

Isn't It Intolerant to Say Jesus Is the Only Way?

Given today's call for tolerance, the idea of Jesus as the only way to God seems rather distasteful. Some deal with this question by saying that Jesus never said he was the only way and that Christians through the years came up with that idea so as to promote their own religious agenda. This objection, however, does not stand up well to scrutiny. The biographical accounts of Jesus not only have Jesus saying he is the only way, but his enemies react violently when he does. Furthermore, after his death and resurrection, Jesus' followers start preaching that he is the only way. You could argue they did this to elevate their own cause, but given that it eventually led to their own suffering and martyrdom, you'd have to say their lie was a costly one. Consider some of the things Jesus and his followers said:

John 3:16, 18 | "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life...Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

John 8:23-24 | But he [Jesus] continued, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins."

John 14:6 | Jesus replied, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Acts 4:12 | "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among people by which we must be saved."

Of course, just because Jesus and his followers said things like this doesn't mean they are true. Before we consider that possibility, however, it is good to look at a couple of objections to the exclusivity of Christ's claims that aren't particularly strong despite their popularity. The first is the charge that Christ's claims are errant for the very reason that they are exclusive. The argument is that intolerance is wrong; exclusivity is intolerance; therefore, the exclusive claims of Jesus are wrong. But just because something is exclusive does not make it wrong. Take, for example, snake anti-venom. It may be the exclusive way to save someone's life. To say so, is not to be intolerant, it is simply to state what is true. Certainly, it is possible to be exclusive and wrong. Some could say that only men can do math well. That would be an exclusive statement, and it would be a wrong statement. But just because some exclusive claims are wrong, not all are.

A second common objection to the claims of Christianity is that it excludes people from other religions who are not only sincere, but are good people. Such an objection is important to consider, especially considering the billions who hold beliefs other than Christianity. But we must ask: does the sincerity or moral goodness of those who hold a belief necessarily make their belief valid? A few years back some nurses in Ohio sincerely thought they were giving their patients oxygen, but it turned out that nitrogen tanks had been wrongly labeled. Three patients died before the problem was identified. The nurses were good people and their beliefs were sincere, but that did not make their beliefs right. When we look at the religions of the world, we find they make rather contradictory claims. Some of them say there is one God; some say there are many. Others say, there is none at all. Furthermore, some religions say that certain rituals or behaviors get you to God; others say that a different methodology is the key. A few

make room for a variety of beliefs in their religious rubric, most say, "It's our way or the highway." Of course, there are sincere and good people in all these camps, but given the contradictory positions, they cannot all be right at the same time. Like it or not, some people, even many good people, are sincerely wrong.

So what about Christ? He made the claim that he is the only way. Are Christians right in believing him or are they sincerely wrong? That is up to you to decide, but here are some reasons Christians find it reasonable to think Jesus' claim should be trusted. First, Jesus lived a morally spotless life, something even his enemies acknowledged. Notice, I did not just say Jesus was a good person as we would call a person good today, but that no one could find that he did *anything* wrong. Second, history records that Jesus did many miracles. Jesus himself said these were signs that his words were trustworthy including his claim to be Christ. Third, Jesus fulfilled dozens of Messianic prophecies written centuries before his birth, which were way too outlandish to have occurred by mere chance. And fourth, and perhaps, most importantly, he rose from the dead and predicted he would before he did so. I suppose you could say that is not enough and that you need more to believe in Jesus' claim to be the only way to God, but I hope you can see that when Christians believe his claim, as exclusive as it might be, they aren't acting unreasonably. If you had a friend who did what Jesus did, you'd probably follow him to the moon. Why not do the same with Jesus?

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