

QUESTION #4: “AREN’T ALL RELIGIONS THE SAME?” (Isaiah 43:8-13)

6.2.19

INTRODUCTION

President George W. Bush was interviewed a few years ago by correspondent Charles Gibson of ABC News. Here is a part of that interview:

Charles Gibson: “Do we all worship the same God, Christian and Muslim?”

President Bush: “I think we do. We have different routes of getting to the Almighty.”

Charles Gibson: “Do Christians and non-Christians and Muslims all go to heaven, in your mind?”

President Bush: “Yes, they do. We all have different routes of getting there.

In a second interview with Cynthia McFadden of ABC News:

President Bush: “The Bible is an amazing book.”

Cynthia McFadden: “Is it literally true, the Bible?”

President Bush: “Probably not. No, I’m not a literalist, but I think you can learn a lot from it.”

Last week we answered the question, “Is Jesus The Only Way To Heaven?” During our conversation about that, we looked at truth, and at one option in particular that pertains to the question this week, and that option is that *all beliefs are true*. Most people would say that’s impossible because something cannot be true and not true at the same time (the “Law of Noncontradiction”), nor can something exist and not exist at the same time.

Why are considering the basis for truth? Because we live in a pluralistic culture — meaning that, as a nation, we hold to a huge diversity of beliefs among our people. This in fact is one of our founding principles; we find its basis in the so-called “establishment clause” of the First Amendment of the US Constitution. The First Amendment holds in part that: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

That “establishment clause” means that the US Congress cannot pass, nor can the US President sign, any law that establishes an official or state religion. It also prohibits any government actions that show favoritism of one particular religion over any other. In addition, it would be similarly illegal for our government to favor religion over non-religion, or vice versa. Because of that, all religions are viewed as equal — meaning that they have equal protections and equal rights under the law of our land. But does that make all religious beliefs the same?

What we’re going to do today is look at how some of the world’s religions compare with the Bible. In other words, we are going to look at some fundamentals of the different faiths in our world, and compare them to what the Bible specifically says. Our goal: to see if all religions are the same, or if there are profoundly different beliefs that each of these religious traditions represent.

TEXT

“You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord, “and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no savior. I have revealed and saved and proclaimed — I, and not some foreign god among you. You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord, “that I am God. Yes, and from ancient days I am he” — Isaiah 43:10-13a.

Isaiah was a prophet at a time of gross unfaithfulness on the part of God's chosen people. By the time he was speaking for the Lord, the northern kingdom of Israel had been exiled at the hands of the Assyrian Empire. While Isaiah ministered in Judah during the godly reign of King Hezekiah, he still was being confronted with an astonishing lack of faith in the God of Israel as the one true God. Obviously no one was more aware of this than God himself. Because of that, at several places in the book of Isaiah (chapters 44, 45 and 46 to cite three of them), we hear God making pronouncement of himself as the one and only true God.

So that being said, how does biblical Christianity compare with other faiths? Is it true that all religions are the same? Let's take a look. Now this is not going to be any kind of in-depth look at every detail of these faiths, but just the main points of these beliefs, to compare them with the truths that the Bible says. If we are biblical Christians, the Bible has to be our starting point. So what's to be our measure as we move forward? These two verses:

- 1) ***Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist — denying the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also — I John 22-23.***
- 2) ***"[Y]our word is truth" — Jesus Christ, John 17:17b.*** So here we go.

JUDAISM

Judaism is often thought of as the cradle from which Christianity sprang. Certainly the OT lays the foundation for the entire NT. As Jesus said: ***"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished"*** — ***Jesus Christ, the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:17-18.*** In other words, their Scriptures are eternally relevant. The problem? Because Judaism does not recognize Jesus Christ for who he said he was, because they ignore his words and his signs as well as his death and resurrection, Jews throughout the world are still looking for the first coming of the Messiah. Imagine if all we had was the OT. All the wonders, all the teachings that we read in our NT wouldn't even exist. Think about that, because that by itself is the single most profound difference between Judaism and biblical Christianity. We claim Jesus Christ as Messiah; they are still looking. Both of those viewpoints — the Messiah has come, the Messiah hasn't come — can't both be true. **BOTTOM LINE:** Judaism is NOT the same as biblical Christianity.

ISLAM

Islam is the world's second largest religion, with approximately 1.8 billion people claiming that faith (roughly 23.2% of the world's population). It is considered to be the world's fastest growing religion. So how does Islam compare with biblical Christianity? Here are some of the most startling differences:

- 1) Christians are called to ***"love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"*** — ***Jesus Christ, the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:44.*** By contrast, Muslims find these words in their scriptures (the Quran): ***"Fight and slay the infidel wherever you find them"*** — ***Sura 9:5.*** In fact, there are detailed instructions about when to behead "infidels" (non-Muslims). While Christians are called to reach the world for God through the love of Christ, Muslims are called to conquer the world through the sword. When a Christian kills in the name of Christ, it is condemned as contrary to Christianity (abortion center killings). When a Muslim kills, it is seen as showing allegiance to Allah and Mohammad. **Bottom line:** Islam is NOT a religion of peace.

- 2) The Bible teaches that we can KNOW our eternal destiny: ***I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life — I John 5:13.*** By contrast, Mohammad said in the Hadith (a collection of his sayings separate from the Quran): *“Even I do not know what Allah will do with me.”* A Muslim’s life is thought to be judged at the end of time by Allah weighing their life’s works in a balance. If it tips to the good, they are rewarded with Paradise. If it tips to the bad, they are condemned to hell. The issue: Islam teaches (and Mohammad’s own words affirm) that you can never know where your eternal destiny lies.
- 3) The Quran acknowledges Jesus (“Isa”) as one of their great prophets — perhaps the greatest AFTER Mohammad. But at the same time, Islam teaches that Allah has NO son (or no Holy Spirit for that matter), that Allah has no partners. So what does the NT record about Jesus?
 - a) ***“I and the Father are one” — Jesus Christ, John 10:30.***
 - b) ***“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” — Jesus Christ, John 14:9b.***
 - c) ***[F]or us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things come and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things come and through whom we live — Paul, I Corinthians 8:6.***

That becomes a HUGE problem for Muslims. If Jesus is the Son of God, isn’t he much more than a prophet. But if Allah can “have no partners,” as they say, how can Jesus be anything more than an infidel and a blasphemer worthy of death? Certainly how can they hold him to be the second greatest prophet after Mohammad if he claimed to be God?

- 4) Lastly, Islam teaches that Allah is so transcendent, so beyond human beings, that any idea of a personal relationship is ridiculous. No human being could even think of Allah in terms of personal relationship. Yet what does Christianity teach? Personal relationships with God the Father through surrendering to the work of God the Son:
 - a) ***He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God — John 1:11-13.***
 - b) ***“Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them” — Jesus Christ, John 14:23.***
 - c) ***See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! — I John 3:1a.***

BOTTOM LINE: Islam is NOT the same as biblical Christianity.

HINDUISM (1.1 billion, 15%)

Hinduism had its beginnings in India. There are over 300 million deities observed in this faith. Their name for God is “Brahman.” It is Hindu teaching that Brahman is indescribable; he is unknown and cannot be known. It is Hindu belief that the universe has always been — everlasting to everlasting; it has always been there. The goal of Hinduism is to become one with Brahman through meditation. At that point you achieve immortality. Hindus believe in reincarnation — repeated life cycles that, hopefully, bring each person to a higher level of attainment of Brahman. Reincarnation is a constantly repeated cycle of birth and rebirth (called “samsara”). So how does Hinduism and biblical Christianity compare?

- 1) As opposed to over 300 million deities, as God said through Isaiah: ***“I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God” — God speaking, Isaiah 45:5a.***

- 2) As for being unable to know God:
 - a) ***“Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight” — God speaking, Jeremiah 9:23-24.***
 - b) ***“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” — Jesus Christ, John 17:3.***
- 3) As for there always being a universe, that it has always been in existence (incidentally, an idea that astronomer Carl Sagan promoted in his *Cosmos* book and television series), the Bible says differently: ***In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth — Genesis 1:1.*** The Hebrew word for “beginning” carries the meaning of “the point in time or space at which something started.” According to Scriptures, the only ***from everlasting to everlasting — Moses, Psalm 90:2b,*** is God.
- 4) As for the idea that we improve ourselves to make ourselves better for the next life (reincarnation), the Bible says:
 - a) ***All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags — Isaiah 64:6a.*** In other words, our own efforts at self-improvement are futile — they will NEVER accomplish anything.
 - b) ***[P]eople are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment — Hebrews 9:27.*** We do not return many times to life on earth. Life on earth is one-and-done; after that, as Daniel was told by an angel: ***“Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt” — Daniel 12:2.***

BOTTOM LINE: Hinduism is NOT the same as biblical Christianity.

BUDDHISM (520 million, 7.1%)

In essence, Buddhism teaches nothing. It’s founder, Siddhartha Gautama, lived in sixth and fifth century BC northeastern India. He was actually born into a Hindu family. Though born into wealth, he left his family to pursue a path of enlightenment that he felt was missing in the religious traditions and ideas he saw around him. He supposedly achieved enlightenment while meditating on the proper path of life, a middle road, between worldly indulgences and severe deprivation and avoidance of all indulgence. He supposedly reached the ultimate goal of full Buddhahood (*nirvana*” and was persuaded to teach his findings to others. He died at the age of 80.

Buddhism is not a religion in the usual sense; it is rather about teaching yourself as you become more and more enlightened. There is no god to worship or any other religious trappings (ceremony or ritual). The basic idea of Buddhism is to live a life that is empty of ego-driven pursuits or desires. The ultimate goal of such a disciplined life is to reach that place of *nirvana* — the state of nothingness. Nirvana literally means “blowing out” or “quenching.” It is their life’s salvation and brings an end to the constant cycle of reincarnational births known as *samsara*. That state of being can only be attained after someone has become completely and totally detached from all ignorance and all selfishness. That goal can be reached through the self-pursuing goal of enlightenment. It is completely driven by the person’s own strengths and abilities. So how does Buddhism compare with biblical Christianity? A couple of things:

- 1) Our own efforts cannot save us or improve us. We are still defined by Paul's words: *[All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God — Paul, Romans 3:23.* Even an attempt to view our lives accurately — our weaknesses and shortcomings — is bound to fail; as the prophet Jeremiah noted: *The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? — Jeremiah 17:9.*
- 2) Human beings are sinful beings; we will never be divine beings. Life is a “one-and-done” (no reincarnation) after which we will be judged based on our surrender to Jesus Christ. It is only by his redemptive work that we will ever know the peace that comes from being washed clean from sin. That is the only path to eternal life that we will ever know — BUT that is the only path to eternal life, to heaven, to the presence of God, that we ever NEED to know. As Peter noted: *“He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls — I Peter 2:24-25 (quoting Isaiah 53:4, 5, 6).*

BOTTOM LINE: Buddhism is NOT the same as biblical Christianity.

MORMONISM (LATTER-DAY SAINTS) (15 million)

Mormonism has been around since the 1820s and 1830s when it was founded and developed by Joseph Smith after a supposed vision he received from God and Jesus (two separate beings) that told him that all existing churches were an abomination, and that he should join no existing church. From that understanding, he started The Church Of Jesus Christ Of Latter-Day Saints. It is headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah, from where it sends missionary efforts all over the world. Mormonism creates a huge problem because many people assume that Mormonism IS Christian because they use a lot of the same words as biblical Christianity and they carry Bibles with them. It absolutely is NOT Christian. In the context of biblical Christianity, Mormonism is a cult. The teachings of Mormonism contradict many of the most fundamental doctrines of biblical Christianity.

- 1) Mormonism considers the “Trinity” three separate gods. Mormons teach a succession of gods, that each god then created another god after them, and so on down the line. The god we know as “God the Father” actually has a tangible body of flesh and bone. He was once a finite, mortal man who became God in the same way that all Mormons hope one day to achieve deity.
- 2) Like evolutionary thought, Mormons believe that the universe is eternal — always has been, always will be. As such, creation happened not as something out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) but rather out of pre-existing material.
- 3) Mormon doctrine teaches that the Bible is not yet complete, and that it is full of errors. In addition, the Bible is not more important than other sacred works in Mormon thought, particularly *The Book of Mormon*. They hold the Book of Mormon to bear the most correct book in history. It is this book, and not the Bible, that contains the true, full and complete gospel. By extension, only The Church Of Jesus Christ Of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) is the only true church. All others are apostate.
- 4) Mormons teach that Jesus was the first child conceived by Father and Mother God through a sexual union. He is considered the brother of Lucifer, who was conceived in the same way. Jesus' earthly life was not found in his being conceived by the Holy Spirit but rather through the sexual union of Father God with Mary.

- 5) Christ provided general salvation for all people by his death and resurrection. However, specific, individual salvation (called “exaltation”) can be achieved only through good works — and polygamy in heaven is necessary for exaltation. In addition, it is necessary for Mormon priests to perform baptisms in order for people to be forgiven of their sins.

BOTTOM LINE: Mormonism is NOT the same as biblical Christianity.

JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES (7.9 million)

Jehovah’s Witnesses have been around since the 1870s, begun by a guy named Charles Taze Russell. While they also have a Bible and quote Scripture, while they also do extensive mission work from international to door-to-door, and while they seem to be able to explain themselves and their positions very well, they, like the Mormons, are a cult — they are a counterfeit Christianity. Here is a sample of their beliefs:

- 1) There is only one God, called Jehovah. He has a body and therefore is not omnipresent — a direct contradiction of Scripture: *Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast — David, Psalm 139:7-10.* They believe that God uses angels to keep him informed about what is going on around the world. Therefore the idea of a “trinity” is a pagan idea.
- 2) While the Bible is the inspired word of God, most Bible translations get critical Bible doctrines wrong. Only the *New World Translation Of The Holy Scriptures (1961)* gets Biblical translation right. But according to most evangelical Greek scholars, their translation of the Bible is a terrible one — but used because it bolsters their particular beliefs.
- 3) Before Bethlehem, Jesus was actually the archangel Michael, the first created being. While on earth, he was a man who lived a sinless life. After the resurrection, Jesus returned to being Michael. His resurrection was in a spirit body only. That was never who Jesus was; according to the Bible:
 - a) *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made — John 1:1-3.*
 - b) *[Christ Jesus], being in very nature God, did not regard equality with God something to be used to his own advantage — Paul, Philipians 2:6.*
 - c) *The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. . . . For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him — Paul, Colossians 1:15, 19.*
 - d) Man is both body and soul. When we die, we cease to exist. There is no hell, no place of conscious torment. At the resurrection, everyone is re-created into new people. Again, Scripture says something else: *[E]ach person was judged according to what they had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire — Revelation 20:13b-15.* As John noted earlier: *They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever — Revelation 20:10b.*
- 4) Salvation is works-based. These works must be performed to ensure that we are included in the Book of Life. In their theology, however, only 144,000 will get to enjoy heaven, and that roster is filled. So, for the rest of us, we will enjoy an earthly paradise. Paul would beg to disagree over their emphasis on works: *For it is by grace you have been*

saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast — Paul, Ephesians 2:8-9.

BOTTOM LINE: Jehovah's Witnesses are NOT like biblical Christianity.

NON-RELIGION (“NONES”) (16.3%)

Right now the largest religious demographic of people in the United States between the ages of 18-34 are those who declare their religious affiliation to be “none.” In Europe, “nones” are the second-largest religious group on the continent. So what does that mean?

- 1) It means that organized religion holds no appeal for them.
- 2) It means that Christianity has, instead of being “good news,” become an impression of “dos and don'ts” that they want nothing to do with.
- 3) It means that they have fallen for the lie that “all religions are the same,” which has morphed into “we're all going to heaven anyway, right?”
- 4) It means that they have fallen for the lie that religion is theirs to craft as they want, to design a god and belief system that satisfies their likes and desires.
- 5) It means that they see all religious people, particularly Christians, as hypocritical, bigoted, narrow-minded and self-righteous, and they want nothing to do with them.
- 6) It means that they largely feel that this life is all there is, and life is difficult enough.

BOTTOM LINE: The “nones” don't have a clue what biblical Christianity is all about.

CHRISTIANITY (2.4 billion, 31.5)

Now why would I include Christianity as a false doctrine or belief? It's because many so-called Christian denominations today promote a belief that has little to do with biblical Christianity.

With one exception, these are all quotes that I have personally received from people:

- 1) “Everybody goes to heaven” (*universalism*) — from an Episcopal church elder.
- 2) “All beliefs, all faiths, are valid” — from an Episcopal priest.
- 3) “Jesus was just a very good man, nothing more” — from an Episcopal deaconess
- 4) “If you have been baptized and confirmed, you are saved” — from a Lutheran pastor.
- 5) “All love is from God” — Presbyterian USA and Episcopal USA confirming their affirmation of same-sex marriage and gay clergy.
- 6) “I always pray to Mary” — from a friend who is a lifelong Catholic.
- 7) “I go to confession every week. If I can't think of a sin to confess, I just make something up” — from another friend who is a lifelong Catholic.

This demonstration of Christianity is NOT like biblical Christianity. All this reflection of Christianity has done is create the picture that Christianity, like all these other faiths we've looked at, is a man-made religion. If that is true, that Christianity is a product of man and not of God through his Son Jesus Christ, then maybe all religions are the same. But are the? Not according to biblical Christianity as taught in the Scriptures.

APPLICATION

So what do we do with all this? Some ways to approach these issues:

- 1) We are commanded to look at the world as people in need of salvation. We are not here to judge; not even Jesus went that way. Instead, he said: ***“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” — Jesus Christ, John 3:17.*** Judgment for sins has already taken place at the cross. That is God's free gift of salvation to the world. We are the messengers to communicate that gift. That's what we're here for.

- 2) I personally couldn't care less what belief people hold to. I don't care if they are Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Mormons, JW's, agnostics, atheists, witches or warlocks; I don't care if they're little green men from Mars. None of that matters, because we are commanded to place our faith in the power of God's salvation; Paul said it this way: ***Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! — Paul, II Corinthians 5:17.*** Do we believe that? Do we believe that, in Christ, all things become new? Do we believe that, as Gabriel said to Mary: ***“For with God nothing will be impossible” — Gabriel, Luke 1:37 (NKJV).***
- 3) Unless these people become saved, John made very clear what lays ahead of them when he wrote in his gospel: ***Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them — John 3:36.*** There is no worse place to be than on the receiving end of God's wrath. Which brings me to . . .

CONCLUSION

And that conclusion can only come down to one word: Love. Love is the reason Christ came. Love is the reason we are here as his body. All that matters is reaching the people in our world for Christ.

This is an incredibly difficult time in our Christianity. Our culture has figured out so many ways to divide ourselves. And if we begin to buy some of the lies of that culture, we risk reflecting the standards of our culture. Folks, our culture is absolutely going away someday. Nothing of this world is going to last except whatever we have done for the Kingdom of God.

So what does love do? Love reflects what drove Christ on our behalf; he knew all that we were, and he came anyway. So, whatever somebody is, we reach out anyway. Love reflects Christ's passion for the world, and therefore the passion WE are supposed to have for the world — not just “whatever,” but PASSION! The stuff that would make you willing to die for somebody. That's what Christ did. And love reflects the incredible fact that nobody's life in Christ reflects anything less than amazing grace, and more love than is humanly possible. Why is my salvation any more likely than anybody else's? Pardon my grammar, but I ain't any better than anybody. The only good in me is the good found in the saving presence of Jesus Christ. That's it. For us to make the difference for the truth, for biblical Christianity, that God intends for us to have as the body of his Son, we need to never ever be anything less than WOWed by the fact that Jesus loves even me, he saved even me, he's preparing a place in heaven for even me. Otherwise we will never see the world as God does.

No excuses: If I had to earn my salvation, if I had to earn God's favor, if I had to earn God's grace, I'm toast. And when Jesus died on that ugly, brutal cross, he knew everybody he was dying for. He knew everybody's sin because everybody's sin is what put him there — all of us, all of humanity, equally and without exception.

Are all religions the same? No way. Is anybody saved by anything other than biblical Christianity? No way. Are we better than anyone else because we're saved? No way. Is my salvation any more likely or deserved than anybody else's? No way. Does EVERYBODY need our love and prayers, our passion for their salvation? Absolutely. Let's pray!