

IS JESUS THE ONLY WAY TO HEAVEN?

Evangelicalism has always been a diverse movement. It has encompassed every entity from hard nosed fundamentalists like J. Frank Norris and Bob Jones (1930-1950) to the Jesus People (1960's – 70's). But every expression of evangelicalism has had one distinctive feature until recently: They all believed that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the only way to God and Heaven.

Forty years ago, the “One Way Sign” – the index finger held high- became a popular icon. “One Way” bumper stickers and lapel pins were seen everywhere. “One Way” slogans were the identifying “catchphrases” of all Evangelicals – Baptomethopaliancongrepresbygationalists.

However, the Evangelical movement is no longer united on this issue. Two viewpoints have risen to challenge this position:

- (1) Those who are convinced that people of all faiths will be in heaven, not just those who have trusted Jesus Christ.
- (2) The cowardly who, though they profess to be conservatives, are embarrassed to proclaim the exclusivity of the gospel, the “One Way” to God and Heaven, when pluralism and tolerance are deemed cardinal virtues in western cultures.¹

Why has this dramatic shift occurred in Evangelical thought? Several factors have undoubtedly produced it:

1. **The Rejection of the Authority of the Bible.** The source of the “One Way” theology is the Holy Scriptures, and when the absolute authority of the Bible is denied, the doctrine of the “One Way” falls with that viewpoint.
2. **The Rise of Post Modernism.** Modernism reigned in most of the 20th century, teaching that science is the only pathway to truth. Now Post Modernism has arisen to deny this view-point, insisting that there is no such thing as absolute, objective, universal truth. Thus by Post Modern thought truth is subjectively determined by each person. Thus truth is nothing more than one's opinion. So to say that Jesus is the only way to God is regarded by many moderns as absolutely unacceptable, insulting, even idiotic, and therefore unbinding on enlightened humankind.
3. **The Replacement of Reality by Ridiculous Tolerance.** In a Post-Modern culture, tolerance is the dominant feature. The word “tolerance” used to mean respecting people and treating them kindly; but in Post-Modern thought tolerance means we must never regard anyone else's opinion as wrong. To tell anyone that Jesus is the only way to God is totally unacceptable and even the unpardonable sin.

¹ See John McArthur, Why One Way, W Publishing Group, 2002, pp. vii-viii.

4. **The Refusal of Many Pastors to Preach their Convictions.** I asked Dr. Al Mohler this question in 1998 on the campus of Louisville Seminary, “How would you describe Southern Baptist preaching today?” Without hesitation, he replied, “Most Southern Baptist preachers and pastors have lost their ‘nerve’ to preach the whole counsel of God, including the truth that Jesus Christ is the one and only way to God.” Dr. James Kennedy used to say that “Three hundred thousand pulpits in America are silent on the issues of abortion, same-sex marriages, homo-sexuality.”
5. **The “Relevance Craze” Sweeping the Nation.** Many religious leaders are so desperate to be relevant and fashionable that they are willing to sacrifice truth or dilute it to mean nothing, failing to see that they are in fact sacrificing the saving gospel on a false premise. Dr. John McArthur writes a scathing word at this point, “Preachers are terrified that the offense of the gospel might turn someone against them; so they deliberately omit the parts of the message the world might not like.

Evangelicalism seems to have been hijacked by legions of carnal spin-doctors, who are trying their best to convince the world that the church can be just as inclusive, pluralistic, and broad-minded as the most politically-correct worldling.

The quest for the world’s approval is nothing less than spiritual harlotry. In fact, that is precisely the imagery the apostle James used to describe it. He wrote, ‘Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God’ (James 4:4).”²

6. **The Results of Cultural Pressure:** “One Way” is despised by the mainstream media and liberal elites. Just as with woman’s roles and homosexuality, it is another case of the church compromising to culture.

Having rejected the “One Way” Gospel, modern man has now invented three main approaches to get around the “One Way” approach:

- (1) **Universalism** – Another name for Universalism is pluralism, which holds there are many ways, even unlimited number to God and everyone will eventually be saved and reach heaven. This heresy goes back as far as Origen in the second century (185-254 AD.). This position. is popular with liberal theologians and New Age followers. This view is strongly espoused by John Hicks in these words: “Most New Testament scholars today do not believe that Jesus, the historical individual, claimed to be God incarnate. The old exclusivist view that only Christians are saved has been abandoned by the majority of Christian theologians and church

² Ibid, pp. 12

leaders.”³ Hicks has greatly exaggerated the extent of Universalism, but the fact that Universalism or Pluralism is rife in our times cannot be denied. Some years ago, I believe about 2000, Dr. Paige Patterson, Jerry Fallwell, and I were having lunch on the campus of SEBTS, and I asked these brothers this question, “What do you think is the greatest danger Southern Baptist’s will be facing in the years to come?” They both said, “Universalism.” I myself have thought that there is but a short step from “Easy Believism,” (which is widespread in Southern Baptist churches today), to Universalism).

- (2) **Inclusivism** – Adherents of this view claim that Jesus is the only Savior, but that it is possible for Jesus to save people even though they have never personally trusted Him for salvation. This view amounts to this: People can receive salvation by responding to God’s revelation in nature and conscience (general revelation), or even through other world religions. Other religions may have an imperfect understanding of the one true God, but the truth they teach is adequate to save them. Roman Catholic Karl Rahner says such persons should be recognized as “anonymous Christians” because of their good deeds. Dr. Clark Pinnock, once a flaming fundamentalist and a man I knew personally and admired greatly, has come to embrace the “inclusivist” position. He writes, “According to Acts 4:12,...Jesus has done a unique work for the human race, the good news of which needs to be preached to the whole world. But this uniqueness does not entail exclusivity.”⁴
- (3) **Annihilationism** – the view that the wicked will be ultimately exterminated and cease to exist. J. W. Stott and Dr. Clark Pinnock, once highly respected in evangelical circles, espoused this view point.⁵

EXCLUSIVISM –(The One-Way) This is the Biblical and True Position

This position holds that salvation comes only through a personal trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. “Exclusivism affirms the absolute uniqueness and finality of God’s revelation in Jesus. He alone is the Savior, the definitive, and ultimate expression of divine truth. Only in Him can people be saved. God would not have sent His only Son to die on a cross if He could have save us another way. The cross of Christ is God’s greatest testimony that Jesus is he exclusive way to the Father.”⁶ Exclusivism has been held by the historic church, both Catholic and Protestant, for most of its history. The great Princeton theologian, Benjamin Warfield, in The Person and Work of Christ affirms the uniqueness of Jesus in cogent language. He wrote, “Christ is Christianity itself; He stands not outside of it but in its center; without His

³ World Faiths Encounter, March 2001, pp. 3-11.

⁴ Quoted in Daniel Akin, Discovering the Biblical Jesus, Nashville, Tennessee: Life Press, 2003, p. 90.

⁵ Al Mohler, Hell Under Fire, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, p. 30

⁶ Akin, *Ibid.* p. 91

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name, person and work, there is no Christianity left. In a word, Christ does not point out the way to salvation; He is the Way itself.”⁷

Finally, the question remains, what is our basis for believing that Jesus Christ is the one and only way to God and to heaven? Our basis lies in the repeated teaching of the Holy Scripture, especially the New Testament. When we search the New Testament we find that all the major writers declare categorically, and with no ambiguity, that Jesus is the one and only way to God and to heaven:

1. **Jesus Himself, the Son of God**, says in John 14:6 that He is the only way to the Father. Verse 6 literally begins with the assertion, “I Myself am the Way.” Jesus used an intensive pronoun to stress that He and He alone is the way, the truth, the Life. The article is prominently placed before the three words: Ho Hodos (way), Ho Aletheia (truth), and Ho Zoe (life). Without the Way, there is no going; without the truth, there is no knowing; and without the Life, there is no Living. Hallelujah what a Savior. Not only did Jesus declare “He is the Way ...to the Father.” But He reinforced this truth when He went on to say, “No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6) and to know Him was to know the Father (John 14:7). To know Jesus is to know God, and to see Jesus is to see the Father (John 14:9).
2. **The Apostle Peter, Chief of the Apostles**, said that Jesus is the way. Peter is defending himself before the Sanhedrin who asked him, “By what power or by what Name have you done this?” “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: If we this day are judged for a good deed *done* to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the *‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone. Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.* Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:8-13).
3. **The Apostle Paul** said that Jesus is the only way. Instructing young Timothy, Paul states that God wants everyone to be saved and come to knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). Then Peter points out that there is only one way humankind can enter

⁷ Benjamin B. Warfield, The Person and Work of Christ, p.319.

into the presence of a holy God – through the “one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). God’s invitation is universal, but His salvation is specific and exclusive. It is only through His Son, Jesus, and in no other (1 John 5:12; Romans 10:9-15).

4. **The Apostle John** said that Jesus is the Only Way. By quoting the very words of Jesus, as stated above in John 14:6-9, the beloved apostle clearly believed and affirmed that Jesus alone is the only way to God and heaven. 1 John 5:12 teaches the same truth.
5. **The Historic Church** for almost 2000 years, both Protestant and Catholic, has confessed that Jesus is the only Savior, the only way to God and heaven. An examination of the great creeds of Christendom and the confessions of individual denominations has affirmed Jesus Christ as the only way to be saved. The departure from this belief has taken place within the last generation or two among evangelicals.

There still remains a vital question about the “One Way”: **Why One Way?**

To answer this question we have to look at the history of human kind. Adam and Eve were created by God in His own image, in true holiness and righteousness. But they deliberately disobeyed God, and immediately they died spiritually, which ultimately brought physical death also (Gen. 2:17). Thus man’s sin separated him from a holy God. However, God, because of “His great love wherewith He loved us,” (Ephes. 2:4) sent His One and only begotten (*monogenes*, the only one of His kind) to die for two basic reasons:

1. The sinfulness of man, and
2. The holiness of God.

Romans 3:23 states, “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” But by Jesus substituting Himself on the cross, God Himself demonstrated His righteousness so that He (God) would be righteous and holy and declare as righteous all who believed in Jesus (Romans 3:24). The glorious result being, “We are freely just (declared righteous) by His grace (free gift) through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

Thus we may confidently conclude that Jesus is the One and Only Way to God because God the Father appointed Him to be and no one else. In fact, Jesus is the only One who ever qualified to be our Savior, since He, the God man was the only person ever to live without sin. As the writer of Hebrews says, “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. *For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens*” (Hebrews 7:25-26)

The best known verse in all the Bible is John 3:16, which succinctly states the truth of all I am attempted to say above. “God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.” Then John re-enforces this truth by stating further, “God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. Anyone who believes in Him is not judged, but anyone who does not believe is already judged, because he has not believed in the name of the One and Only Son of God” (John 3:17-18).

Conclusion: Why would anyone seek another way than the way God has provided? Jesus answers this question in John 3:18-19, “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” Man’s rejection of Christ is not an intellectual problem but a moral one. In a word, man does not want to humble his heart and bring himself under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Chuck Colson has so aptly stated, “It’s obvious why Eastern religion is such an attractive form of salvation for a post-Christian culture. It soothes the ego by pronouncing the individual divine, and it gives a gratifying sense of ‘spirituality’ without making any demands in terms of doctrine of ethical living.”⁸ The religions of this world differ in teachings and rituals, but all of them have one thing in common: they teach salvation by good works, human merit or personal accomplishments. Only does the atoning death of Jesus Christ on the cross offer the good news of salvation by grace through faith through the accomplishments of the One and Only who paid in full the price of sin as our Mediator, Savior, Lord and coming King. The wise will heed the warning of Solomon, “There is a way that seems right to man, but in the end it leads to death” (Prov. 14:12; Prov. 16:25).

Are other religions exclusivistic? Yes.

- I. Islam is clearly exclusivistic. Allah is the only God and one must please Allah to enter a Paradise of sensual pleasure.
- II. Buddhism and Hinduism- Both teach endless cycle of suffering until you find the right path. According to them, if you believe in Christ, you will continue to suffer. It is only until you believe that truth that you escape suffering.
- III. The Pluralist thinks everyone is wrong and everyone is right.
- IV. The informed Agnostic believes none of these religions is true.

⁸ Chuck Colson, How Should We Then Live, p. 125.