same way it is often a turnoff to inquirers of Christianity when Christians insist that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven. It seems like Christians so often are intent on pushing Christian ideas without a genuine consideration of the other person's interests, beliefs or needs. In fact, Christians can seem to be guilty of the worst of religious arrogance. What right do Christians have to say that Christians are right and everybody else is wrong? What about Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Jews, animists, pantheists, Satanists, pagans and atheists? Does not each person have a right to believe whatever he or she chooses to believe? Isn't one religion as good as another as long as a person is sincere in the beliefs that are held?

The common sense approach of our culture repeatedly tells us that there are lots of different ways to accomplish the same thing. We have many expressions such as "All roads lead to Rome," "There's more than

one way to skin a cat," "All religions are different ways to the same God."

Whether a person chooses to be a Christian or chooses some other faith is entirely up to that individual. It is a matter of private and personal choice. However, it seems good to at least understand Christianity by hearing what Jesus Christ had to say in the Bible.

In John 14:6 Jesus is involved in a conversation. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Notice that Jesus did not say "I am a way or a truth or I am a means to get to the Father." He's absolutely exclusive in his claim that he is the only one that can provide a personal relationship with God. You might read that and think maybe at that particular point he was using hyperbole. Maybe he was overstating the case and there could be other interpretations of that quote from Jesus.

But let's look at another quote from Jesus, this one in John 8:24. Once again talking on the same subject, Jesus is very pointed in explaining, "I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins." That statement, along with the whole conversation that surrounds it in John chapter 8, was so offensive to the religious people who were listening to it that by the end of the conversation they picked up rocks and they were going to stone him. They were going to kill him because he was insisting that he was the only way to get to God.

This same teaching was picked up by the followers of Jesus. In Acts 4: 12 Peter is speaking again to religious leaders in the city of Jerusalem. He tells them, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

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It's hard to mistake the point that is being made. He's declaring that without faith in the person and

the name of Jesus Christ, there is no other way to be saved from sin and to have eternal life in heaven. Jesus is the only way.

What St. Peter said in Acts 4:12, St. Paul echoes in I Timothy 2:5. In the previous verse Paul teaches that God wants everyone to be saved from sin and to come to the knowledge of truth. He goes on to explain how a person gets salvation and learns the truth about God. He explains, "There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." It's another one of these all or nothing statements. There's only one way to God. It's not through saints, it's not through some other religion, it's not through doing good deeds. The only way to God is through Jesus Christ. He is it. It's all or nothing.

Now I think if I were an objector to Christianity and I read these statements, that maybe they would drive me away more than they would draw me close. I think my objections might be strengthened. However, these lines from the Bible would be helpful to me in understanding why Christians say what they say. For too often Christians are perceived as arrogant and presumptuous in their claim that, "Because I'm a Christian I'm going to heaven and other people are not going to heaven because they are not Christians." These verses would help me to understand that Christians aren't claiming to be smarter and superior to everyone else at all. They are just saying that this is what the Bible teaches. This is what Jesus said. This is God's plan and not ours!

The Bible teaches that all humans are sinners who are alienated from God and therefore we are excluded from heaven. Nothing that we can do will work to remedy our situation. So unless God steps in and does something, we're done. But God did step in.

God's solution was Jesus Christ his Son. He sent his Son from heaven to earth. For thirty-three years Jesus lived a perfect life that qualified him to be a substitute who could take the sin of other people. He was then sent to a cross to die. He took all human sin of all of history on himself and paid that penalty for sin when he died on the cross and then rose back to life again.

But couldn't God have done it some other way? If he's God, why couldn't he just say, "Poof!

All sin is forgiven!" Why not just pardon everybody? Or why doesn't he set up a system of credits and debits so that if you do bad stuff you get a debit and if you do good stuff you get a credit and by the day you die you hope to be at least one ahead on the credits? Then it would be up to everybody to sort of work it out for themselves. Or why didn't God endorse all the different religions that people come up with and say that they all lead to the same place, they all lead to heaven? Wouldn't that be a better alternative than killing his own Son?

Seriously, would God send his Son to die if there really was any other way of doing it? Now if you're a parent, you think about that. Would you give your own child to be sacrificed if there was any other way of accomplishing whatever you were trying to accomplish? It seems obvious that God sent Jesus to die because that was the only solution. That was the only thing that would

work. There simply was no other way.

Think of the one person

that you love more than anyone else in the world. Now, as horrible as the thought is, imagine that person suffering severe injuries in a terrible accident that has left him on life support in a hospital. As you stand by the bed, the attending physician comes in and says that this person that you love so very much is brain dead and there's really no point in continuing life support. He asks if you would be willing to sign a consent form that his organs could be donated to help other people live. The physician says, "Why don't you take an hour and a half to think about it and I'll meet you back here."

You put the form in your pocket and start walking down the hall in a daze. As you wander through the hospital something happens that is never suppose to happen. Through a series of events you find out who the intended recipient of your loved one's heart is supposed to be. This person is going to die very soon without a heart transplant. It is his only hope. And so, in one of the most difficult decisions you've ever made, you take the pen and sign the consent form. Shortly thereafter, the one you love is removed from life support and his heart is removed. And

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then to your absolute amazement you find out that at the very last moment the intended recipient of the heart refuses the heart. Now it is too late to find another compatible recipient and the heart is going to go to waste.

You are so dumbfounded that you rush to the room of the intended recipient and demand, “Why?” The intended recipient turns to you and says, “Well, you know there are a lot of different ways to deal with heart disease. I’ve decided from now on I’m going to take an aspirin everyday, become a vegetarian and start running a few miles a day. And then you know I was reading this article about some alternative medicine you can buy over the counter in Tijuana, Mexico, and so probably later this week I’m going to travel to Mexico and buy this medicine and start taking it.”

Your mouth hangs open in amazement. You don’t know whether you feel pity or rage. You blurt out the words, “Are you crazy? None of that stuff will work! You’re past taking an aspirin everyday. Eating a few carrots is not going to change your situation. None of these things will save your life. You are signing your own death certificate. Your only hope is the transplanted heart from the person that I love more than anyone else in the world.”

God’s plan to save our souls for eternity, the plan explained in the Bible, is absolutely brilliant. It was completely sacrificial but, most of all, it’s the only way that would work. Nothing else would work and so that’s why he did it.

But the objector insists, “There have just got to be some others ways to heaven! Really, as long as you sincerely believe, God certainly will accept that as enough.”

Does it really make sense that all roads lead to heaven as long as you’re sincere? It’s hard to find an example of that principle working in any area of life. If you have high blood pressure or if you have glaucoma or diabetes, you’ve got to take the right medicine for whatever the malady is. You can’t just take any medicine because you’re sincere. If in the middle of the night you wake up with a headache and you mistakenly grab the rat poison instead of

the Tylenol, do you think you’re going to wake up tomorrow morning healthy and headache free just because you were sincere?

There isn’t another area of life where we think and function in that way. Not that sincerity isn’t good. It’s very important. But sincerity does not make the wrong way into the right way anymore than sincerity makes a wrong religion right.

To claim that all religions lead to heaven is both naive and ignorant. It’s typically the type of statement that is made by somebody who probably isn’t very knowledgeable about religion. The truth is that most religions of the world are really quite contradictory one to the other.

For example, Christianity teaches the deity, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Islam denies the deity, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Hinduism says there are thousands of gods. Christianity says there is only one God. Christianity says that Jesus is God and that he is the Messiah. Judaism insists that Jesus is not God and he is not the Messiah. These opposing teachings cannot all be true at the same time. Some are right and some are wrong.

I think that it is more intellectually honest to say that Christianity is wrong and some other religion is right, than to insist that contradictory religions are all right and that they all lead to God and heaven. That just doesn’t make sense.

For those of you who insist that there probably is a better way to God than the way of Christianity, if that is legitimately your belief, then I encourage you to do all you can to pursue it. But I’d like to offer some guidelines to consider along the way.

One of them is to at least give Christianity a full and a fair chance.

Let Christianity compete in the search for a true religion. Read the Bible yourself — don’t base your judgment on what somebody else has said about it. Read the Bible in it’s entirety. Be bold enough to say a prayer to God that says, “God, if you are there, if this is the true way, please show me. And if you’ll help me to believe, then I will.”

A second guideline is to beware of the danger of searching forever. There are hundreds,

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perhaps thousands of different religions in the world and because the major religions of the world are themselves so complex it takes more than a lifetime to check them all out. There isn't time to actually figure them all out and test them all out. A different approach has got to be taken. If someone has an undiagnosed illness you go from doctor to doctor until you find someone who can figure out what is the matter and what you're suppose to do. When that happens then you stop your search. You don't have to see every doctor in the entire world, you just search until you find one who can help you. The same approach can be taken as far as religion is concerned. It's not a matter of examining every religious claim of truth — instead, determine to limit your search to finding the one that works. When you find one that will meet your needs then that is when the search will end.

But a third guideline before making your final choice is to compare the religion you are considering to Jesus Christ. For I think that those who do so, discover that Jesus and the Bible always compare favorably to every potential competitor. In fact, I'm convinced that Jesus Christ, when put head to head in comparison with any other religion, will invariably prove to be superior and will be the only true faith.

Author and speaker, Josh McDowell, offers a fascinating challenge. "Suppose a group of us are taking a hike in a very dense forest. As we get deeper into the forest we become lost. Realizing that taking the wrong path now might mean that we will lose our lives, we begin to be afraid. However, we soon notice that ahead in the distance where the trail splits, there are two human forms at the fork in the road. Running up to these people, we notice that one has on a park ranger uniform, and he is standing there perfectly healthy and alive, while the other person is lying face down, dead. Now which of these two are we going to ask about the way out? Obviously, the one who is living."

"When it comes to eternal matters we are going to ask the one who is alive the way out of the predicament. This is not Mohammed. Not Confucius, but Jesus Christ. Jesus is unique. He came back from the dead. This demonstrates that He is the one whom He claimed to be, the unique Son of God and the only way by which a person

can have a personal relationship with the true and living God."¹

This morning we conclude what has been a seven part series dealing with objections to Christianity. I hope that what we have talked about has been honest and helpful. Honest enough to recognize that these are serious issues. And I hope that at least part of the message that has gotten across has been an encouragement in the all-important search for God and for a life that lasts for eternity.

For those on you who may not yet be Christians but who are thinking about it. Or those who say, "Actually I'm ready — I'm ready to believe." If that's you, I encourage you to express that faith to God. Pray and tell him that you believe that Jesus Christ is the way and the truth and the life. Accept Jesus Christ as your only Savior from sin and acknowledge him as the supreme Lord of your life.

God of heaven and earth, I pray for all of those who are seeking for you that they will not be disappointed. May they discover that the reality is that you are the true Seeker — far more than any of us. That you are the one who sent your Son to die for the sins of each of us and that you have been seeking us ever since. I pray that you will chase the doubts away. I pray that you will give faith. I pray that you will turn doubters into believers and answer the objections. I pray that we'll become Christians through Jesus Christ. Amen.

¹ Josh McDowell, Answers to Tough Questions Skeptics Ask About the Christian Faith, San Bernardino, California: Here's Life Publishers, Inc., 1980, pages 63-64.

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