

Plurism & Post-Modernism: Do we all believe in the Same God?

APOLOGETICS

The Only Way

At the core of every church, transcending various activities, events, and services, lies an unwavering purpose: the salvation of souls. This fundamental mission is rooted in the belief that Jesus Christ is the sole path to eternal life. It is a conviction that propelled the Disciples and Apostles to embark on a lifelong journey of preaching and sacrifice after Christ's death and resurrection. Their unwavering dedication stemmed from the understanding that if salvation could be found through other means, their mission would have been rendered unnecessary. St. Paul evoked this very message when speaking to the Corinthians: *“For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.”* (1 Corinthians 15:16-19).

The gospel message, encapsulated in John 3:16, emphasizes the profound love of God in sending His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, as a sacrificial offering for the world: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life”(John 3:16). Through faith in Christ, individuals can escape eternal condemnation and embrace everlasting life. This central tenet of Christianity underscores the belief that salvation is not a mere philosophical concept but a transformative reality accessible only through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

The Disciples and Apostles spent the rest of their lives after Christ's death and Resurrection, traveling, suffering, and preaching. Salvation is only found in Jesus Christ and it is for this reason that the disciples accepted all these circumstances and mustered the courage to preach to Jews and Gentiles. Our mantra as servants is: “Christ is the only way to heaven”. As servants of Christ, it becomes our sacred duty to faithfully proclaim this message to the world and to those we serve. It is not simply a matter of adhering to religious rituals or engaging in charitable works, but rather, it is about extending the invitation of salvation to all who are lost and in need of hope. Our words and actions should consistently reflect the love and grace of Christ, drawing others to experience the transformative power of His sacrifice.

Furthermore, as we engage in various ministries and outreach programs, it is essential to remember that our ultimate goal is to lead people to a saving faith in Jesus Christ. While providing practical assistance and addressing temporal needs is important, it should never overshadow the spiritual

dimension of our service. It is through the proclamation of the gospel and the guidance of the Holy Spirit that individuals can truly find lasting peace and purpose in their lives.

In a world often characterized by uncertainty and despair, the message of salvation through Jesus Christ offers a beacon of hope and eternal life. Let us, as servants of Christ, embrace our sacred calling with unwavering commitment, boldly proclaiming the gospel and leading others to the saving grace found only in Jesus Christ.

Pluralism & Relativism

The concepts of pluralism and relativism have, for a long time, served as obstacles to the apprehension of Truth in our society. These ideas, often intertwined and deeply ingrained in contemporary thought, pose a significant challenge to the foundational principles of Christianity and the notion of absolute truth.

Pluralism, characterized by the coexistence of multiple principles and sources of authority, suggests that there is no single, objective truth but rather a mosaic of truths that vary depending on individual perspectives and cultural contexts. This mindset undermines the idea of universal truths and promotes the notion that all beliefs are equally valid. In the realm of religion, pluralism leads to the belief that all religions are essentially the same and that there is no one true path to salvation.

Relativism, on the other hand, posits that knowledge, truth, and morality are relative to cultural, societal, and historical contexts. It asserts that there is no absolute or objective standard of truth but rather a spectrum of truths that are contingent upon the subjective experiences and beliefs of individuals. In the context of religion, relativism implies that all religious beliefs and interpretations are equally valid and that there is no inherent superiority or inferiority among them.

The combination of pluralism and relativism has had a profound impact on the religious landscape of our society. It has fostered an environment in which truth is seen as subjective and provisional, rather than objective and immutable. This has led to a widespread skepticism toward religious doctrines and a reluctance to embrace any particular faith as the ultimate source of truth.

For Christianity, the implications of pluralism and relativism are significant. The Christian faith is predicated on the belief in the existence of an objective Truth revealed through the teachings of Jesus Christ. It asserts that Christianity is not merely one among many equally valid religions but rather the exclusive way to salvation. The relativist and pluralist mindset, however, challenges this exclusivity and opens the door to a more fluid and inclusive understanding of religious truth.

The tension between Christianity and the prevailing cultural ethos of pluralism and relativism raises profound questions about the nature of truth, the role of faith, and the foundations of human existence. As Christians, we are called to uphold the truth of the Gospel in a world that increasingly embraces a relativistic and pluralistic worldview. This requires a thoughtful and compassionate engagement with those who hold different beliefs, a willingness to listen and learn, and a steadfast commitment to the truth as revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Practical Questions and Application

Morality transcends individual perspectives and societal norms. It is not something that can be determined solely by personal beliefs or political correctness. Just because a person is sincere in their beliefs does not make those beliefs factually correct or ethically sound. Consider the following examples:

1. **Chemistry:** If a person sincerely believes that the Earth is flat, it does not make their belief scientifically accurate. Chemistry is a well-established scientific discipline with extensive evidence and experimentation supporting its principles. It is not a matter of personal opinion but a body of knowledge based on empirical data.
2. **Slavery:** Historically, many individuals held sincere beliefs that slavery was morally acceptable. However, the abolition of slavery was a major moral breakthrough, and it is now widely recognized as a heinous institution that violates fundamental human rights. Morality is not determined by the prevalence of a belief but by its alignment with universal principles of justice and equality.
3. **Holocaust:** The Holocaust stands as one of the darkest chapters in human history, characterized by the systematic genocide of millions of Jews and other marginalized groups. Denying or minimizing the Holocaust is not only factually incorrect but also morally reprehensible. It trivializes the suffering of victims and perpetuates harmful historical revisionism.

Being politically correct with our Christian faith does not mean we are factually correct. In all three of these examples you would not see someone able to say any of the following.

- "It doesn't matter what you believe about Chemistry as long as you are sincere in what you believe"
- "It doesn't matter what you believe about Slavery as long as you are true in what you believe"
- "It doesn't matter what you believe to be true about the Holocaust as long as you are true in what you believe"

This concept fits nowhere else, so why should we apply it to matters of life and death? Why take a gamble on our eternity? It is crucial to engage in thoughtful and informed discussions based on evidence, ethical principles, and respect. However, taking a gamble on our eternity by adhering to blindly held beliefs without critical reflection is a dangerous and potentially harmful approach.

Morality requires us to strive for truth, compassion, and justice. It demands that we challenge our assumptions, question prevailing narratives, and seek a deeper understanding of the world around us. "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." (1 Kings 18:21). Relying solely on personal beliefs or political correctness, without regard for objective truth can lead us astray and undermine the very foundation of a just and humane society. "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other." (Matthew 6:24) "He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad." (Matthew 12:30)

- Something cannot be one thing and another thing at the same time and in the same way.
- An object cannot be a sphere and a rectangle at the same time.
- Can something be true and false at the same time and in the same way?
 - “For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.” – 1 Corinthians 14:33
- Can the Eucharist be the true body and blood of Christ and also be a symbol at the same time?
- If the Words in the Bible were ambiguous, there would be a valid argument to be made.
- The words of God in scripture however do not falter; He is clear about Truth and Non-Truth.

The Concept of Two Roads

From the mundane choices we make each day to the profound decisions that shape our destiny, we are constantly faced with a myriad of options. And just as in life, where we are presented with binary choices like right or wrong, left or right, good or bad, the concept of religion also presents us with two distinct paths: heaven or hell. Religion, in its various forms, elaborates on this duality, much like other institutions in society. In the same way that a company establishes guiding principles and "best practices" to dictate the preferred way of conducting business, religion provides a framework of beliefs and moral codes that guide individuals' thoughts and actions. The "right" way, as defined by the company or religious doctrine, becomes the standard by which everything else is deemed "wrong."

It is intriguing to consider why religion and God cannot function in a similar manner to successful individuals in the world, who have found the "right" path or the optimal way of doing things. In the realm of business, companies strive to achieve efficiency, profitability, and growth by implementing well-defined processes and strategies. Similarly, successful people often attribute their achievements to their ability to make sound decisions, develop effective habits, and cultivate a positive mindset. If we were to apply this logic to religion and God, it implies that there is a "right" way to believe, worship, and live in accordance with divine principles. This would imply the existence of a singular, universally accepted path to salvation or enlightenment.

In the profound words of St. Augustine, found in his seminal work "City of God," two distinct loves shape individuals and societies: the love of self and the love of God. The love of self, driven by selfish desires and worldly pursuits, leads to the creation of an earthly city. This love is characterized by division, conflict, and a focus on material possessions. In contrast, the love of God, guided by divine grace and a desire for spiritual fulfillment, gives rise to a heavenly city. This love cultivates unity, compassion, and a longing for transcendence. St. Augustine invites us to examine our hearts and reflect on what we love, for it reveals the city we truly belong to: “Two loves have formed two cities. The love of self has formed the earthly city; the love of God has formed the heavenly one. Let us examine ourselves to what we love and we’ll find which city we belong to” – St. Augustine: City of God

In C.S. Lewis's poignant work "The Great Divorce," the author presents a similar dichotomy in the human experience: “There are 2 kinds of people in the world: those who say to God ‘Thy will be done’ and those that God will say to in the end ‘Thy will be done.’” The former group embraces God's

sovereignty and finds fulfillment in aligning their desires with the divine plan. They recognize the limitations of their own understanding and trust in the wisdom of a higher power. The latter group, however, clings to their own will, driven by pride and a desire for control. They fail to recognize the true source of joy and fulfillment, and ultimately experience the consequences of their choices.

These two perspectives offer a profound reflection on the nature of human existence. Our choices, both consciously and unconsciously made, determine the trajectory of our lives and shape our ultimate destiny. By examining what we love and to whom we surrender our will, we can gain a deeper understanding of our identity and purpose in the world. The choice between self-love and love of God, between our own will and the will of a higher power, is a fundamental decision that has profound implications for our present and eternal existence.

What is the Christian Goal?

The Christian goal is to achieve unity with Jesus Christ. This journey begins with salvation through Christ and culminates in perfection when we join Him in Heaven. Heaven represents the ultimate realization of being one with Christ. Every aspect of religious practice is designed to facilitate this unity.

At the core of service in the church, the goal is to teach the requirements for being worthy of Communion, which symbolizes oneness with Christ. This process involves repentance, prayer, confession, baptism, following the Canon, and ultimately receiving Communion. As the Nicene Creed states, "We confess one baptism for the remission of sins." Being one with Christ involves a transformation of our hearts and minds. It is a process of becoming more like Christ in our thoughts, words, and actions. We strive to embody His love, compassion, and forgiveness in our daily lives.

Achieving unity with Christ requires a commitment to spiritual growth and discipleship. We engage in prayer, Bible study, and fellowship with other believers to deepen our understanding of His teachings. Through these practices, we grow in faith and develop a closer relationship with Him. The Christian goal is not merely a destination but an ongoing journey. It is a life lived in pursuit of Christ, seeking to know Him more deeply and to reflect His character in all that we do. By surrendering our lives to Him and following His guidance, we experience the joy and peace that come from being one with Christ.

Is Christ the Only Way to Heaven?

The Bible proclaims that the path to salvation lies exclusively through Jesus Christ. In John 14:6, Jesus unequivocally declares, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." This profound statement affirms that Jesus is not simply one among many ways to salvation but the sole and unique way. No individual, regardless of their stature, accomplishments, knowledge, or personal righteousness, can reach God the Father except through Jesus.

The exclusivity of Jesus' role in salvation is rooted in His unique nature and accomplishments. He is the only One who has descended from heaven and returned there, signifying His divine origin and authority (John 3:13). Furthermore, Jesus stands alone as the only person in human history to have lived a perfect life, free from sin (Hebrews 4:15). His sinless life serves as the perfect sacrifice that atones for the sins of humanity (1 John 2:2; Hebrews 10:26). In addition, Jesus uniquely fulfilled the

prophecies and requirements of the Old Testament Law and the Prophets, leaving no doubt about His divine mission (Matthew 5:17).

But Jesus' significance extends beyond His sinless life and sacrificial death. He is the only one to have conquered death forever, shattering the chains of mortality and paving the way for eternal life for those who believe in Him (Hebrews 2:14-15). Jesus is also the sole Mediator between God and humanity, acting as the bridge that connects us with the divine (1 Timothy 2:5). And it is Jesus alone whom God has exalted to the highest place of honor and authority in the universe (Philippians 2:9). The exclusivity of Jesus as the way to salvation is further emphasized through His prayer in John 17:3, where He implores, "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." This prayer reveals that eternal life in heaven is made possible solely through Christ.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus faced moments when even His followers were tempted to abandon Him, seeking alternative sources of salvation. In John 6:67, Jesus confronts the Twelve with a pointed question: "Do you also want to go away?" Peter's response encapsulates the understanding of Jesus' unique role: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (John 6:68-69).

In a world of diverse beliefs and claims of spiritual truth, the Bible's emphatic declaration of Jesus as the exclusive way to salvation stands as a firm foundation for Christian faith. It is through Jesus Christ alone that individuals can find forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, and the promise of eternal life.

- "For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him," – Hebrews 2:2-3
- "...without shedding of blood there is no remission...so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation." – Hebrews 9:22,28
- "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?" Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day...He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him....Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, "Does this offend you? From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more." – John 6:51-54,56,60,66

Nineveh's Example

In the realm of divine providence, the story of Jonah and the city of Nineveh serves as a profound testament to God's compassion and His desire for all people to find salvation. It challenges the notion

that only those who know and believe in God are eligible for His grace and mercy. Nineveh, a bustling metropolis renowned for its grandeur and opulence, was a hub of pagan worship and moral depravity. Its inhabitants had turned away from the true God and embraced a life of idolatry and wickedness. Yet, despite their spiritual blindness, God's heart yearned for their redemption.

In an unexpected twist, God commissioned the prophet Jonah to undertake a challenging mission—to travel to Nineveh and deliver a message of impending judgment unless the people repented of their evil ways. Jonah, initially reluctant and filled with prejudice against the gentiles, reluctantly embarked on his journey. As Jonah approached the gates of Nineveh, a profound transformation took place. The people of the city, from the king to the common folk, were gripped by a wave of genuine repentance. They humbled themselves, fasted, and cried out to God for mercy. Their heartfelt contrition and willingness to turn away from their sinful ways moved the heart of God, and He spared them from destruction.

The story of Jonah and Nineveh highlights several important truths. First, it underscores God's universal love and compassion for all people, regardless of their religious beliefs or ethnic background. God desires the salvation of all humanity and longs for every individual to come to a saving knowledge of Him. Second, the narrative challenges the idea that God is a vengeful and capricious deity who delights in punishing His creation. Instead, it portrays Him as a patient and merciful Father who is slow to anger and eager to forgive those who repent of their sins. Third, the story emphasizes the power of repentance and the transformative impact it can have on individuals and communities. When people genuinely turn away from their sinful ways and seek God's forgiveness, He is faithful to cleanse them, restore them, and grant them a new beginning.

If people could stumble their way into heaven without knowing and believing in God, Jonah would not have been sent. Nineveh was a gentile country, but God cared for them as much as He cared for the Jews. “Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.” “But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.” (Matthew 12:38-41). Jesus came to do for the Jews, what Jonah came to do for the gentiles. Why would God destroy a city if it didn't know better?

Moreover, the account of Jonah and Nineveh foreshadows the coming of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. Jesus, the "greater than Jonah," came to offer salvation not just to the Jews but to people of all nations and backgrounds. Through His sacrificial death and resurrection, He opened the door for all who believe in Him to receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life. The story of Jonah and Nineveh serves as a timeless reminder of God's boundless love, His desire for the salvation of all people, and the transformative power of genuine repentance. It invites us to embrace God's grace and mercy, turn away from our sinful ways, and experience the abundant life He offers to all who come to Him in faith.

Revelation

In the realm of Revelation, a profound vision unfolds, unveiling the ultimate destiny of humanity. An angel soars through the heavens, bearing the eternal gospel, a message that reverberates across the earth, reaching every nation, tribe, tongue, and people. With a voice that shakes the foundations of the world, the angel proclaims, "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come. Worship the Creator of heaven and earth, the seas, and the springs of water."

The angel's message carries a solemn warning, heralding the imminent judgment of God. Yet, amidst the impending doom, a beacon of hope shines forth. In Revelation 3:10, a promise is given to those who have faithfully persevered in their faith. They shall be spared from the hour of trial that will engulf the world, a time of testing that will separate the true believers from the pretenders. The revelation continues, revealing the triumphant return of Jesus Christ, accompanied by clouds and visible to every eye. Even those who pierced Him will witness His glorious advent, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn. The day of reckoning has arrived, and the ultimate judgment will be pronounced.

In the chilling climax of Revelation, those whose names are not found written in the Book of Life are cast into the lake of fire: "And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire." (Revelation 20:15) This irreversible fate serves as a stark reminder of the consequences of rejecting God's grace and mercy. The revelation underscores the urgent need for repentance and a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ, the only way to escape eternal condemnation.

Throughout history, the message of Jesus has transformed millions of lives. Countless individuals have experienced radical change through their encounter with Jesus Christ. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, they have devoted their lives to serving Him, sharing the good news of salvation with others, and standing firm in their faith even in the face of adversity and persecution.

The revelation of Jesus culminates in a glorious vision of the new heaven and the new earth, a realm where righteousness dwells and God's presence is eternally experienced. In this eternal paradise, pain, sorrow, and death are no more, as God wipes away every tear from every eye. The faithful, having overcome the trials and tribulations of this world, will inherit eternal life and dwell in the presence of God forever. As we navigate the complexities and challenges of life, let us find comfort and strength in the revelation of Jesus Christ. By aligning our lives with His teachings, seeking His forgiveness, and living in accordance with His will, we can experience the transformative power of His love and the promise of eternal life that awaits us. The revelation of Jesus is a timeless treasure, a source of hope and guidance for all who embrace it.



Review Questions

1. What is the purpose of the church? (A: saving souls)
2. All religions are the same. True or false? (A: False)
3. Morality is relative to the person. True or false? (A: False)
4. Provide two references that show Christ as the only way to heaven. (A: John 14:6; Hebrews 4:15)
5. God cared for the gentiles as much as He cared for the Jews. True or false? (A: True)

