

Why Are Christians So Intolerant of Other Beliefs?

John 14:6-11

6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you had known me, you would have known my Father also.[d]From now on you do know him and have seen him."

8 Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." 9 Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. 11 Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves."

What's up church fam. How we doing this morning? My name is Marcus and I'm one of the pastors here at City. If you have your bibles go ahead and turn with me to [John 14: 6-11](#). For those who are new here or we just haven't been introduced, I would love to meet you and get to know a little of your story. And also if you're new here, let me catch you up on the series we are in. We are working through a series called Question Everything, where we are trying to answer questions that people who are working through deconstruction have about the church. So far we've talked about what it actually means to deconstruct well. We dove into why Christians are so politically driven. And last week Kent talked about why God cares about who I sleep with. We only do light, breezy topics here at City if you were wondering.

Now today we will be talking about the question: **Why are Christians so intolerant of other beliefs?**

You typically hear this a lot when people who don't follow after Jesus say things like: "Do Christians really believe that even if you are good you can still go to hell just because you don't accept Jesus. Or something like: Do Christians really think they know the only way to God?" So these questions and others like it fit

into the overall question why are Christians so intolerant of other beliefs. And for some of us in the room right now, these might be questions we are asking ourselves right now or people that we know are asking them.

If you're in college, maybe your friends are the ones asking you these questions. Or a professor has posed this question in the classroom. Maybe you are trying to be on mission at work and a coworker tells you this is the thing they can't get past. Maybe you see this on social media. Your favorite celebrity just tweet stormed one of these questions or Tik Tok'd it and as the likes pour in it has you questioning things as well. For those reasons and more, that's why we wanted to tackle this question today.

And here's the thing, there's no way around what Jesus claims, so what we are gonna do is look at the claim itself, unpack some stuff, and we will circle back and try to answer some of the natural pushbacks. Y'all ready, cause we bout to go in. Alright, verse 6.

6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

So there it is. Jesus comes in hot and lets his disciples know what's up; he says I am the only way to the Father. He doesn't say I'm "a" way to the Father or I'm one way out of equally good ways to the Father. He says pretty clearly I'm "the" way to the Father. So that's the claim and from here he keeps going...verse 7.

7 If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." 8 Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us."

Philip says "Jesus if you will just bring about a manifestation of God, right here. If we can have a visible, physical encounter with God, we will believe you 100. Let's see what Jesus says in response to this:

9 Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. 10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. 11

Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

So Jesus' response was, Philip, how long have we been kick'n it fam and you still trip'n? You still don't know? "You're asking for a physical encounter with the Father? Well, what if I told you point blank, I am the manifestation you were looking for." Sometimes people will say that Jesus doesn't claim to be God, but I mean, this is pretty clear right. He said, if you've seen me, you've seen the Father. Jesus is making an undeniable claim, he's saying that he is God himself and therefore the only way to God. Now Jesus isn't the only one that claims this, New Testament authors also claim this.

1 Timothy 2:5 says this:

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus...

Paul's not beading around the bush at all. There's one God and one mediator. Mediator as in someone who goes between two parties. Paul says that Jesus is the only one that can do that. We also see this in [Acts 4:11-12](#):

11 This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. 12 And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

So this is Peter and John speaking, and they are making a similar claim that Jesus made, and that Paul makes in 1 Timothy. The way they put it is that there is no salvation in no one else, and then they double down and say, matter fact, there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. So not me, not you, not Caesar during this reign, not any President, not any world leader, not your favorite actor, actress, not yah momma, not yah daddy, not your kids, wife, husband, no-bah-ty but Jesus.

They are also saying Jesus is the only way to God.

There's some pushback I hear people talk about and it's that of course these people thought that Jesus was the only way to God. They had a simplistic

mindset, or that they were narrow minded. They didn't know about all the religions that were out there. They were not pluralistic or like our society is today. But here's the thing, the problem with that is that it's not true at all.

The Roman Empire had a society that was actually built on pluralism. Rome had conquered the world and all the people they had conquered had their own gods. The Ephesians had their god, the Egyptians had their god, the Jews had theirs as well. And so on and so forth. Some gods were not geographical but restricted to a certain dimension of life like fertility or traveling or war... and that was all cool with Rome. The way Rome saw it everybody could have their own god, but there was a limit on their sphere of influence.

Roman historians tell us the one thing no one was allowed to say was that their god was superior to all the others. Basically, the message was "to each his own as long as you don't say anyone else's view of God is wrong." Does that sound familiar to anybody? Especially anybody living in 21st century America? That's us btw. I mean, it's pretty identical to our approach today right?

This was the world that Christianity was born into.

One thing people today will say and believe is that because Christianity was sort of exclusive and dogmatic their claims were a product of its day. Sure they believed that sort of thing back then, but now we have come to see the value and worth of all faiths and traditions and religions.

But the reality is, guys like Peter and Paul weren't preaching to monotheists. Monotheists are people who believe in one singular powerful God. They were trying to reach polytheists. People who believed in multiple gods and multiple ways to the gods.

So when they stood up in the market square with people surrounding them and said things like "We know you guys serve all of kinds of gods, but we want to let you know that Jesus is the only way to salvation", people's response was not "THANK YOU SO MUCH. THIS IS WHAT WE WERE LOOKING FOR" They we're not like the people in Jonah's day when Jonah gave his couple word sermon and everyone repented. Nah fam, they got beaten and ridiculed and thrown in jail nearly everywhere they went. The Bible has plenty of stories about

such things. People of antiquity were not more inclined than you and I to believe in an exclusive, singular God...they actually were less so. And yet there were Peter, John, and Jesus and everyone else following Jesus, saying that he was the only way to God.

So this, this right here is what has been handed down to us through church history. And while we are a long way from the early Roman empire, the claim that Jesus makes of being the only way to God remains very unpopular and contested to this day.

Now when I hear it contested today, the objections come in 3 primary forms:

- 1) **Is it not dangerous to claim that Jesus is the only way to God?**
- 2) **Is it not arrogant to claim that Jesus is the only way to God?**
- 3) **Is it not more inclusive to claim that all good people go to heaven, no matter what they believe?**

Usually people will say it in one of these three ways. That claiming Jesus is the only way to God is either dangerous, arrogant, or exclusive. So that's what I want to do for the rest of our time; to spend some time on each and help unpack them a little. First up...

Is it not dangerous to claim that Jesus is the only way to God?

People will argue, doesn't religious fundamentalism cause all sorts of problems and therefore should be done away with? Isn't this sort of religious fundamentalism that starts wars and leads people to crash airplanes into buildings and all of that? Doesn't it divide and create strife among us?

To that I would say, yeah it certainly can be. But I would also add, it all depends on what the fundamentals are though. If your fundamental is, "we have the truth and we will do anything and everything to force you into said truth. Then yeah, that's pretty dangerous. And there are many who claim to be Christians that do this in various ways. Kent covered this in the second week, but there are some that desire power and use Christianity as their front man so to speak. Christianity is just a mask so they can have power.

But listen, for followers of Jesus, that's not what our fundamentals are. That's not what it means to follow Jesus. It never has been. The center of our faith is Jesus. He embraced those who were different from him and even died for his enemies. He didn't force anybody into his belief system, he offered. He invited. He welcomed. And the people that wanted something else, he let them go after something else. With the people that wanted to walk away, he was like cool.

Sometimes people use the term Christian extremist to refer to people being all in on their faith. Meaning, you will go to any lengths for your faith. But often the type of people that are attached to Christian extremists are people who claim Christianity but also do things like what a dude in Seattle did, who went into an abortion clinic and shot people. He was labeled a Christian extremist. And sometimes people will use that term to describe anyone who does things differently because they follow Jesus.

For the record, I hate the term Christian extremist, it just feels weird, but if we were to use the same term, I would say that a *true* Christian extremist is someone who would serve those who were against them, who would die for their enemies. The same as Jesus did. He didn't come to throw his power around and be served. He could have but instead he says in Matthew 20:28 I came to serve. There's even a passage where one of Jesus' disciples tries to use violence to prevent Jesus' arrest and Jesus was like, nah fam, put that sword away. That's not how we do it here.

So really, if you met a *true* Christian extremist, they wouldn't kill you if you disagreed with them, they would actually die *for* you. We have a person who is the truth, who forgives us, and as a result we should be the most forgiving, the most understanding, the most sensitive, the least high and mighty people around.

So is religious fundamentalism dangerous? It sure can be. And a lot of people claiming to be Christians are not aligning their ways with how Jesus would respond to people that don't believe the same things. And for that I'm sorry. If you've been caught up in that with someone who says they follow Jesus, I'm sorry. Hear me say, calling people to follow a man who submitted and died for his enemies won't make people dangerous. It will make them beautiful and sacrificial. And as Christians we are wrong if we do anything less than that and

for that we should repent of our sins for not looking like Jesus enough in that respect. Aight #2..

Is it not arrogant to claim that Jesus is the only way to God?

With this one you'll hear: "Ok, if it's not dangerous then it must at least be arrogant. I mean, you are saying that you have the truth and that everyone else is wrong. Isn't it arrogant to claim that you have the truth? I mean, isn't truth relative? Or put another way they might say, Christianity might be your truth, but that doesn't mean it is 'my' truth."

There's a movement of speaking your truth nowadays. Truth for many people is not objective but personal. It's not something that is out there to be discovered but something that comes from within each individual. This is what is called relativism. It's the doctrine that knowledge, truth, and morality exist in relation to culture, society, or historical context, and are not absolute.

So when Christianity claims that Jesus says he's the only way to God, then that is seen as absolute and therefore arrogant. You'll hear things like religion is merely human attempts to discover and learn things about God. It's based on human effort therefore its' flawed and fallible. To that claim I would say if that were true then I would agree that Christianity is for sure flawed. If it was based on human effort. At that point it really is about pride and arrogance.

G.K. Chesterton on *The Dislocation of Humility* says this:

"What we suffer from today is humility in the *wrong place*... A man was *meant* to be doubtful about *himself*, but undoubting about the *truth*; this has been exactly reversed. We are on the road to producing a race of men too mentally modest to believe in the multiplication table."

If something is true, it's not about pride or humility, it's about *fact*. For Christians to claim that Jesus is God who created the universe, created us, died for us and rose from the dead, is the only way to God is not about pride or arrogance. It's about facts. Now, we could be right or wrong. But it's not about arrogance or pride.

Let me show you, if you go out to lunch at SoKno afterwards; I know we be have'n a lot of City people there nowadays. If you go to SoKnox, and someone at the table across from you says "Nashville is the capital of TN " no one's gonna respond "how dare you, that's so arrogant to say Nashville is the capital of TN! Who do you think you are to say something like that!" No one is gonna do that. Why? Because it's not arrogant to state a true thing right? It's just true. Now you can say a true thing in an arrogant and prideful way for sure. So if that same person were to say it like this "Listen up idiots. Nashville is the capital of TN " well then yeah we got a problem. That's def an arrogant way to say a true thing. And we can't be about that right. But I think we can all agree that saying a true thing in and of itself is not arrogant.

Look back at [John 14:11](#)

11 Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

Jesus says we should believe that he is God, the Father and him are one, but if we are still wavering, check the work. He says check the receipts. See what I've accomplished. Allow that to be proof. For followers of Jesus, we believe the claim that he is God because he validated himself. This is important. It's not semantics. As a follower of Jesus I am not claiming that I have the truth. I am saying Jesus knows the truth. Our knowledge doesn't come from our own efforts to figure out God but rather the result of God graciously revealing himself to us. It is about God seeking out lost sinners and opening their eyes to the truth. Every religion has a human being at the center touting this or that, but ours says that God came into the world through Jesus.

So maybe the real objection is towards Jesus. Everything comes down to what people think about him and not what they think about us. Jesus makes all the truth claims. Not us. We are just passing them along.

This is the way that Peter and John defend themselves in [Acts 4:20](#).

"We can only keep reporting what we've seen and heard."

I don't actually know, at least not on my own. But Jesus rose from the dead so I am going with what he said. That's not arrogant. Arrogance would be arguing with the guy who rose from the dead simply because it doesn't sound right to me.

I've heard people say "well religion is like we are all climbing a mountain we are just on different sides, so we only see our side. And when we get to the top we will realize we were all climbing the same mountain. But I've got to ask, if all I can see is my side of the mountain, where are you sitting where you can see the whole mountain? The only way you could know if we are all climbing the same mountain is if you see the whole mountain. So really what those who use this analogy are saying is that I can only see my side but they see the whole thing. So I would say, who is arrogant?"

Lesslie Newbigin, a missionary to India, in his book *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* said this:

"There is an appearance of humility in the protestation that the truth is much greater than any one of us can grasp. But it may be in fact an arrogant claim to have a kind of knowledge which is superior to all others. So we have to ask the person, what is this absolute vantage point from which you claim to be able to relativize all the claims these different scriptures and religions make?"

When you say no one should have a superior take on spiritual reality, that is a superior take on spiritual reality.

Now, with all of that said. Sometimes people accuse Christians of being arrogant because Christians are just being flat out arrogant. And I would totally agree with that. If Christians ridicule other religions, are harsh or rude or self righteous towards people of other backgrounds. When we are afraid of any sort of conversation or dialogue...then we should absolutely be fairly criticized for pride or arrogance. **It is possible to hold to the truth in a way that undermines the truth to which we hold. But the arrogance is not because we hold that Jesus rose from the grave.** And I don't want us to confuse those two.

Alright, how are we doing out there? Y'all good for this last one? Aight #3:

Is it not more inclusive to claim that all good people go to heaven, no matter what they believe?

Or to say it another way that I've heard, why are Christians exclusive? Can't we just say that all good people go to heaven. There are lots of really great people out there, doing far better work than I am and honestly better than many Christians I know.

When people say things like "all good people should go to heaven," it's an interesting concept because while they are trying not to be exclusive, do you know who you are excluding? Bad people. People who don't measure up. Those who fall short are inadequate. So if you've ever screwed up in your life, sorry you're out. If you have ever fallen short of some elusive definition of being good in your life you are excluded.

I don't know about you but I'm not in love with that world view. Because that would mean that I'm out. That means people in my life are out. That's way more exclusive than what Jesus claims. That is far more divisive and exclusive and self righteous than what Jesus even claims.

So really we are all being exclusive with our claims. We are basing it off of some definition. There is actually no such thing as a truly all inclusive worldview.

To reject Christianity because it is exclusive but then say "all good people go to heaven"...you are actually being more exclusive than Jesus.

Check out [John 14:1-3](#) with me, the part that came right before our passage from earlier:

"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."

This is what puts Jesus on a different team from all other philosophies, traditions, religions, faiths and teachers. Notice that Jesus does not say "If you are able to measure up in these ways, I will accept you."

Here's how religion usually works: every religion sets a standard and says, "If you live a certain way and you keep the commandments or live the proper life then you are to be approved by our god." Whether their answer is good works, giving to charity, penance, karma, reincarnation, pillars or martyrdom, all of it is about us doing something to make ourselves right with God.

Jesus however, invites us to simply "believe" and be accepted by him. Jesus operates by grace. And all our good works are a response to what he has already done for us by saving us.

Jesus is exclusive. But he's not exclusive because of WHO he lets in. He is exclusive because *he's the only way to get in.* But there is room for everyone at the foot of the cross. All are welcomed. The cross is for all who are failures. All who fall short. Anyone who sees they don't have what it takes. All who see themselves as weak and needy.

This means, in Christ, there is room for you - whatever your past, whatever your issues, whatever your sin - he welcomes you."

So there are likely people in the room or listening to this that feel nervous making claims about Jesus that *sound* exclusive. To those people, I would just invite you to see that we're actually *all* making exclusive claims. No matter our belief or belief system, *all* of us are drawing lines in the sand. All of us are deciding who's "in" and who's "out." And all of us are including somebody and excluding somebody. The only difference is 1) is the basis on which you're doing that true or false? And 2) how compassionately do you treat those on the other side?

And I would argue that the way of Jesus provides a pretty compelling response to both of those questions. To the first one, he says "examine the claims." Test it. Ask questions of it. Look at the history, look at the works themselves. There is plenty to build a belief in Jesus in, as the way, the truth and the life. And to the second one, he says "if we're all gonna believe in one exclusive belief system or another, why not believe in the one that teaches compassionate acceptance for anyone and everyone?" That's the way of Jesus. And that's who we're aiming to be here at City.

Let's pray.