

Is Christianity the Only Way to Heaven?ÿ

John 14:4-6

Introduction

In the last fifty years, the land of America has seen incredible changes. In fact, if you were born sometime around the late 1940's, you were born before the invention of television, penicillin, frozen foods, Xerox machines, plastic cups, contact lenses, and Frisbees. In the last fifty years, everything from credit cards, laser beams, ballpoint pens, dishwashers, electric blankets, and air conditioners were created.

Fifty years ago, America had never heard of computer dating, dual careers, day-care, group therapy, and nursing homes. We had never heard of FM radio either, or tape decks, electric typewriters, artificial hearts, and yogurt. Fifty years ago, the word "hardware" meant hardware, a "chip" meant a piece of wood, and "software" was not even a word.

What has happened in the lifetime of nearly everyone in the country of America is staggering.

There is a shift in our culture today, that has taken many by surprise. It is a shift that affects something much more basic and important than our credit cards or computer disks. It is a shift in our way of thinking. It is what we call a paradigm shift and it has affected not only our demand for variety and selection in toothpaste and lipstick, but in religion and beliefs as well.

For instance, fifty years ago there was the basic belief in America that there was one God and that He was the God derived from the scriptures. You either believed in this God or you did not believe in God at all. Today, the belief is that the God of the Bible is

only one god among many gods, each equally valid in their claims.

In fact, in the 1993 to 1994 *Barna* research report, nearly two out of three adults contend that the choice of one religious faith over another is irrelevant because all religions teach the same basic lessons about life.

So, today, you have probably heard statements such as:

- "I love Christ as much as you do, but I don't think He is the only way to God. God would never limit the way to heaven to one person."
- "I don't believe much of what the Bible says really happened. And I don't have to be 'A-okay' with God – it's just a matter of your own personal interpretation."
- "I think that all the religions of the world are essentially the same. Why should we argue about minor points of disagreements?"
- "There are a lot of things I like about Christianity, except the fact that it seems so dogmatic and intolerant of other religions."

Erwin Lutzer's book entitled, *Christ Among Other God's*, caught my attention. Dr. Lutzer described his exposure to the Parliament of World Religions, which met in Chicago the year before he wrote the book. Six thousand delegates, who had one message, "Unite or Perish!" attended. It was a call for all the religions of the world to find common ground and unite. In fact, the Parliament of World Religions held seminars to help people get over the thought that

one religion could be superior to another, which is, and I quote, “the crucial obstacle” to religious unity.

Dr. Lutzer reported an interesting observation. Among the seven hundred workshops offered, Christ was variously admired, quoted, and favorably compared to other religious teachers. He was merely one enlightened man among many. Though He was respected, He was not worshiped.

Whether we like it or not, today, the paradigm in religious thinking is this, “The doctrines of different faiths should not be held as truths but as shells that contain kernels of truth that are found in all religions. Since the claim for truth is a stumbling block to unity, it is best to speak of religious traditions rather than religious truths.”

Today, our society is actually moving from pluralism, to syncretism. That is, you can now choose a little bit from Christianity, a little bit of New Ageism, a little bit from Hinduism, a little bit of Protestant doctrine, a little bit of Catholic doctrine, mix them all together and come up with your own personal religion that fits your lifestyle, and your own little god who accepts you on your terms.

Religion is one happy buffet of possibilities. Spirituality is just another supermarket where you can choose the god of your choice.

What Jesus Christ is about to say, in John, chapter 14, will shatter any attempt to pick and choose. Jesus Christ is about to say, in the clearest terms yet, the most dogmatic, exclusivistic statement that, to this day, troubles our world.

Peter asked, “Lord, where are you going?”

If you were with us in our last discussion, we arrived at John, chapter 14, the chapter of answers! The disciples are troubled that Jesus is leaving them. And Peter, in chapter 13, verse 36, asked the question,

. . . Lord where are you going? . . .

So, in order to bring healing to their hurting hearts, Jesus tells them about their future reunion in heaven.

Thomas asked, “Lord, how do we get there?”

The next question comes from the lips of Thomas, and we will pick up our study there. For the sake of context, let us begin with verse 1, of chapter 14, and continue to Thomas’ question in verse 5.

“Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way where I am going.” Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, [so] how do we know the way?”

Don’t you love it when you are in a class and the teacher has just said something that you do not understand, but you are afraid to speak up and look slow?

It reminds me of the quote by Abraham Lincoln, “It is better to remain silent and be thought a fool, than to speak up and remove all doubt.”

And you are so relieved when Tom, over there, raises his hand and says, “Professor, I don’t understand. Could you back up and start again?”

Frankly, poor Thomas usually gets the bum rap for being the slow learner in class. I am grateful, however, because, instead of a rebuke for Thomas, his question gave the opportunity for one of the most powerful statements in all the Bible about the Lord Jesus, and the way of salvation.

Peter’s question was, “Lord, where are you going?”

Thomas’ question was, “Lord, how do we get there?”

The Divine Proposition

So, Thomas raises his hand. Read verse 5 again.

Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, [besides, even if we did] how do we know the way?”

Verse 6,

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.”

Now, the way this verse is put together is fascinating. Christ’s answer was not one thought, “I am the way, in that I am the truth and the life.”

No. It is three distinct thoughts or predicates. You could render the verse, “I am the way . . . I am the truth . . . I am the life.”

Furthermore, each predicate has an article which the Greeks would use for emphasis. You could expand your translation by writing, in the margin of your Bible, the word “only”. So it would read, “I am the only way; I am the only truth; I am the only life.”

Now, what I want to do today is simply illustrate and explain each of the three thoughts in Christ’s answer. He intended it to bring healing to their hurting hearts. Then, I want to explain the verdict with which Christ concludes His answer. And I can assure you, His verdict will either comfort your troubled heart, or it will trouble your comfortable heart.

I AM THE WAY

1. Predicate number one – “I am the way”.

Remember, that Jesus did not tell His disciples, in this verse, that He would show them the way to heaven. He told them He *was* the way! And that is a lot more comforting.

Imagine that you have come to a strange town. Many of you moved to this town and you were once strangers. Suppose you asked a person, when you had just arrived, “Could you give me directions to the nearest hardware store?”

“Sure,” they say, “go to the first intersection and turn right, then go one mile and turn left at the blinking light, then proceed two blocks and turn left and take an immediate right, follow that for one more mile . . .”

By the way, that is one of the reasons men rarely ask for directions – we have such poor memories. We will forget as soon as we pull away. That gives our wives ammunition, because they never forget the details of directions!

Since I am on this “rabbit trail,” that will probably just get me into trouble – have you ever asked someone from Minnesota or Wisconsin for directions? I can say this because I was born in Minnesota. Ask someone from Minnesota and they will say, “Go to the first intersection and turn north, go one mile and turn east . . .”

Big help! I never did stick that compass on my dash!

The chances are, we will be lost before we get halfway there.

I love the story that Billy Graham told of a time when he was a young preacher arriving in a small

town for the first time. Wanting to mail a letter, he stopped a young boy on the street and asked directions to the post office. After the boy had told him, Graham thanked him and said, “Listen, if you’ll come to church this evening, I’ll be telling everyone how to get to heaven.”

The boy thought a minute and then replied, “I don’t think I’ll come. You don’t even know how to get to the post office.”

Suppose, however, that the person from whom you asked directions said to you, “Listen, I have time, I’ll just take you there.”

In that case, the person does not show you the way, he has *become the way*. He does not show you a map, he *is* your map.

That is what Jesus is saying. He is not saying, “Look, I’ll tell you the way.”

He is saying, “I *am* the way.”

That is, “I will take you by the hand and lead you and guide you so that we will never lose your way.”

Jesus says, “I am the only way.”

This exclusive, dogmatic statement does not allow any other way to God – only His way!

In January of 1985, a large, unmarked, unclaimed suitcase was discovered at the customs office of the Los Angeles International Airport. When customs agents opened the suitcase, they found the curled up body of an unidentified young woman. She had been dead for several days. It was learned that the woman was the wife of a young Iranian living in the United States. Unable to obtain a visa to enter the country and join her husband, she took matters into her own hands and attempted to smuggle herself in, via an airplane’s cargo bay. While to her, the plan seemed simple, though risky, officials were hard pressed to understand how such an attempt could ever succeed. Even if she survived the journey, she would still be considered an illegal alien, having entered through improper channels. She would have been forced to leave.

Ladies and gentlemen, heaven is no less designed. Entry plans of your own making will prove not only to be foolish, but fatal. If you go your own way; if you pick and choose your own path to heaven, you will be dead on arrival – no way in!

Solomon declared, in Proverbs, chapter 14, verse 12,

There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.

Now turn to Acts, chapter 4, and listen to Peter preaching to the religious leaders, in verses 10 through 12.

let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead . . . He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the very corner stone. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.

Jesus Christ declared in John, chapter 14, verse 6,
I am the way . . . no one comes to the Father, but through ME.

I AM THE TRUTH

2. He also went on to say, in verse 6, predicate number two – “I am the truth”.

G. Campbell Morgan is careful to expound on this three-fold declaration within its direct relationship to the Father.

Jesus says,

“I am the way – that is to the Father.”

“I am the truth – that is the truth about the Father.”

In other words, if you want to know the truth about God, heaven, the hereafter; if you want to know the truth about God – study Jesus – He is the way to God, He is the truth of God, and He is the very life of God. Jesus Christ is the embodiment of God.

That is what Paul meant when he wrote in Colossians, chapter 2, verse 9,

For in Him [Christ] all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form

If you want to know what God looks like – look at Jesus. If you want to know what the power of God is like – watch the works of Jesus! The exclusive representation of truth about God is Christ.

The question is, is Jesus telling the truth?

Now everybody knows that nobody can tell a bigger tale than a fisherman. “It was this big!” – that is always the size of the one that got away!

Kent Hughes, in one of his commentaries, tells about a fishing contest which holds a lying contest afterward. The person who catches the biggest fish gets an award, but so does the person who tells the biggest lie. He tells of the winning contestant’s lie one year. The winner said he had found a fantastic place to fish. In fact, the fish were just watching and waiting for him to drop his line. It was so good that he had to stand behind a tree to bait his hook. Once, when he was not paying close attention and forgot to stand behind the tree, a seven pound bass jumped out of the lake, cleared thirty feet of shore, and bit the hook!

Dr. Hughes also told about the Liar’s Club in Burlington, Wisconsin, where anyone can join for one dollar and a good enough lie. One aspiring member told how the fog was so thick that, when they cut down a tree, it did not fall over until the fog lifted. Another said his wife was so lazy that she fed the chickens popcorn so the eggs would turn themselves over when she fried them. And another man said his wife’s feet were so cold that every time she took off her shoes, the furnace kicked on. That is no a lie is it?!

You know how society views the Bible – as fanciful tales; folk stories. Well, is this carpenter from Nazareth just inventing fanciful tales to encourage a following? Is He telling clever stories? Is this a fisherman’s tale?

Of the many reasons why Christ is indeed the truth, one would be that, if you observed all the major religions of the world, their founders all lie in graves. Jesus’ grave is empty.

And, all the other religions of the world tell you to do a myriad of works and things and rituals, if you ever hope to make it to their version of paradise. Jesus is the only one who says, “You don’t have to do anything – apart from believe that I’ve done everything for you already.”

Go back to verses 1 through 3 of John, chapter 14.

Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In my Father’s house are many dwelling places, if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

Who is doing everything? Jesus is! What are you doing? Nothing.

Yet, what Jesus is saying is troubling – because it is dogmatic to our flexible world; because it is narrow-minded to our open-minded world; because it is intolerant of any other view in a society that supposedly applauds tolerance.

The famous historian, Arnold Toynbee, predicted that the governments of the world would unite, either by force or federation, but that the unity could not succeed without a universal religion. Christianity, he said, should be purged of its “sinful state of mind,” namely, its exclusivism.

Exclusivism maintains that God has revealed Himself only in Jesus Christ.

But isn't that what Jesus Himself declared – that He is the exclusive way, truth, and life?

I like the comments of one writer who said,

I've discovered that the less some people know about Christ, the more they like Him. The baby in the manger touches even the most cynical soul. The Sermon on the Mount is treated with reverence. He is worthy to be spoken of as first among equals. However, since Christ said that the world would hate Him, we can be sure that, when the world loves Him, it is because they have made Him into something He is not.

We used to have the conviction that everyone has a right to his own opinions. Now, our society believes that every opinion is equally right.

Yet that belief is, ultimately, absurd. And it violates the laws of logic.

For instance, if you have a pot of water sitting on top of a stove. The water is boiling and the eye is red hot. You say to your friend, “I believe that water is hot,” but he says, “I believe it is cold”.

So you and he agree that, for you, the truth is that the water is hot and, for him, the truth is that the water is cold.

That is absurd! The water is either hot or cold. One of you believes the truth, the other believes a lie.

Or perhaps you live next to a Mormon family. They believe Jesus Christ is the brother of Satan and is merely an angelic being. You believe Christ is God in the flesh, unrelated to Satan. Both of you could be wrong, but both of you cannot be right.

In India, they believe in the existence of more than three hundred thousand gods. You believe that there is only one. Both of you cannot be right.

Now follow this. The laws of logic relate to mathematics, science, and history, and yet, when it comes to the spiritual world, all of sudden, there are brilliant people throwing logic away and saying, “What is right for you to believe is right and what is right for me to believe is right.”

If you want to believe that every tree, bush, and bird is a spirit being – great, you are then right; if I want to believe in one God, one Lord, one faith – great, for you that is right.

No! Somebody is wrong – and I, for one, do not want to stake my eternal future on what could be wrong.

I read about a man who was driving in the country. He passed a barn that had, on its side, numerous targets. In the center of each target, right in the bull's eye, was an arrow. He was amazed! He got out of his car and went to congratulate the farmer. The farmer said, “I didn't do that. That was done by a young guy in the village who came out and just shot arrows all into the side of my barn. Then, he painted bull's eyes around each arrow!”

The Western world now believes that you can shoot your arrow of faith in any direction, and a benevolent supreme being will approve every shot, “Sching . . . bull's eye; Sching . . . bull's eye; Sching . . . bull's eye!”

Even if you shoot yourself in the foot – “bull's eye!”

So, if you say to someone, “I believe in Christ” – you might gain respect for being a moral, upstanding person. But, if you go further and say, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the only true Savior” – you are an intolerant bigot.

The state of our world's rebellion could be illustrated by someone drowning at sea. They are graciously thrown a life saving rope, but respond by insisting that they deserve a choice of several ropes, along with the option of swimming to safety, if they so choose.

No! Jesus Christ says, “I am it! I am the way to God, and I am the truth about God. Choose Me or choose to perish.”

I AM THE LIFE

3. Now, the last part of this triple declaration, in John, chapter 14, verse 6, is the third predicate – “I am (not only the way, and the truth, but) the life.”

The apostle John was captivated by this word, “zoe,” in the Greek, or “life”. He used it and its cognates approximately fifty six times in the gospel.

The Lord Jesus Himself, used the word, for the first time, when He said, as recorded in Matthew, chapter 7, verse 14a,

For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life . . .

The Lord also told Martha, outside the tomb of her brother Lazarus, in John, chapter 11, verse 25a,

. . . I am the resurrection and the life . . .

If you and I want to experience the fulfilled, God-intended life here on earth and, later, the thrilling dimension of eternal life in heaven, there is only one way. Christ says,

. . . I am . . . the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.

While other religions take bad men and try to make them better, only one is qualified to take dead men and make them alive.

I can testify that He is the life. I can tell you that I have come to life in Him, and I know the truth of forgiveness and the joy trust; I know the freedom of spiritual life and the freedom from guilt.

Jesus Christ is the end of your search for the way, the truth, and the life.

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah said, in chapter 30, verse 21a,

And your ears will hear a word behind you, “This is the way, walk in it” . . .

David would cry out, in Psalm, chapter 86, verse 11a,

Teach me Thy way, O Lord; I will walk in Thy truth . . .

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”

Carson’s poem has Jesus speaking,

I am the way to God;

I did not come to light a path that you may simply follow in my tracks;

Each other path is dismal swamp, or fraud.

I stand alone;

I am the way to God.

I am the truth of God;

I do not claim I merely speak the truth;

The claim to speak the truth good men applaud.

I claim much more;

I am the truth of God.

I am the resurrection life.

It’s not as though I merely bear life-giving drink,

A magic elixir which is cheap because it’s not bought.

The price of life was fully paid;

I fought with death and black despair;

For I am the resurrection and the life.

Perhaps you saw the news, some years ago, as I did, of the fire in Colorado and the tragedy. In fact, the headline of a *USA Today* article said, “Colorado Tragedy”. And so it was. I kept up with the news and I clipped the article because I thought of this passage in John. It talked about the thirty eight firefighters who survived the fire on Storm Mountain, while a dozen more died. But, what arrested my attention to this article was the fact that the deaths were the result of their wrong decision. Now, they only had seconds to make it and the tragic panic, that must have been there, was overwhelming to me.

Each firefighter, if you have read and learned, as I did, how this works, carries, in their belt pouches, a thin blanket, called a shelter. It consists of a thin layer of aluminum foil glued to a layer of thin glass. It is cloth-like, less than an inch thick, and weighs about three pounds. It can be opened and the person can lie under it, when the fire gets too close and they are having difficulty surviving the heat, and it allows them to live.

Well, this fire, that raged on Storm Mountain, took a turn for the worse on a Wednesday afternoon. These men had been able to contain the fire to less than fifty acres, but, on that Wednesday, huge, powerful winds whipped the fire up so that it covered two thousand acres in less than five hours. Many of the men were trapped. One firefighter said that, without warning, it just exploded. It sounded like a tornado and everybody got out of there as fast as they could.

The article goes on to say,

With just instants to outwit the fires, some firefighters ran back through walls of flame to burned out, spent ground. They were among the thirty eight who lived. But, at least nine who died had tried to climb into their shelters, in the path of the fire, and found them insufficient shields against suffocating flames and heat. One firefighter summarized it this way, 'The guys who used their shelters died. The guys who ran back into and through the wall of fire, onto the ground already burned, lived.'"

Ladies and gentlemen, when I read this, I thought of humanity, running for its life before the flames of eternal judgment. Those of you who have your little shelter – religion, good works, baptism, money, morality – I will tell you, it will not withstand the heat of God's holy wrath. The only ones who will live are those who have run to scorched ground – ground where the fires of God's wrath have already burned. My friend, that ground is none other than Jesus Christ, for against Him, the wrath of God has already been revealed, and all those who stand in Him will be saved.

As Romans, chapter 6, verse 23, tells us,

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Divine Verdict

If Jesus Christ is the way . . .

1. If Jesus Christ is the way – you are lost unless you are following His direction.

If Jesus Christ is the truth . . .

2. If Jesus Christ is the truth – you are deceived unless you are believing His message.

If Jesus Christ is the life . . .

3. If Jesus Christ is the life – you are hopeless unless you are receiving His gift.

Jesus Christ is not one god among many – He is the only God.

Jesus Christ is not one kernel of divine truth – He is the only truth.

Jesus Christ is not one path to heaven among many – He is the only path.

For He Himself declared, "I am the only way . . . truth . . . life; no one, not even one, comes to the Father, except through Me."

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 8/28/1994 by Stephen Davey.

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