

John 14:6-7 4/29/12 (The Reason for God #2) **“There Can’t Be Just One True Religion”**

So last week I showed you this internet image that had been bugging me.

Slide: Christianity slide (“CHRISTIANITY: The belief that some cosmic Jewish Zombie can make you live forever if you symbolically eat his flesh and telepathically tell him that you accept him as your master, so he can remove an evil force from your soul that is present in humanity because a rib-woman was convinced by a talking snake to eat from a magical tree. Makes perfect sense.”)

On one level, it would be pretty easy to just dismiss it as nonsense. In fact I saw a response to it that you could just put up and leave it at that:

Slide: Atheism slide: (“Atheism: The belief that there was nothing and nothing happened to nothing and then nothing magically exploded for no reason, creating everything and then a bunch of everything magically rearranged itself for no reason whatsoever into self-replicating bits which then turned into dinosaurs. Makes perfect sense.”)

Those two images represent two different camps in our world today, both of which growing in followers and in passion and in presenting books and resources to defend their thinking. And the reason I couldn’t leave this alone was because in the middle of those camps are our children.

Slide: young person with computer pic

They are huge consumers of the information that’s available on the internet today. But unfortunately, they are not always that good at discerning truth from error. I found it interesting that my weekly email from Answers in Genesis this week also was responding to someone who had referenced this idea of Jesus being a “cosmic Jewish zombie.” They were also giving us a defense against that kind of attack on our Christian faith.

Slide: AIG slide

Aside from the obvious “Great minds think alike” conclusion, I would say that Answers in Genesis is just a great resource and I would encourage you to go onto AnswersinGenesis.org and sign up for their answers weekly email. They will often have an article there that can help you get an answer for some troubling current issue that’s out there.

And that’s of course, what I’m after with this Apologetic series. Apologetics is the discipline of giving answers to the questions people have that are keeping them from the Christian Faith. It comes from 1 Peter 3:15, our theme verse for this series.

Slide: “...in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” (1 Peter 3:15 NIV)

Again, I had intended to do just a one week response to the “cosmic Jewish zombie” thing, but it just didn’t seem to be enough. As I started to investigate the thinking behind that assault on the Christian faith I became more aware of something that’s been out there for quite some time, a new “evangelistic atheism”. Many atheists are no longer content to simply deny God and be allowed that belief or lack of belief. They are now actively involved in trying to persuade people who believe in God to forsake their faith. That thinking is well represented for instance by Richard Dawkin’s book “The God Delusion,” a book he wrote deliberately, he says, to convert people to disbelief. In fact, he dedicated the book to someone that he had led away from faith in Christ. Now I guess it’s understandable if you succeed in persuading someone to your point of view, that you would be proud of that, but it’s just awfully sad as well – and very, very dangerous if he’s wrong. For instance, Jesus said:

Slide: “Jesus said to his disciples: “Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. 2 It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin.” (Luke 17:1–2 NIV)

Again Jesus is showing us the serious nature of what we’re about here - and the reason it definitely deserves more than a week’s worth of discussion. So let’s get to it. I’m calling the series “The Reason for God, and I’ll use the general outline included in the book of the same name by Timothy Keller.

Slide: “The Reason for God” pic

(For those who want to go a little deeper during this series, I’ve got some of his books available for \$10 on the table next to the office.)

So for the next seven weeks we’re going to deal with 7 big-time objections people bring to the Christian faith, starting with the one today:

Slide: “There Can’t Just be One True Religion”

This one is exceedingly popular today, led by “The Oprah”

Slide: Oprah pic

Who has said simply:

Slide: “It’s impossible for there to be only one way.”

And because she says it, it must be true, right? A lot of people think so, and they are staking their eternity on it. In his book, “The Case for Faith”, Lee Strobel quotes Rabbi Schmuley Boteach who says:

Slide: “I am absolutely against any religion that says that one faith is superior to another. I don’t see how that is anything different that spiritual racism. It’s a way of saying that we are closer to God than you, and that’s what leads to hatred.” - Rabbi Schmuley Boteach

In contrast, an approach like the one expressed long ago by Indian philosopher Swami Vivekenanda is much more acceptable today:

Slide: “We (Hindus) accept all religions to be true. The real sin is to call someone else a sinner.” - Swami Vivekenanda

And that sounds all enlightened and fits quite well into the current thinking of society where we’ve documented many times that two thirds of Americans now deny that there is such a thing as absolute truth. So we’ve got things like this bumper sticker:

Slide: Coexist bumper sticker pic

Urging all religions to coexist – which sounds good and is good – from the perspective of living together without persecuting each other. This is the beauty of the first amendment in this country that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...” That part is great - that we’re able to live together without killing each other and so on. That’s one thing, but the search for “Truth” is something else. It may sound enlightened to say that “all religions are true”, but the fact is, it just doesn’t work in practice. The truth is that

Slide: I. The truth is by Definition EXCLUSIVE.

Ravi Zacharius, a superb Christian apologist, makes the obvious statement:

Slide: “Any time you make a truth claim, you mean something contrary to it is false. Truth excludes it’s opposite.” - Ravi Zacharius

And it's funny to see people try to refute that logic. When they try to say: "There is no such thing as truth" they expect us to believe them. Do you see the contradiction? If there is no truth, then why listen to what they say? Keller writes:

Slide: "The reality is that we all make truth-claims of some sort and it is very hard to weigh them responsibly, but we have no alternative but to try to do so." – Timothy Keller

In fact, the alternative is really silly. For instance, one of the most ridiculous statements that has ever been made is that "All roads lead to heaven." Folks, if I told you that the correct way to get to Marne is to head west from here on 1-96 and go straight through the lake, would I be making a true statement? No. Just as surely as there is a correct way, there are wrong ways, ways that will not take you where you want to go. The Veracity Project has an excellent video that explains it about as simply as you can get. It moves along pretty quickly though so you have to stay on your toes as you watch:

Slide: Truth Refocused (The Veracity Project)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2vUWn1QuyLI>

Right? It's either true or it's not. To say that you are the Way the Truth and The Life is just an outstanding claim. Jesus is saying that He not only knows the way to God, or is **a** way to God, but that He is **the** way, **the** truth and **the** life. And there is no other way. And that is absolutely the heart of the Christian faith. The Apostle Paul put it this way in his letter to the Ephesians:

Slide: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8–9 NIV)

In other words, we can have salvation and eternal life by Grace – just because God loved us. Now if that's true:

Slide: A. If Salvation is by GRACE (an undeserved way) it Can't Be By WORKS (a deserved way).

The Bible says:

Slide: "Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. 39 Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses." (Acts 13:38–39 NIV)

Now that verse is making a specific claim: that believing in Jesus brings me the forgiveness of sins He won for me on the cross. And I could never win that forgiveness by trying to earn it, or by keeping the 10 Commandments or trying the best I can to live a good life. And I for one am very glad to know that truth – because even though I try, I can never keep the commandments perfectly. I need the forgiveness of Jesus. And so do you. See, it may be politically correct to say that "all religions are really the same when you boil it all down. We all teach the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of humankind." But it's just not true. For instance, quoting Zacharias, "What do they mean by the universal fatherhood of God when Buddhism doesn't even claim that there is a God? What do we mean by the fatherhood of God when Shankara, one of the most respected Hindu philosophers, said theism is only a child's way to ultimately get to the top, where you find out that God is not distinct from you?" In other words, "You are God." No folks, all religions are not the same at all. And the fact is that:

Slide: B. CONTRADICTORY Religions Cannot Both be True.

Again, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Now, others in history have made that claim, haven't they? Some in our recent history:

Slides: David Coresh, or Jim Jones. Sun Myong Moon claims to be the Christ. Or do you remember Marshall Applewhite, self-appointed leader of the Heaven's Gate cult?

He was going to take his followers on the spaceship that was supposedly trailing along behind the Hale Bopp Comet. 38 of his disciples followed him into suicide.

The Mormon Church believes that God the Father has a "body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's". They believe that Jesus is a god, but that any human can also become a god.

The Jehovah's Witnesses believe Jesus is Michael the archangel, the highest created being and that he is certainly not God, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, three persons in One God.

And of course Islam teaches that Jesus was just a prophet and he did not die on the cross. That person was just a look-a-like and the church supposedly corrupted the story later. And we could go on and on throughout the various religions in the world. They cannot all be true because they believe completely different things that cannot both be true at the same time.

Folks, there is a truth, and the truth is that

Slide: II. GOD has Determined the Way to Heaven.

He didn't ask people how it should be done. He determined it. And the way is through Jesus Christ. The Bible says:

Slide: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12 NIV)

Folks, face it, an Almighty God is not obligated to be politically correct. Oprah does not give Him orders. He's not nearly as concerned about hurting people's feelings as in saving their immortal soul. That's why He sent His Son. And...

Slide: A. Jesus' sacrificial death satisfied the problem of **SIN**.

The bible says: "The wages of sin is death..." (Romans 6:23). All religious systems understand this problem and freely admit that man isn't by nature good enough to get to heaven or eternal life, or nirvana, or the presence of God. And really here is where it does get quite simple. Every other major religion outside the Christian faith teaches man that he has to strive, earn, work, learn or **buy** his way into the presence of God. Only the Christian church understands that "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him (not who works for him, but who believes in Him) has eternal life." And that **is** an exclusive message. So folks, when you study the claim of Jesus Christ, you need to understand today that either Jesus is telling the truth, and He is who He says He is, or He is a lunatic or a liar as we said last week. It's lunatic, liar, or Lord. You make the choice, but you have to choose. Because folks, Jesus Christ is not a nice guy if he's a liar about the most important thing in life, the way to heaven. And He's not a good teacher if he's a lunatic. And he's not a true prophet if He leads people astray. If Jesus is not who He says He is, the Son of God who came to earth to stand in our place and take the punishment for the sins of the world and die on a cross and rise again then he is most certainly not someone that you want to build your life around.

But folks, do you realize that if it is true, then the Lord of the universe loves you. He cares about you. He died for you. He rose again and conquered death for you. And if you believe in Him, then you will live forever with Him in heaven. And folks, **it is** all true. And the good news is that...

Slide: B. Jesus' RESURRECTION proved His power to give you eternal life.

Jesus looked forward to His resurrection and knew His power over death already when He said:

Slide: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.” (John 11:25-26 NIV)

Folks, Jesus was put to death because he would not stop claiming to be the Son of God. But His followers were put to death because they would not stop saying that He had risen from the dead. They’d seen it and knew it was true. Many of them were also crucified. Now let me ask you a question. If they were just inventing a religion, or just wishing it had happened, don’t you think, if not before, then when they felt the point of the nail and saw the Roman soldier raising the hammer to drive it home, that it would be a good time to say, “Hey, I was just kidding. I changed my mind. The guy’s dead, why would I believe in a dead guy...” But that’s not what they said. They said, “How can we help but speak about the things that we have seen and heard.” The disciple Peter said:

Slide: “We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.” (2 Peter 1:16 NIV)

They knew that Jesus proved His power to give eternal life. And they knew that he would give it also to them. So they were more concerned with pleasing Him than with those who were persecuting them.

And finally:

Slide: C. God has promised to show Himself to those who SEEK Him.

In the last analysis, this question of the exclusivity of Jesus and of Christianity, comes right back to the justice of God. People are somehow worried that God will be sending people to hell who don’t belong there. (We had to do a whole series just on that issue). For instance, someone might say: “Mahatma Gandhi lived a more virtuous life than most Christians. Why should he be sent to hell just because he wasn’t a follower of Jesus?” or “You’re only a Christian because you were born in the United States. If you were born in Iran you’d be a Muslim – what then?” And those are tough questions for us. Remember Abraham in the Old Testament worried about the same thing when God was going to totally destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorra because they were so wicked. And Abraham wondered whether he was going to let the righteous die with the unrighteous. Folks, it’s tremendous how Abraham answered his own question. He said,

Slide: “Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Genesis 18:25 NIV)

‘Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?’ Folks, like Abraham, we can be absolutely confident that whatever God does in the case of Gandhi or any other person, he will do what is right.” Again, Bible says:

Slide: “He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.” (Deut. 32:4 NIV) Folks, why are we worried for God about who gets to heaven? You don’t think He can figure that out in a totally just and righteous way? We’re going to talk about this more in this series when we get to the question: “How Can A Loving God Send People to Hell?” Of course God sends no one to hell, they choose it by their rejection of His grace. And I don’t presume to have all the answers here, but I do know that we have God’s promise:

Slide: “You will seek me **and find me** when you seek me with all your heart.” (Jeremiah 29:13 NIV)

The Bible also says:

Slide: “From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.” (Acts 17:26-27 NIV)

Folks, I just want you to know that I am not at all worried about God’s ability to draw to Himself all people around the world who want a real relationship with Him. Again, Ravi Zacharias uses this verse to point out: “We are clearly told that wherever we live – in whatever culture, in whatever nation – he is within reach of every one of us. There is always the possibility of a person crying out on their knees, ‘God, help me,’ and if that happens there are ways in which God can minister to them that are beyond our understanding.”

In interviewing him, Strobel challenged him on that and said: “For example.”

“For example” Zacharias went on, “he might send someone to share the gospel with them. Or let me tell you what happened in the case of a Muslim woman who worked for a very well-known institution in her country. She told me how she was leaving her office at the end of her day’s work and was very unhappy in her heart. As she was walking, she muttered, ‘I don’t know why I am so empty,’ and after that, out of the blue, she said, ‘Jesus, can you help me?’ She stopped on the sidewalk and said to herself, ‘Why did I name him?’ Well, that woman ended up becoming a Christian.”

Folks, I’ve heard too many stories like that from all around the world to be skeptical about it. The Bible says:

Slide: “God wants **all** people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2:4 NIV)

and He is about the work of making that happen. Folks, quickly, to finish: That’s your work too. A unique opportunity is before us in this ever-darkening society. To share with a world that is lost – The WAY. To share with a world wrapped in falsehood – the TRUTH. To share with a dying world – the LIFE that only God can give through Jesus Christ. Take that opportunity and use it for Jesus’ sake. Amen.