

“The Scandal of Christianity” (John 14:6)

What is the mother of all politically incorrect statements? Are you ready? Here it is: “Jesus Christ is the only way to God.” Even the mere hint of this conclusion causes most Americans to cringe and shudder. Many Americans become irate over this declaration. They will spew forth accusations such as “intolerant,” narrow-minded,” “arrogant,” “hateful,” and “bigot.” It quickly becomes apparent that the greatest atrocity in today’s culture is not theft, rape, or murder. It is intolerance. People are willing to tolerate any viewpoint, except one that claims to be uniquely true. Today, a scant 12% of Americans claim that their religion is the only true faith.¹

It should not be surprising that unbelievers reject absolute truth along with the claim that Jesus Christ is the only way to God. What is shocking is that a 2008 poll of 35,000 Americans showed that “57% of evangelical church attenders said they believed many religions can lead to eternal life.”² Now, this is disturbing! It’s not even a foregone conclusion in evangelical churches that Jesus Christ is the only way to God. Is it any wonder that most of our churches are so anemic? Seriously, if Jesus is just one of many possible options, it should be no surprise that Christians aren’t sharing their faith. Why bother? We don’t have to sweat sharing the gospel with our neighbors, coworkers, classmates, friends, and family. They can just believe in “God” or in some other worldview and be saved.

But what does the New Testament actually say about this? In John 14:1–6, Jesus informs His disciples that He must go away and prepare a place for them through His death, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus assures His men that they know where He is going. But Thomas objects, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?” Then in 14:6, Jesus declares the mother of all politically incorrect statements: **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”**³ This statement could be called “the singular solution.” Here, Jesus props Himself up and drops all His competition. Notice the definite article “the.” Jesus doesn’t say, “I am a way, and a truth, and a life.” He insists, “I am *the* way, and *the* truth, and *the* life.” But Jesus is not only saying He’s the way to heaven, He’s also saying He’s the *only* way, that you can’t get there any other way, because they all fall short. You can’t get there by being good. You can’t get there by being religious. You can’t get there by being sincere. You can’t get there by ceremony or knowledge or pedigree. There’s no other way than through Him. In John 14:6, Jesus doesn’t merely point the way, He is the Way. Jesus does not just teach us truth, He is the Truth. He does not represent one avenue to life, He is the Life. This is an exclusive claim that cannot be compromised. In a word, the human quest for God ends in Jesus Christ.⁴ There I said it. Now, you can call me an intolerant, narrow-minded bigot.

John 14:6 is more than sufficient to prove the point that Jesus claimed to be God, but one could ask, “What about the rest of the New Testament?” In Acts 4:12, Peter, the one who denied Jesus several days earlier tells the Jewish leaders: “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.” Now that is an exclusive claim! Peter uses phraseology like “no one” and “no other name.” Clearly, Peter believes that Jesus Christ is the only way to God. In 1 Tim 2:5–6, Paul writes, “For there is one God, *and* one mediator [i.e., bridge] also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom [i.e., the exchange price] for all, the testimony *given* at the proper time.” Paul also believes that the only way humanity can have a relationship with God is through Jesus. Finally, in Matt 7:13–14, Jesus declares, “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” Christianity is narrow because salvation is spelled DONE not DO. It is all done through Jesus Christ.

No reasonable, impartial person can deny that Jesus claimed to be God. But can we believe this claim, and on what grounds? The following historical facts support the notion that Jesus Christ is God and can be trusted for information on salvation.

- ***Jesus claimed to be God.*** No religious figure in history has made such a claim. Not Mohammed, Buddha, or Confucius. Not even Abraham or Moses, who are accepted as prophets and great men by all three major world religions (Islam, Judaism, Christianity) ever claimed to be God. Many have claimed to know the way to God, or have tried to show the way to God, but none have claimed to be the one and only way to God.⁵
- ***Jesus performed miracles.*** John, the beloved disciple, weaves seven “signs” (i.e., miracles) throughout his gospel to demonstrate beyond the shadow of a reasonable doubt that Jesus is God. No one has pulled off the miracles of Jesus. Many have tried and Satan performs counterfeit miracles, but no one has changed water to wine, calmed the wind and the waves, or brought the dead back to life.
- ***Jesus never sinned.*** He never withdrew or modified any statement He ever made. He never apologized. He never needed to ask anyone to pray for Him. He never succumbed to any temptation. Jesus was and is God! As humanly impressive as many religious leaders have been, none of them are without sin.
- ***Jesus came to die.*** The mission of Jesus was to die on the cross for humankind. This was His passion; his entire life was pointed toward the cross. No other religious leader ever sought to die a death of crucifixion for his or her followers. Jesus was the ultimate example of a selfless, sacrificial servant leader.
- ***Jesus rose from the dead.*** After spending the better part of three days in a tomb, Jesus rose from the dead demonstrating that He was God (cf. Rom 1:4). Those who have attempted to disprove Christianity have done so by attempting to disprove the resurrection. But many of these people have instead become convinced that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead! There are countless testimonies of changed lives that have occurred by coming to grips with Christ’s resurrection. This is why the resurrection of Christ is one of the cardinal doctrines of Christianity. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, let’s eat, drink, and be merry (1 Cor 15). If Christ’s resurrection is merely a spiritual resurrection, stop reading this sermon right now! Christianity rises or falls on whether or not Jesus rose.

Of course, many skeptics and cynics will object that these arguments involve circular reasoning. They are right! However, these arguments are necessary more so than ever since the church is biblically illiterate and ignorant. It is critical, therefore, that we know what we believe and why we believe it. Furthermore, the Bible is a supernatural book that changes lives. Human logic and argumentation often fail to persuade people whose minds are already made up. But God’s Word can break through the hardest heart and draw a person to faith in Christ. So it is imperative that you and I still rely upon the Scriptures to argue for Christianity.

It is likely that you agree with what you’ve read thus far. Your challenge is not in believing these facts about Christ; your challenge is articulating this message in a culture that completely rejects your views. My goal in the following pages is to provide you four principles and several arguments and illustrations that will help you to boldly and respectfully share Christ with your unbelieving neighbors, coworkers, classmates, friends, and family.

1. Establish absolute truth. Unless you can establish a common point of agreement, absolute truth, there is no discussion. While our culture vehemently rejects this notion, if you are patient and gracious, you can persuade nearly anyone that they adhere to absolute truth. If you enter a phone booth, you cannot dial any set of numbers and get your home. Every residence and business has a separate number that must be dialed to reach that location. If you want to drive your car to California, you can't drive down any road that strikes your fancy, make any turn you want, get on any interstate that looks appealing, and arrive at your intended destination. If you have a headache, you cannot take any medicine you want to find relief. Some pills might help; others might kill. There is not a single area of life in which you can make any choice you want from a wide array of options and achieve the same result or experience.⁶ "Two plus two equals four" is a very narrow statement. But truth is narrow. When I'm on an airliner, I want my pilot to land on the runway, not on the freeway; right side up, not upside down; and when he is told, neither sooner nor later.

Suppose a teacher returns to her students an exam she has graded over the weekend. One of the students answers every question correctly, except question number ten: "What is the capital of New York?" His answer, "New York City," is marked incorrect. When he challenges the teacher, she reminds him that the correct answer is Albany. But he isn't satisfied. He turns to his classmates and asks, "How many of you thought the capital of New York was New York City?" Half the students in the class raise their hands. The student then turns to the teacher and says, "So, what makes you think your opinion is more valid than our opinion? You're being intolerant. Aren't all opinions equally valid?" Obviously, there is only one right answer to that question regardless of how many incorrect opinions exist. But now let's suppose that the same student says to the teacher, "I think it's too hot in here. Would you turn down the thermostat?" The teacher says, "The temperature is just right; we'll leave it where it is." Whose opinion is correct? Obviously, both opinions are equally valid since there is no objective standard for the "right" temperature.

Most major religions attempt to answer the question, "How can a person have a right relationship with God?" But our culture is attempting to move the answer to that question from the arena of objective truth (such as state capitals) to the arena of opinion (such as comparable temperatures). This means that anyone who tries to shift answers from the realm of opinion back to the realm of objective truth will be regarded as being as intolerant as a person who tries to impose his opinions about the temperature, music, or politics on others.⁷

Nevertheless, I still maintain that unbelievers can and will acknowledge the legitimacy of absolute truth. I find one of the greatest ways of helping people understand this is by appealing to their children. Believers and unbelievers alike love their kids and will do anything for them. So I find the following approach helpful. Imagine that your child develops a terrible disease. As a loving parent, what would you do? You would take your child to the doctor. Now imagine if your doctor said, "There are hundreds of potential cures to your child's condition. Every treatment is a viable option. I have studied all of these possibilities and I recommend each of them for your consideration. I will not prescribe a path to your child's recovery because that would be arrogant and intolerant. There are plenty of medical journals that would dispute my recommendation. I would also offend many of my colleagues. So, you will have to come to your own conclusion because in the end any medical treatment is going to lead to your child's health and healing." What would you say to your doctor? The unbeliever would have to acknowledge, "I would get up in his face and scream, 'Are you crazy? I've never heard such nonsense in my life! Doc, you're supposed to help me. Stop this ridiculous pluralistic and relativistic mumbo-jumbo and help me see my child get well!'" At the end of the day, when push comes to shove, we all hold to absolute truth.

It's a good thing that deep down humankind recognizes absolute truth because the world religions contradict one another.⁸ Islam says that Jesus was not crucified. Christianity says He was. Only one of us can be right. Judaism says Jesus was not the Messiah. Christianity says He was. Only one of us can be right. Hinduism says God has often been incarnate. Christianity says God was incarnate only in Jesus. We cannot both be right. Buddhism says that the world's mysteries will end when we do what is right. Christianity says we cannot do what is right. The world's mysteries will end when we believe what is right. Obviously, these views cannot all be true for we would be dealing with an absolutely schizophrenic God. Hence, we must return to the fact that $2 + 2 = 4$, not 3 or 5. Again, if we patiently and graciously establish absolute truth and demonstrate that all people recognize the reality of truth, we will be laying a compelling foundation for discussion.

Let's suppose that researchers at the University of Washington this very week discovered the cure for cancer. After years of research, they developed a treatment that could instantly cure all forms of cancer. The treatment is painless, one-time, and 100% effective. Would it be arrogant for them to say, "This is the only treatment for cancer you will ever need?" Or would that be the most loving thing they could ever say?⁹ I would guess that many unbelievers who have cancer would be more than willing to receive the cure and go through the treatment. I don't think very many people would complain, "What about all the other potential cures?" When it comes to healing our bodies, most people are looking for a "silver bullet" solution. Similarly, the Bible and human experience teaches that humanity has the spiritual cancer of sin. This disease needs to be cured. Absolute truth in spiritual matters demands that we discern a solution. Christianity provides both the diagnosis and the remedy.

2. Affirm Christ's claim about Himself. Christians don't affirm the necessity of faith in Christ alone because they are bigots, but because He left us no option. To say less than He said is to be disloyal to Him. To say something contrary to what He said is to be disobedient to Him. When coworkers, classmates, neighbors, family, and friends object to our belief in Christ alone, we must gently insist, "Your argument is with Jesus and the Bible, not me. I am a mailman or a mailwoman. I just deliver the mail. I don't write the mail or send the mail. I simply deliver it."

Suppose you receive a memo from your employer saying all employees are to report to work the next morning one hour early. Anyone failing to do so will be docked a day's pay. A coworker of yours is home sick the day the memo arrives, so you call him on the phone and say, "I thought you would want to know that you need to be at work tomorrow one hour early or you'll lose a day's salary." Your friend rants and raves about how unfair such an expectation is. "You don't have any right to tell me to come in an hour early. You're not my boss," he argues. How do you reply to such an outburst? You tell him you are simply reading a memo from the boss. This is not your decision; it is your boss's decision. You're just relaying the information out of concern for your coworker.

We must tell people that Jesus Christ claimed, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me" (John 14:6). This message is not going to be popular, but we must still affirm Jesus' claim about Himself. Since we have staked our eternal destiny on Jesus' words and works, we must love people in our lives enough to tell them the good news of the gospel. Will they reject us and potentially persecute us? Yes, but remember the words of Jesus: "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt 5:10-12). Persecution will come, but so will reward, and in the end, being bold for Christ will be more than worth it.

3. Learn from religious devotees. How many ears do you have? How many mouths? It is likely that you should listen twice as much as you talk. Yet, too many Christians seem to be all mouth and no ears. We talk, but we don't listen. Or we listen just to have an excuse to talk some more. While we appear to be listening we are thinking of what we're going to say next. We need to recognize that the only way we will be able to influence people of other worldviews is by showing kindness and building rapport. We need to ask questions, seek understanding, and find whatever common ground we can. We aren't compromising our Christianity by showing kindness to followers of other religions. But we may see God open doors that otherwise would not be open.

This year on my way to England, God sat me next to a devoted Hindu. We talked for hours. I asked him as many questions as I possibly could. I learned a great deal about Hinduism. I affirmed him in every way that I possibly could. He eventually began asking me all kinds of questions about Christianity. He allowed me to present the gospel to him and even leave him with some gospel literature. I don't think this would have been possible if I had not sought to intentionally draw him out and express interest in his faith. So acknowledge whatever degree of truth exists in other religions. Affirm the Jew or Muslim for his or her adherence to a single, personal Creator. Express to a Buddhist that you appreciate his or her ethical appeal to honesty, charity, and service. Tell a Mormon that you respect his or her marriage and family. Let a Jehovah Witness know that you respect his or her zeal, and you wish that Christians were as zealous. Show respect for people of other faiths.¹⁰

4. Refuse to be intimidated. Christianity has been given a terribly bad rap. While we may be exclusive in our claim that Jesus Christ is the way to God, many other faiths are exclusive as well. Muslims cannot tolerate disagreement with the Koran. Buddhism does not accept the Hindu scriptures and the Hindu caste system. Hinduism does not accept views of life that do not include Karma and reincarnation. Atheists cannot accept any belief in God. Of course, only Christianity is persecuted for its "intolerance." Many Christians are bothered by this, but this is one of the reasons we know that Christianity is true. Satan knows that Jesus is the way and the truth and the life and that no one comes to the father but through Him. Consequently, he is pulling out all the stops in an attempt to destroy Christianity.

In Matt 10, Jesus sends His believing disciples out to proclaim Him as the Christ. He warns them, **"But beware of men, for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues"** (10:17). He then states, **"Therefore do not fear them [the men who will persecute you, 10:17], for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows. Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven."** In these verses, Jesus exhorts His disciples to proclaim Him as the only way to God. He assures them that if they boldly preach His words and works, nothing will befall them that He doesn't ordain. The worst case scenario is the disciple dies a martyr's death, immediately enters Jesus' presence, and is rewarded for eternity. Jesus then explains that those disciples who publicly confess Him will experience His approval; those who shrink back and deny Him will lose out on His approval and the rewards that come from being a bold witness (10:32–33). Don't make the mistake of succumbing to the temptation of pleasing men; you will forfeit God's pleasure. Pray that God grants you the grace to boldly proclaim Jesus Christ as the only way to God.

This message can be boiled down into one statement: *Only Jesus and Jesus only. Only Jesus and Jesus only.*¹¹ When everything is said and done, Christianity is about Jesus. Emmanuel Bible Fellowship is known for its biblical preaching, dynamic worship, and children and teens ministries. But are we known for Jesus? If all of these other ministries were to fall away, would Jesus remain?¹² My ministry needs to be focused on the supremacy of Jesus. If I fail to boldly proclaim Jesus, give me my walking papers and send me packing. Find another preacher that fearlessly preaches Jesus. This is all that really matters. Life's biggest decision is what you do with Jesus and how you proclaim Him to a lost and dying world. *Only Jesus and Jesus only.*

Scripture References

John 14:6

John 3:31–36

John 11:25–27

Matthew 7:13–14

Acts 4:12; 10:42–43; 17:30

1 Timothy 2:5–6

1 John 5:12

Study Questions

1. Why are various world religions, worldviews, and cults so appealing? If I was not a Christian, which worldview would I likely adopt? What makes this faith relatively intriguing? What faith system is in my background? What did I learn from my religious upbringing or lack thereof? Do I know some people from a similar religious background that I can share my faith in Christ with?
2. Are all religions really the same? How do the various world religions contradict one another? What about sincerity? Is it enough to be sincere in one's convictions? Why or why not? Why is it so difficult to proclaim Christ as the only way to God in the marketplace? How have I successfully been able to do this? Why is it so important to speak graciously and truthfully (John 1:14)?
3. What is significant about the claims that Jesus Christ made concerning Himself (John 8:19, 24, 28, 58; 14:9; 18:5)? Did the Jews of Jesus' day understand the implications of His claims (Mark 2:6–7; 14:61–64; John 5:18; 10:30–33)? How did the apostles affirm Christ's unique claims in their writings (John 1:1–4; Acts 4:12; Rom 6:23; Gal 1:8)?
4. What does Jesus Christ have to say about possible alternative routes to heaven (John 3:18; 8:24; 14:6)? If Jesus is the only way to God, what about those who have never heard about Him (Rom 2–3)? How have I attempted to answer this question when I've been asked?
5. What can I do to become more knowledgeable in my understanding of Jesus Christ's person and claims? Where is my knowledge weak? Where is it reasonable? Who do I need to boldly share Christ with this week? How can I do this?

Notes

¹ Christine Wicker, "How Spiritual Are We?" *Parade Magazine*, 10/04/2009: www.parade.com/news/2009/10/04-how-spiritual-are-we.html.

² "Americans: My Faith Isn't the Only Way to Heaven," Foxnews.com, June 24, 2008: www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,370588,00.html.

³ That expression "the way, and the truth, and the life" was commonly used by religious teachers of the day to describe the Torah, the Law. It meant that the Law provided a person with everything they needed to know about life, God, and eternity. Jesus intentionally included those three words to emphasize the sweeping scope of his claim, but His emphasis was on "the Way." And notice that He's not just claiming to know the way or show the way, but that He Himself is the way.

⁴ Gary M. Burge, *The Gospel of John*. NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 392.

⁵ There have been crazies that have claimed to be God or the Christ, but these individuals do not enjoy the respect or credibility of the various leaders of the world religions. Besides, Jesus predicted, "Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There *He is*,' do not believe *him*. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you in advance. So if they say to you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness,' do not go out, or, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe *them*" (Matt 24:23–26). As the day of Christ's return draws near, more and more of these antichrists will creep up onto the scene (cf. 1 John 4:1–3).

⁶ James Emery White, *A Search for the Spiritual* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 94–95.

⁷ Robert Jeffress, *Hell? Yes! . . . And Other Outrageous Truth You Can Still Believe* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2004), 27–28.

⁸ The five major world religions differ significantly on major issues such as salvation and the afterlife. Hindus are pantheists or polytheists who worship more than 300 gods. Hindus see humankind as fundamentally divine, but trapped in this world due to ignorance and bad karma. Deliverance comes from changing beliefs about reality and true identity. This entails sentencing oneself to an endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. The only way to break this cycle is through the spiritual development that is achieved through the practice of four yogas. Buddhists are pantheists or atheists. Buddha, a dissatisfied follower of Hinduism, decided to develop his own name-brand religion built on the premise that humankind's basic problem is the desire for pleasure and status as well as the necessities of life. According to Buddhism, the only way we can ever stop our cravings and enter into the restful state of nirvana is by following the Noble Eightfold Path. Muslims are theists and Unitarian. Muslims believe humankind is weak but not sinful in nature and are under God's judgment for disobedience to Allah's laws. Salvation comes from his laws. Judaism claims that obedience to Yahweh and the OT Law is the only path to righteousness. Christians are theists but Trinitarian. Christians believe that humankind is alienated from God and salvation can only come through faith in Jesus Christ.

⁹ Pritchard, "Is Jesus the Only Way to Heaven?" (John 14:6): www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/2005-07-31-Is-Jesus-the-Only-Way-to-Heaven/.

¹⁰ Before we know it, we will be outnumbered by other faith systems in America. Christianity has the slowest growth among religions in America. Between 1990 and 2001, Christianity grew only 7%, Mormonism grew by 112%, and Humanism by 169%. Islam grew by 210%, Buddhism by 270%, and Hinduism by 337%. The Wiccan religion grew the fastest: 1,675%. Nearly 1 out of 5 young people age 18–22 now self-identify as atheists. Gateways 8/9/09 quoted in Church Leaders Intelligence Report 10/9/09.

¹¹ Pritchard, "Is Jesus the Only Way to Heaven?"

¹² Wilkins states this well, "Christianity claims to be *the* truth. We differ about many things, from the right style of worship, to the right lifestyle, to the right time Jesus will return. Christianity's claim to being right must stay centered in the essential truths of historic Christianity, not trivial issues. The important issues are that Christianity claims to be the true way to know God, salvation, and eternal life." Michael Wilkins, "Why do you claim Christianity is the only way?" *Moody* (March/April 1999): 28.