

# A READY ANSWER

September 2009, Volume 2 Issue 9, Page 1

## Misconceptions About Truth - Religious Pluralism

By: LARRY A. FAMBROUGH

Are we all traveling to the same place and just taking different paths?

In **John 14:6**, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." With this short statement, Jesus dispels the idea that "we are all traveling to the same place (heaven), just taking different paths." Jesus plainly declares himself to be the exclusive way to God the Father. This teaching is the basis for Christian faith. Humanism declares that Christianity is untrue. Pluralism on the other hand, does not deny Christianity, but instead declares that it is only one of many religions which are equally true. "Religious pluralism is a loosely defined expression concerning acceptance of different religions, and is used in a number of related ways: 1) As the name of the worldview according to which one's religion is not the sole and exclusive source of truth, and thus that at least some truths and true values exist in other religions; 2) As acceptance of the concept that two or more religions with mutually exclusive truth claims are equally valid. This posture often emphasizes religion's common aspects; 3) Sometimes as a synonym for ecumenism, i.e., the promotion of some level of unity, co-operation, and improved understanding between different religions or different denominations within a single religion; 4) And as a synonym for religious tolerance, which is a condition of harmonious coexistence between adherents of different religions or religious denominations." (From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia).

Religious Pluralism refers to an acceptance of differing, sometimes conflicting views. For instance, there are the opposing views of Christianity and Islam. One view, Christianity, says that redemption and salvation comes through Jesus Christ alone. On the other hand, Islamic faith holds that salvation does not come through Christ but through Mohammed. To think that these two positions can be equally true runs contrary to the **Principle of Contradiction** which says that **no two opposing viewpoints can be equally true at the same time**. Yet an increasing number of people seem to believe that opposing viewpoints can be equally true. In a 2004 interview with ABC News, former President George W. Bush was asked if he believed that both Christians and Muslims worship the same God. He replied, "I think we do. We have different routes of getting to the Almighty" (see article at <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/story?id=193746&page=1>). His response is indicative of a growing sentiment which says that religious exclusivity is wrong and intolerant. Are there different routes which lead to God? Can both Muslims and Christians worship however they choose and still please God the Father? Can polytheism (belief in multiple gods, i.e. Hinduism) lead a man to God?

Ravi Zacharias writes, "The truth is that all religions are not the same. All religions do not point to God. All religions do not say that all religions are the same. In fact, some religions do not even believe in God. **At the heart of every religion is an uncompromising commitment to a particular way of defining who God is or is not.** Buddhism, for example, was based on Buddha's rejection of two of Hinduism's fundamental doctrines. Islam rejects both Buddhism and Hinduism. So it does no good to put a halo on the notion of tolerance and act as if everything is equally true. In fact, even all-inclusive religions such as Bahaim end up being exclusive by excluding the exclusivists! Therefore, the statement that Christians are arrogant because they claim absoluteness ignores the reality that members of every other major religion do so as well....**Inherent in any truth claim is the belief that something contrary to it is false. Truth excludes its opposite.** The person who denies the exclusive nature of truth is also making a truth claim." (Norman L. Geisler & Paul K. Hoffman, **Why I Am A Christian**, 2001, 2006, pg. 303).

What does the Bible say about religious exclusivity? Far from treating the idea of exclusivity as intolerant and wrong, from beginning to end, the scriptures teach that there is one God, one Savior, one truth and one pathway to heaven. The principle of exclusivity finds its origins in the pages of the Bible itself.

**Exodus 20:3** says, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." God identifies Himself as the one and only God to whom the children of Israel should bow before and worship. The apostle Paul echoes the sentiment concerning the exclusive nature of

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God when in **Ephesians 4:6** he writes that there is "**One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.**" Even within the spirit world, the exclusive nature of God is acknowledged. **James 2:19** says, "**Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.**" The devils (daemoniac beings) also believe that there is one God. Unlike foolish men who deny the existence of God (**Psalms 14:1**), these evil spirits are never represented as such who **1) Deny God in general** or who **2) Deny that there is only ONE God.** The daemoniac world may stand in steadfast opposition to God, but they still acknowledge the He alone is God.

There are multiple passages in the New Testament which demonstrate the exclusive nature of Christianity while at the same time showing religious pluralism to be unscriptural. **John 14:6** is one of them. Jesus said, "**I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.**" Jesus expresses the principle of exclusivity by declaring that He alone is the way to God. Implied in that statement is a repudiation of religious pluralism which says "*we have different routes of getting to the Almighty.*" Jesus never taught or envisioned men gaining access to God through their own goodness, a preacher, Mohammed or any avenue other than Himself. In **John 10:9**, Jesus said, "**I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved...**" Jesus did not say that He was "a door" nor did He indicate that He was "one of the doors" by which a man could be saved. He is "the door" by which men can enter and find eternal salvation. In **John 8:24**, Jesus removes any doubt about where He stood on the issue of religious pluralism. He said, "**I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.**" Again, Jesus refutes the notion of religious pluralism by maintaining that belief in Him is a requisite for eternal life. Those who do not believe in Christ as the Messiah will die in their sins and lose their souls to eternal damnation. Christ is the exclusive way to God the Father.

The apostles of Christ also maintained a claim of religious exclusivity. In **Acts 4:12**, Peter plainly declares the principle of exclusivity in Christ when he says "**there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.**" John wrote, "**Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. 23 Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.**" (**1 John 2:22-23**). John's teaching is plain. Proper views of God cannot be held without proper views of Jesus Christ. God and Christ are so connected that one cannot be denied without denying the other (see **John 12:44**). Therefore, any philosophy which teaches that there are multiple avenues to God is wrong and unscriptural. Jesus Christ is the only means by which a man can access the Father and go to heaven.

The scriptures also teach that the **gospel message** is exclusive in nature meaning that there is only one gospel which men are accountable to. In **Galatians 1:6-12**, Paul writes, "**6 I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: 7 Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. 9 As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. 10 For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. 11 But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. 12 For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.**" Paul's chief concern for the saints in Galatia was that they had been moved away from the gospel he had delivered unto them to some false gospel which would not save the soul. The gospel Paul had preached was received by the revelation of Christ and as such, had exclusive saving power. The futility of "other gospels" is illustrated in **2 Thessalonians 1:7-8**. Paul writes, "**7 And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, 8 In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:**" The eternal state of each and every man will be determined on whether or not he has obeyed not just any gospel, but the "**gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.**"

Other passages like **Ephesians 4:4-6** make it clear that religious pluralism is **not** a philosophy rooted in scripture. Paul writes, "**4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; 5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.**" Religious pluralism may sound pleasing and honorable, but it is one more misconception about truth which Satan uses to deceive the hearts of men.