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Mind Games Survival Course Manual



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Is Jesus the Only Savior?

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III. Some Remaining Questions

Though the case for exclusivism is very strong, there are some questions that must not be overlooked!

A. *If Christianity is exclusively true, are other religions totally false?*

1. No. There are many truths in most other religions. There are certainly some ethical truths in Buddhism and in Islam, for example. There is even theological truth in Islam (belief in the God of Abraham).
 2. But there is no saving truth in any other religion.
2. *What about parallels to Christianity in other religions, like incarnations of God and sacrifices to God?*
1. There are some similarities in some other religions. But we must beware of drawing the conclusion that similarities imply identity. In no other religion is there provision of an atonement for sin through the sacrifice of the incarnate Son of God, who gave proof of His person and work by rising from the dead (an event surrounded by a wealth of historical evidence).
 2. Even where there is sacrifice in other religions, the intent of the sacrifice is unlike that taught in the Bible. Generally, such sacrifices are intended to provide sustenance to the gods, or to appease an angry deity.
3. *What, then, is the source of other religions?*
1. There may be elements of God's truth in other religions, introduced

at times through early contact with the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. (Cf. Islam, and a few Buddhist and Hindu sects.)

2. Other elements of truth are the result of man's reflection on the creation, on his moral consciousness, and on his desire for forgiveness and immortality.
 3. We must not discount the direct activity of Satan and his demons whose desire is to lead as many as possible into destruction . . . even if by promoting a counterfeit religion and morality. (Cf. 2 Cor. 11:13--15.)
- 4. *If salvation comes only through hearing and believing the gospel, what about those who have never heard of Christ? Is there no hope for them?***
1. Some have proposed that the "unevangelized" will receive an opportunity to hear and believe in the gospel after death. Appeal is usually made to 1 Peter 3:19f and 1 Peter 4:6. However, careful examination of these texts will show that they do not refer to a proclamation of the gospel after death, but to preaching to people who later died (and were dead at the time of the writing of Peter's letter). Hebrews 9:27 would be consistent with the belief that only during this life can we come to faith: "It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment." It is doubtful that a decision to believe after death would be a free decision, since one would be in the clear presence of heaven and hell.
 2. A text that gives us some guidance in this area is Luke 8:18, "Therefore take care how you listen; for whoever has, to him shall more be given; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him." Applied to the present discussion, these words of Jesus would seem to indicate that when a person responds to the revelation he has already (whether it be through creation, conscience, or the truth in another religion), God sees that he receives more truth, and ultimately truth about Christ.
 3. Cornelius himself is a wonderful example of someone who had responded to the truth that he had, and as a result God later revealed to him the gospel through which he was saved!

Conclusion

The teaching of Scripture is that God always brings salvation to an individual through his hearing and believing in the message about His gracious provision of that salvation. This was true before Jesus came, and it is true today.

During this age the message of salvation centers on what God has done through His Son, Jesus Christ. "So faith come from hearing, and hearing by the word of (or, about) Christ" (Rom. 10:17). This is the message "that leads to salvation through faith which is in Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 3:15). It is not impossible that God could communicate the

gospel in an extraordinary way to some individuals; but we do know that His normal way is to spread the message through His people. "And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? . . . How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things" (Rom. 10:14--15)!

For Further Reading

Anderson, Sir Norman. *Christianity and World Religions*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1984.

This is an excellent discussion of the uniqueness of Christianity as compared with other major religions. He presents the inclusivist position in chapter 5.

Boa, Kenneth and Larry Moody. *I'm Glad You Asked*. Colorado Springs, Co.: Chariot Victor Books, 1994.

This handbook on apologetics has two excellent chapters (8 and 9) on world religions and the question of the unevangelized.

Carson, Donald A. *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.

A thorough study of the issue of pluralism. Carson is well-qualified as a New Testament scholar to deal with the hermeneutical issues underpinning much of (post)modern pluralistic thinking.

Clarke, Andrew and Bruce Winter. *One God, One Lord*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1992 edition.

This book provides a serious discussion of the biblical perspective on other religions.

Fernando, Ajith. *The Christian's Attitude Toward World Religions*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1987.

A very helpful discussion of the biblical case for exclusivism.

_____. *The Supremacy of Christ*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossways Books, 1995.

"As a very capable Bible scholar, an effective evangelist, and a leading theologian with many years of experience in Buddhist and Hindu contexts, Ajith Fernando is especially qualified to address one of the most controversial issues of our day the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in a pluralistic world. His sensitive, informed, and thoroughly biblical treatment of the subject should be read carefully by all interested in the current debate." Harold Netland, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

Nash, Ronald H. *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994.

A reasoned response to both the pluralist and inclusivist position, written by a convinced exclusivist.

Netland, Harold A. *Dissonant Voices*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991.

A scholarly rebuttal of the pluralist viewpoint.

Richard, Ramesh P. *The Population of Heaven*. Chicago: Moody, 1994.

An informed refutation of the inclusivist position.

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