aren’t all religions basically the same?
Sean McDowell

During the release of the three prequels for the Star Wars series, George Lucas was asked if the movies had any religious meaning. He said, “I remember when I was 10 years old, I asked my mother, ‘If there’s only one God, why are there so many religions?’ I’ve been pondering that question ever since, and the conclusion I’ve come to is that all religions are true” (Time, April 26, 1999). According to Lucas, and many Americans today, all religions are basically the same.

While this perspective is often driven by a noble desire for common ground, the profound differences between religions suggests otherwise. This becomes clear when we consider how various religions view the nature of God, the identity of Jesus, and the means of salvation.

1. **God:** Christians believe that God is a Trinity—one God eternally coexisting in three persons. Muslims believe in a Unitarian God (Allah). Some versions of Buddhism are atheistic. Hindus believe in thousands of gods. New Agers believe that all reality is divine. Religious Naturalism holds that the world is the body of God, a view called panentheism.

2. **Jesus:** World religions also differ radically on the identity of Jesus. Christians consider Jesus the Messiah, the divine Savior of the world. While Muslims consider Jesus a holy man, they vehemently deny his divinity. Jews reject Jesus as the Messiah and consider Jehovah the one true God (Dt 6:4). They especially object to the doctrines of Trinity or incarnation. Hindus believe Jesus is one God among many. Buddhists consider Jesus an enlightened guru.

3. **Salvation:** The religions of the world also differ drastically on the means of salvation. Christians believe that salvation is by grace through faith alone (Eph 2:8-9). To the Jew, salvation is tied to keeping the commandments in the law. Muslims try to tip the scale of judgment in their favor by following the Five Pillars of Faith. The afterlife for Hindus involves a karmic process of paying off debt with the purpose of becoming one with the impersonal Brahman. And to New Agers, salvation is found through the recognition of oneness with the God, humanity, and the universe.

World religions also hold opposing views about which books are Scripture, the nature of human beings, creation, and the afterlife. These are not minor points, but claims that stem from the heart of each religion. While most religions agree on the Golden Rule, their core doctrines are simply beyond reconciliation. While all religions could be wrong, they can’t all be right. This leaves us two options for the religions of the world: either they are all wrong or only one of them is right.

So, how do we know which one is right? Examine the evidence. This is where Jesus stands apart from other religious figures. Jesus not only claimed to reveal knowledge about God, he claimed to be God in human flesh. And he confirmed this claim by
fulfilling prophecy, living a sinless life, doing miracles, and rising from the dead (Rm 1:4).

Why would someone like Mr. Lucas say that all religions are true? The nature of truth is that two contradicting truth statements cannot both be true at the same time without some qualification. We readily live this way in every other area of life. We know 2+2 does not equal 4 and 5 at the same time. We know that one person cannot physically be in Florida and Oklahoma at the same time. So we must obviously believe that God cannot exist and not exist at the same time, right? Not exactly. Our world is full of people who either deny anything can be known as true when it comes to religion or say that each individual belief about religion is true. Unfortunately truth does not work that way.

Mr. McDowell is exactly right. Religions may agree on certain moral points as not lying or the golden rule, but they differ fundamentally on some of the most important points. I would add that means of salvation is one of the most drastic differences. In all other religions being right with God, reaching heaven, attaining nirvana, pleasing the deities, having a better reincarnation, etc. are all based on moral performance. You only succeed based on how “good” you are or how well you hold up to the moral guidelines of the faith in question. This is where the teachings of Christianity and Jesus in particular stand in stark contrast to all other religions. It is not by morality, legalism, tradition, or superstition that one is made right with God. Righteousness before God is found only through trust in the person of Jesus and His work. Morality by itself was never meant to be a means of salvation. Morality is a response to salvation. Salvation comes first. A love for Christ and what He has done inspires obedience knowing that the law actually frees us to live to our full potential. This, in my opinion, is one of the biggest differences in religions when comparing them. Jesus is not just a moral teacher in whom good ideas are found. He is the source of salvation Himself. All religions can not be true.

Pastor Chris

Discussion Questions:

If there is only one God, why are there so many religions? Have you ever been asked this question or wondered about it yourself?

Why is our culture so quick to agree to the notion that all religions might be true?

1 Peter 3:15 calls followers of Christ to be ready to give a defense for what they believe with gentleness and respect. Inherent in this command is the fact that follower may offend people by saying that not all religions can be true. How does one
navigate a situation where a person may be offended by the Truth shared in love that
you proclaim? How does one share truth with gentleness and respect?

Discuss some different religions you are familiar with and how their beliefs differ from
that of Christianity.

How does the message of the gospel differ from how salvation is achieved in other
religions?

Jesus often condemned the religious leaders of His day because their religion was
based on legalism, tradition, and/or superstition. Read Matthew 12:1-8. What were
the religious leaders worried about? Why? How did Jesus answer them? What does it
mean when Jesus says, “something greater than the temple is here”? Jesus points out
that these leaders hearts are not right and that God desires something different from
them than what they are doing. How do we protect from being like this?