

DO ALL RELIGIONS LEAD TO GOD?

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INTRODUCTION

For many life issues, the modern world's perspective is that **all viewpoints are equally valid**. Many people consider **religion** to be one of those issues like your **food preferences** or your **hobbies**. Each of us is **different**, but none are **better** so people assume that all religions are **pretty much equal, fundamentally the same**, and **all lead to the same place**.



Here, we'll address 2 burning questions:

1 Do all paths lead to the right place?

You're going up a mountain and want to end up at the summit - heaven or enlightenment. As you start traveling there's a fork - "Christianity" turns left, "Mormonism" turns right, etc. Some would say, **"The paths might look different, but they all go to the top." Is this true?**

2 What do we do about our differences?

The bumper stickers that say "Coexist" have all the religions **happily side-by-side**. In our culture it's a truism to say we should all be tolerant and get along. Religions should be able to **"stand side by side"**. But is this **true**? Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God? What about the differences?

A big issue is the lack of clarity **with our terms**.

There's a lot of "equivocation": people use the **same word** to mean **different things**. That's not okay on **legal documents**, but on **Twitter and Facebook, anything goes**.

DIVERSITY AND TOLERANCE

Diversity is the quality or state of having many different forms, types, ideas, etc.

Diversity is a good thing, and we have lots of **religious diversity** which means we live in a **diverse marketplace of ideas** where **no single view is dominant at the exclusion of others**. The idea of **tolerance** is built-in.

But the definition of tolerance has shifted...

The **classic** definition of tolerance was: "To accept **all** people even if you **don't agree** with them." "**Accept**" **didn't mean "I agree with you"**; it didn't even mean **saying** "I agree with you."

But "accept" **DID** mean "Even though I disagree, you are valuable as a person. We can still work together, do business together, be friends, and so on."

However, the **modern** definition of tolerance is: "TO ACCEPT ALL **IDEAS AS EQUALLY TRUE.**"

When this gets applied to **religion**, it just seems **intolerant** if we say to anyone, "I don't think what you believe is true."

Should we accept the modern definition of tolerance, that all viewpoints are correct?

BLIND MEN AND THE ELEPHANT

This situation has been expressed in a famous analogy.

Imagine an elephant and a bunch of blind men.



Each one approaches the elephant to see what it is.

One touches a leg and says, "Hey, it's like a tree."

Another touches the side and says, "Hey, it's like a wall."

And so on.

But then, as the story goes, a prince appears, who is not blind, and says

"You are **all** right, you all have **pieces of the truth.**"

And this is what many people say about religion.

"Why are you disagreeing? You all have bits of truth, just put it together."

"Your religion is true for you, and mine is true for me."

We call this **pluralism**. This person is a **religious pluralist**.

Are there any problems with this analogy? When does it apply and when does it not?

Someone who says, "You all have bits of the truth", is claiming to be the prince in the analogy.

So, before determining **whether all religions can be true**, we need to agree that **religious pluralists are making a truth claim...** In a way, they are claiming to know **MORE than everybody else**. They are claiming to **see the big picture**.

RELATIVE VS. OBJECTIVE TRUTH



What does it mean for something to be **TRUE**?

Consider **ice cream**, which comes in many flavors.

"Chocolate is the best ice cream flavor!" Is this true?

If you're really dogmatic you might say "yes" or "no".

But probably most of you would say: "It **depends on who** is saying it."

It depends because it's **relative to the person...**

In other words, it is a **relative truth**.

On the other hand, an **insulin injector** is used to control diabetes.

So if someone says: "Insulin is used to control diabetes", you wouldn't say "Well, **it depends on who's saying it**." This statement is true **regardless** of who is saying it. It's a fact of reality, an **objective truth**.

As a brief exercise, determine whether these are **ice cream (subjective) statements** or **insulin (objective) statements**:

- George Washington was the first president of the United States. (Objective because it's historical fact)
- Bacon is awesome. (Subjective because it's my opinion, not shared by everyone)
- Dan thinks bacon is awesome. (Objective because now it's qualified to just me, and I do)
- God exists.
- After death we cease to exist.

What we learn about truth is:

- 1 Some truths are objective** (George Washington, ice creams stats)
- 2 Objective truth is by nature, exclusive.**

If someone said, "George Washington was NOT the first president of the United States," and a friend of his said, in a very kind and tolerant way, "Sorry man, you're **wrong**." The friend wouldn't have said this because he's **mean**, but because it's an **objective fact**. In fact, we can go far as to say that it's what a good friend would do to help you pass AP US History!

Therefore, when it comes to **subjective, relative** truth, there's no need to persuade others.

On the other hand, when it comes to **objective** truth, the *loving thing* to do is to **engage one another** and mutually get closer to the truth. **If you're wrong, wouldn't you want to know? If someone else is wrong**, would you want them to know? Hopefully, we'd all say yes... because bad things happen when we live a lie!

And even if no one is trying to persuade anyone of anything, **objective truth is still exclusive**. If something is **true to reality**, then statements that conflict with it **cannot be also true**.

WHAT CATEGORY FOR RELIGION?

Where does religion fall? Is religion like ice cream or insulin?

When people say, "All religions are equally true", or "all religions are the same", we have to consider: **Do religions make exclusive truth claims?**

CENTRAL ISSUES IN RELIGION

SURVEY OF WORLD RELIGIONS

To evaluate whether world religions make exclusive truth claims, we'll look at 3 central issues in Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Mormonism:

- **Who is God?**
- **Who am I?**
- **What is my purpose?**

Please bear in mind that the amount of variation within these, especially the Eastern religions, is massive.

WORLD RELIGIONS OVERVIEW

See *The Apologetics Study Bible*, "Comparison of World Religions" Appendix

	Who is God?	Who am I?	What is my purpose?
	<i>Not all religions have "God" per se, but all have some ultimate reality.</i>	<i>What is the nature of man?</i>	<i>What should I be doing, and what is my final goal?</i>
Buddhism	Essentially atheistic at core, Buddha himself did not emphasize the gods, though some forms of Buddhism practice devotion to specific deities; in some cases the "deities" are departed Bodhisattvas - great figures of Buddhist history.	Humanity is in a state of suffering; this suffering arises from a desire, any kind of desire, even the desire for good things; desire is the root of all human problems.	Follow the "Eight-fold path"; it includes right understanding, right speech, and right effort; this leads to elimination of desire and therefore from suffering by entering a state of non-existence (moksha) as an individuated human being (nirvana); highest goal is to cease to exist as an individual.
Hinduism	Many gods, but the most important are Brahma (impersonal reality), Shiva (death and reproduction), Vishnu (love and play); gods not sovereign over events in the world, but subject to the same cosmic forces as humans are, such as karma; along with the common gods recognized by most Hindus, many locations have their own unique deities; at the same time, "Atman (humanity) is Brahman (ultimate reality)" - all is One.	Humanity lives with the illusion (maya) of perceiving the world as it seems to be rather than as it really is (Brahman, or the One); moral retribution (karma) follows us through multiple incarnations (samsara).	Understanding the human predicament through disciplines such as yoga, devotion to one of the gods (especially Shiva), and through a flash of knowledge; knowledge brings release from karmic cycle of reincarnation (samsara); often, men leave their families in their later years to become hermits, working off their karma by ascetic practices. Goal is release from existence by achieving non-existence (moksha) and an entering into oneness with the One (Brahman) ceasing to exist as an individuated human being (nirvana); one becomes like a drop of water that falls into the ocean; this can be achieved quickly for those who achieve enlightenment, though eventually it will be the experience of all.

	Who is God?	Who am I?	What is my purpose?
Islam	<i>"No God but Allah"; a unitarian, monotheistic, faith which sees Allah as determining every specific event that happens in the world; Allah is virtually coterminous with his Word, part of which is found in the Koran.</i>	Humans are finite in contrast to the infinite sovereignty of Allah; they are foolish and need instruction, which comes from the Koran; they are also sinners, such sin being especially seen in violations of Muslim taboos or prohibited behavior and failure to do the will of Allah perfectly.	Embrace the Five Pillars (daily recitation of creed, prayer, giving alms, pilgrimage to Mecca, fasting during Ramadan); complete and utter devotion to Allah; final salvation is reserved only for the most diligent of Muslims. Goal is future resurrection of the righteous unto eternal bliss in a heavenly Paradise; all of the physical pleasures that one may not have access to in this life will be available in Paradise; infidels spend eternity in a most torturous hell.
Mormonism	There are many gods and the Trinity is comprised of three separate beings, two with physical bodies and one with a spirit body. The Father is an exalted man who was granted rule over our world. He himself has a father and mother and also has a wife. He is the creator of all the spirits of those who will eventually be born on earth.	The Fall of Adam and Eve was not actually a serious sin, since it was necessary for opening the way to perfection. Humans do commit sins, but they can overcome that tendency and live lives that please the Father.	Christ's death canceled the penalty of death, but did not actually purchase salvation. Though grace plays a role in salvation, it only comes into play after we do all we can to merit eternal life. The future life is made up of three realms, plus hell, though it is not clear that many besides the devil and his angels will spend eternity in hell. Some hold that hell also includes anyone who has specifically rejected LDS teaching, as well as LDS apostates. The other realms include the telestial kingdom, the terrestrial kingdom, and the celestial kingdom. Only the celestial kingdom is actually "heaven", open only to Mormons.
Christianity	Monotheistic, trinitarian belief; Father, Son and Spirit are equal and eternal and sovereign over all; God is love and is also holy; he is both transcendent and immanent, but is never dependant upon the world; his true nature is most easily seen in the person of his Incarnate Son, Jesus.	In their natural condition, humans are dead in trespasses and sins; they require a specific work of the Holy Spirit to rescue them; they cannot be saved by their own goodness and efforts.	Receive the gift of God's grace by trusting in Jesus Christ alone for salvation, which he purchased with his shed blood; this initial experience of justification is followed by a life of fellowship with other Christians and faithfulness to the Lord. Goal is entering into the spiritual presence of God at death for believers; future resurrection of the body at the Second Advent of Christ; new heavens and new earth in an eternal realm of peace and righteousness for believers; eternal punishment in hell for the finally impenitent.

What are the differences?

Can these religions all be true? Can the inconsistencies be reconciled? How?

EVALUATION



To answer the question, "Do all religions lead to God?", we need to **evaluate** these religions.

POINTS OF EXCLUSION

As we walk through the basics of these religions, there are **points of exclusion**.

The fact is that **many world religions were formed by rejecting some existing doctrine**.

Buddhism was born by the rejection of key Hindu features like the caste system and the authority of the Vedas (Hindu spiritual books).

The Abrahamic religions (Christianity & Islam) disagree with Hinduism over the doctrines of reincarnation and karma. And you can't resolve that without **changing what those religions are**.

If you remove karma or reincarnation, **you no longer have Hinduism**.

If you remove original creation and the final destinies of heaven and hell from Christianity, **you no longer have Christianity**.

Even within Abrahamic religions, you have disagreements over **whether salvation is a free gift, where people come from, and what our final destiny is**.

RELATIVE OR OBJECTIVE?

So, is religion relative or objective? Is it like ice cream or insulin?

Some features of religion are **objective truth claims about the world** – claims about God, our origins, and the afterlife. These are **objective** because religions disagree in a way where **both cannot be right at the same time**. These are the **points of exclusion** because **truth is by nature exclusive**.

THE EXCLUSIVITY OF CONCRETE CLAIMS

Another way to think about it:

For one person to say "This table exists," and another to say "This table doesn't exist," we know that one of us is right and the other is wrong.

Consider these statements:

"Only one true God exists."

"Many gods exist."

"No gods exist."

If God exists, then he is an **objective** part of reality. So these statements **cannot all be true**.

Consider these statements:

"After we die we cease to exist."

"After we die we will go to heaven or hell."

What happens to us after we die is an **objective fact**, not **relative reality**.

STRIPPING OUT THE MORAL COMPONENT

It's tempting to just take the moral component of religion and stick with that set of morals since they seem to be the same everywhere.

- But:
- 1 Even moral commands are not all the same between religions. There are many variations.**
 - 2 By doing this the core truths are stripped away from each religion.**

The result is morality itself becoming a religion with no answers to crucial questions like:

- Is there a **creator to answer to**?
- Where do you go when you **die**?
- **How** can I be a moral person?
- **How** to get away from my own imperfection. Even if everyone agreed to follow the golden rule, each religion has a drastically different way of getting there. We have to face the fact that even if the goal were the same, we don't live up to that goal.

HOW DO WE CHOOSE?



Maybe the idea of having to **choose** seems unfair, or just hard. How can we decide?

If we're arguing about whether this table exists, we can **test it**. We can apply **science** and **logical reasoning** to figure it out.

How do you do that with religion? If **not all religions can be true**, then **how do we determine which are?**

This is one of the things that makes **Christianity so unique**.

It has what **no other religion has** in this respect: it is backed up by **incredible reason and evidence**.

Here's a Bible verse, that makes an astonishing claim that you'll have a hard time finding in any other religious text:



1 Corinthians 5:13-14

But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.

In this verse the Apostle Paul stakes the truth of the entire Christian religion on a historical fact. What a risky thing to do! But Christianity has stood the test of time like no other religion.

HOW DO WE HANDLE THE DIFFERENCES?

There are 2 questions that we are trying to answer:

- 1 Do all religions lead to God?
- 2 If not, **what do we do about the differences?**

PERSONAL IMPLICATIONS

First, there are **personal implications**.

G.K. Chesterton once said, "Merely having an open mind is nothing. The object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid."

If religions have **points of exclusion**, and there is **objective truth out there**, then it means we should all be **seekers** of the truth.

If belief in God is an "**insulin**" issue and not an "**ice cream**" issue, then it means there are **life and death implications** and **our choices matter**.

If you identify as a **seeker** but not a **Christian** yet, that's great! **Keep seeking with an open mind!** And also seek with the goal of arriving at the truth.

INTERPERSONAL IMPLICATIONS

Aside from personal implications, there are **interpersonal implications**.

We need to return to the **classical perspective on tolerance**, where we **accept people as they are**, but allow there to be a **marketplace of ideas**.

We are only going to get closer to the truth if together we **challenge and test** what we hear.

But the point of tolerance is that we must do it **winsomely and kindly**, taking it very seriously that people have their **own** beliefs.

Never assume that just because someone has a **religious label**, that you really know **what they believe**. Instead, **ask people what they believe!**

Tolerance and respect go **both ways**.

If we are going to try to **get our own perspective out there**, we need to be ready to hear others out. **Listening** is often **more powerful than speaking**.

THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRISTIANITY

You may wonder, "**Why would anyone believe** that all religions lead to God?" But there's something about our culture that we must see.

Why would coworkers who are not Christians respond to a Christian who says he serves at his church, "Wow, that's great, man." They may think that at the end of the day, what matters is that **you're fulfilled and happy**.

There's this **hidden assumption** that we all have the same set of goals:
personal fulfillment, happiness, and virtue...

So one person gets it through **Buddhist meditation**...
Another gets it through a **Christian worship service**...
Another gets it through **the 5 pillars of Islam**.

They look at people in different religions who seem **motivated** and **positive**, and that's **all they see** so **all religions are a good thing**. Our culture has taught us that whatever is **good** must be **true**.
Therefore, "**all paths must lead to God**."

But **all religions** do not have the **same set of goals**.

THE GOAL OF CHRISTIANITY IS RELATIONSHIP



What is the goal of Christianity? The goal of Christianity is entering into a **RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR CREATOR**.

In contrast, all other world religions can be broken down into some combination of:

- Things you need to **believe**
- Things you need to **feel**
- And things you need to **do**

The way Jesus described this relationship was that it was about “being known”:



John 10:14-15

¹⁴ “I am the good shepherd. **I know my own and my own know me,** ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.”

John 10:27

²⁷ “My sheep hear my voice, and **I know them, and they follow me.**”

The knowledge he’s talking about is **not intellectual knowledge but a deep personal connection.**

Salvation is **free**, but it’s not about **getting a ticket to heaven and then walking out with it, because the Gospel is about being known.** This new relationship with God, if genuine, brings **about change.**

Jesus did not come to make **bad people good**, he came to make **dead people live.** Even though being a better person is **something that happens to us as Christians** (at least hopefully that’s one of the **byproducts**) it isn’t the primary thing. The goal of Christianity is to be **made alive with Christ** and be **reconciled to God.**

And no amount of following pillars or meditation will get you there.

No other religion calls us into a **love relationship with God** like the Christian gospel. Only **Jesus** does this.

We started by asking the question, “Do all religions lead to God?” We end with Jesus as the answer to the question beneath this question, “How do I get to God?”

In John 14:6, Jesus says, “**I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**”

May your seeking lead you to Him.

