

# Challenges To Christianity

## Christianity is Exclusive

### Week 4

#### Objection

Christianity can't be the only true religion!

#### The Rabbit Trial

- Discussions about *other* religions – sometimes we think we need to be an expert at all the religions to talk into this objection. We don't. It's sufficient to know that not all religions teach the same things.

#### Understanding The Objection (Keith)

At the heart of this objection is our culture's dislike and mistrust of exclusive claims. To say, "Jesus is the *only* way to God" is to be labelled intolerant, arrogant, and narrow minded.

#### Exclusivity of Christianity Makes Christians Intolerant (Keith)

*Response: There's a difference between intolerance and disagreement.*

It is not intolerant to disagree with someone's point of view. To disagree with someone's view of the world doesn't mean one is being rude, or hostile, or betraying some un-written moral code.

There are two competing definitions of tolerance :

- Treating people with respect even though you disagree with them. This is what tolerance used to mean.
- All views are equally valid; no view is better than another. This is the new tolerance.

Notice that the first definition of tolerance is about treating people as equal. The second definition of tolerance is about treating beliefs as equal. This is the irony of the new tolerance. It makes people less tolerant of other people. Those who oppose the exclusive claims of Christianity because they see the idea as intolerant, are themselves imposing their own kind of intolerance.

#### Exclusivity of Christianity Makes Christians Arrogant

*Response: It's not arrogant if it's for the common good.*

Often Christians are called arrogant in thinking that they, and only they, are the ones who know God's plans. But with careful thought it becomes clear that it's never arrogant to share something that is intended for a common good.

Because the message of Christianity is that Jesus is the only way to salvation, then to not share this exclusive claim would somehow be unethical.

Another problem with this accusation is that it is a double-edged sword. People who call Christians arrogant because we say Jesus is the only way are trying to push *their way* on everybody else—why isn't that seen as arrogant?

### **Exclusivity of Christianity Is A Narrow Minded Western Worldview**

*Response: The exclusive claims of Christianity originate with Jesus, a Jewish man living in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Palestine.*

Sometimes the exclusive message of Christianity is seen as narrow-minded attempt to impose a Western religious system on other people. But let's think for a moment where this exclusive claim comes from: The lips of a Jewish man living in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine. How is that a Western religious system? Those who simply bear witness to Jesus' claim can hardly be accused of pushing a narrow-minded Western religious agenda.

The idea that there are multiple truth's about our existence is a strong western ideology. If anything, the suggestion that there are multiple paths to religious Truth is a "narrow minded western worldview."

### **Do All Religions Lead To God?**

For someone to claim that all religions lead us to the same destination can't be true, because there are religions in which there is no destination.

Maybe we can challenge people to think about these issues by asking a follow up question:

- If you think all religions lead to God/heaven, then aren't you saying the religions that don't believe in a god/afterlife are false?

What we're trying to get at with our question is to show people that their statement already assumes that some religions are false. By saying that there is a God or there is an afterlife that all religions lead to, they are actually saying that any religion without a god or without an afterlife is false.

## All Religions Are True

Are “all religions true,” or “basically the same?”

The challenge revolves around the idea that is that beneath the surface all religions are the same. But, what if I made up a religion, would that be true? Of course not!

Also, religions contradict each other, and so it’s not logically possible for them all to be true. Notice first of all that this is not a religious claim; we’re not saying, “It’s our religious belief that not all religions can be true.” Rather, this is a point of logic. If religions contradict each other, then by elementary principles of logic they can’t all be true.

I think everyone can see that religions have differences, but those who say that all religions are true think these are superficial differences. They think that it’s what the religions have in common that is important, not the differences.

Examples of how different religions contradict each other:

Christianity: Jesus is the Son of God	Islam: Jesus is not the Son of God, and it’s blasphemy to say that he is
Islam: Humans must submit to God	Taoism: Humans must live according to the Tao
Mormonism: You can become a god	Christianity: You can’t become a god
Hinduism: The world is an illusion	Most religions: The world is real
New Age: “God” is an impersonal life force that pervades all things	Christianity: God is a personal being and is separate from other things
Buddhism: The purpose of life is to avoid suffering and attain enlightenment	Confucianism: The purpose of life is to fulfill one’s role in society with propriety, honour, and loyalty.

## The Blind Men and the Elephant

Three blind men visit the palace of the Rajah, where they encounter an elephant for the first time. The blind men touch the elephant, one by the tail, one by the ear, and one by the trunk. Naturally, each of them has a different idea of what the creature is like, and so they argue. Then the Rajah speaks up and explains that the elephant is a big animal, and that each of the men only touched one part. They need to combine the parts to understand what an elephant is like.

The point of the parable is that although the blind men all had different ideas of what the elephant was, each of them was only encountering a piece of the truth. To understand the whole truth, they needed to put the pieces all together. So, someone might say to us Christians, you shouldn't believe that your religion is the only way to God; all religions are just different perspectives on the same Ultimate Reality. You need to have a broader, more inclusive approach to religion if you want to understand who, or what God really is.

### *1. It's an illustration*

People who use this parable are claiming that all religions are just pieces of the truth, and they've given an illustration to explain what they mean. But they haven't given us any reason to think this is true (remember the burden of proof).

"What reasons can you give me to think that this is the way things really are?"

### *2. If religions don't fit together, then this parable is a bad analogy.*

The application of this parable assumes that religions can somehow be fit together into a cohesive whole.

A better analogy would be if one of the blind men said, "An elephant is a tiny creature, the entire thing fits in the palm of my hand" but another said, "An elephant is bigger than a house." These two descriptions can't be small pieces of the whole truth; they are directly contradictory. An elephant can't be both tiny and enormous at the same time.

### *3. What if the elephant speaks?*

The parable assumes that we learn about God by groping like blind men. What if God speaks and reveals Himself to us? What if that's how we learn about God? Christians believe that God has spoken and revealed Himself to us through Jesus. The parable says that people find God by groping, but the Bible says that God reached down to people to find us and rescue us.

### *4. Where is the pluralist in this parable?*

If you're talking to a non-Christian friend and they offer this parable as their own view of religion, what they're saying is that you, the Christian, are one of the blind men in the parable. You're groping, trying to find out what this creature is, and you're unable to see the big picture.

You should ask your friend "Where are *you* in this parable"? Is she one of the blind men? If so, then she's in the same boat as we are--blind and can't see the whole truth. Or is she the Rajah, or the narrator of the parable? If so, how did she manage to overcome the blindness that everyone else suffers from?

### **It Doesn't Matter What You Believe, As Long As You're Sincere**

The problem with this point of view is that there's no reason to single out sincerity as the only thing that God cares about. Aren't terrorists sincere? Can't people be sincere and commit terrible crimes? What is it about sincerity that makes it the only important thing? Isn't integrity important, too? What about moral virtue?

The other problem with this point of view is that it assumes that sincerity is more important than the truth.

### **It's True For You But Not For Me**

The response, "it's true for you but not for me" claiming that there are no *universal* religious truths. The problem is that this claim is in itself a universal religious truth. It's a contradiction in terms.

### **What About Those Who Haven't Heard**

How are we to think about people who haven't been able to respond to the Gospel invitation of Jesus?

Three things are important:

1. *Jesus is the only one to salvation.*

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

2. *God wants everyone to be saved & restored.*

"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9)

3. *God always does what is right.*

He is holy, just, and loving. "He has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed." (Acts 17:31)

4. *God's judgement is based on what a person knows/does.*

"Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly." (James 3:1 see also Romans 1:18-20; 2:6)