

(FAQ) ARE ALL RELIGIONS THE SAME?

Acts 4:12

Frequently Asked Questions Message Series

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A few years ago I had a visit with a young woman who was a college graduate. In the course of our conversation she began to talk about how she doesn't see much difference between the various world religions like Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and all the rest.

She told me she believes we are all worshipping the same God simply in different ways; she believes that each of these religious roads are essentially leading to the same place—to the same spiritual oneness with God and/or heaven depending on what one prefers to call it. She believes each religion has their own truth; that you can find your truth in whichever of these paths you choose.

This kind of thinking, of course, is definitely popular and is very prevalent on many college campuses; it is the attitude of many young adults. It is one way that many are choosing to survive in our pluralistic and religiously diverse society.

Therefore the question we are going to focus on this morning is, “Are all religions the same?” Are they all simply a different form or expression of the same thing? Are we all worshipping essentially the same God; are they all heading toward the same place?

As we delve deeper into studying these questions it is important to first of all lift up the truth that inside each and every person there is a longing, an emptiness, a hole that is yearning to be filled with God. Inside every person there is a spiritual nature that longs to worship and reach out to something greater than oneself.

In fact every culture and civilization of people who have ever been studied have always had some form of religion; some form of worship; some focus on a deity or various deities. As anthropologists have studied long-lost tribes; as archaeologists have studied ancient civilizations they have usually found that each one has some form of belief in a spiritual realm.

This affirms of course our belief as Christians that no person is a blank slate when they are born; people are not just random blobs of protoplasm. Rather we believe that each person is a special creation of God; each person is created with a spiritual inner soul that longs to be in relationship with the everlasting God.

Therefore it obviously follows that every culture/person will reach for some way to fill up this need. If Christianity or one of the major religions are not in that culture they will develop their own. People are prone to find some way to connect with that which is bigger than they are.

The ancient church father, Augustine, said these words, “*Our hearts are restless until they rest in God.*” God has placed inside every person a restlessness for him. This then has resulted in many of the different religions and philosophies coming into being.

A second important understanding concerning the various religions in our world is that most of them do share some similar teachings with Christianity and with each other. In fact most

religions have some form of *“love your neighbor as you love yourself,”* as well as some good virtues upon which to live one’s life. They also have some really good people who are members.

A basic truth is that there is often some excellent wisdom and important truths in these other religions. In other words it is not that these other belief systems are devoid of anything good; it is not that they are necessarily evil. In fact there are certainly things that we may actually learn from these people and religions; things which may help make us more loving and compassionate.

Therefore if people have a built in need to worship; if there are truths in each religion; then aren’t all religions the same? The answer is no they are not the same. Even though some may be focused on some similar goals; even though some may hold some similar truths they are not the same. It is not simply comparing apples to apples.

The important truth and factor which makes them different is Jesus. Acts 4:12 states, *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved.”* The truth of how we are saved eternally by God is what makes our beliefs different.

In studying the other religions of the world it is obvious that their focus is not on a personal relational God. In fact, their god(s) is often distant; often vengeful; often living in statues or things. The focus is not on a god who an individual can know in an intimate way; on a god who cares about and knows them by name.

In contrast with all these other religions Christianity is based on the truth that our God didn’t stay an obscure figure off in the clouds somewhere; he rather came to earth in a little baby in a manger; he gave up his life for you. God became flesh so we might know him as a friend.

It is therefore because of Jesus that we know that our God is gracious and forgiving. It is because of Jesus that we know we can pray to God as a loving father. It is because of Jesus that we know there is a place reserved for us in heaven. Jesus enables us to be able to know God in a real and personal way.

A second major difference between Christianity and other world religions is the motivation with which to serve God. In the other religions there is an emphasis on all the things that a person needs to do to be right with their god. They need to pray bowing a certain way 7-time a day.

They need to do certain rituals in order to appease their god; to prove that they are worthy followers. They need to use various meditation techniques in order to try and achieve spiritual oneness with the infinite. They need to pray that in their reincarnated life they will be in a better place than they are in this life.

The emphasis in all these religions is “do.” Every aspect is focused on what they need to do to attain their own salvation; their own nirvana; their own peace; their own godly being. It is centered completely on that person, that individual being the master of their own destiny.

On the other hand the focus of our Christian faith is not on “do” but on “done.” The good news is that our God through Jesus has done it all for you and for me. Jesus died on the cross; he rose from the grave in order to pay the complete price for all our sins and failings. Jesus satisfied all the requirements so you can be completely free.

This means that none of us are saved by what we do; none of us are saved by how righteous we are; rather we are saved only by the grace and love of God in Jesus. We cannot earn our own way to God; we cannot achieve our own spiritual goodness. It is all a gift of our loving God; it can only be received by putting our faith in him.

The reason therefore we as Christians worship God is out of praise and thanksgiving for his wonderful love. The reason we love our neighbor as we love ourselves is because Jesus has first loved us. The reason we seek to follow his commands; seek to live moral and upright lives is out of love for him. It is not a have to; it is a want to.

The Christian life is one that is filled with freedom and joy. It is a faith that celebrates and values each person and life. It is a faith that values the freedoms of others; that works for justice and peace for all people. The Christian life is one which cares for the hungry; the needy; the sinners; the homeless; the oppressed.

In a world where some religions dictate that they are to rule the laws and government; where all who believe contrary to their beliefs should be denied rights and perhaps even be killed; Christianity is the religion who reaches out in love to all people regardless of their beliefs. There are Christian missionaries all over the world bringing medical care, food, and clothing to people no matter what their religious background—all in the name of Jesus.

My friends I know that it is popular today to promote the idea that all religions are the same; the idea that it really doesn't matter what you believe as long as you believe something. It is also of utmost importance in preserving our constitution be tolerant and understanding of whatever way people choose to worship or live their faith—we need to protect that freedom in the US.

Yet it is also important for us to remember is that these religions are not the same as our Christian faith; they are not simply another expression of the same thing. Without knowing Jesus and his amazing love people do not know God in the same way we do; they do not know the freeing power of our gracious God.

Therefore while we definitely respect, care for, are good neighbors to people who are of other cultures/religions, don't you think we should also want to share with them this amazing message of Jesus? Don't you think we should want each person to know that our God is a personal God who also loves them; who has done it all so that they, too, might have eternal life as a gift?

It is true that even among Christians today there is often the attitude that we should keep the message of Jesus hidden away; we should simply avoid witnessing to these people. Yet we need to learn from Jesus himself.

Jesus taught us to love, to listen and to be a friend to all people. He taught us to also be aware of the opportunities we might have to walk across the room and share our story with someone else. Don't argue religion; philosophy; whose right/wrong. Simply share what Jesus is doing in your life; share the love and freedom you have found in him.

My friends, most people in our world worship a god(s) or manifestations of our God. He placed that need deep in every person's heart. Yet only in Jesus do we know the true face and true nature of God. My sincere prayer is that you will get to know Jesus better each day; may you be set free to worship and live for God in all his beauty, glory and wonder.