

The Basics of Christianity

Why Christianity?

Colossians 2:8, Matthew 7:7-8 (NASB)

INTRODUCTION:

Colossians 2:8 (NASB)

Matthew 7:7-8 (NASB)

BODY:

- I. Does Absolute Truth Exist?
- II. Do Logic and Religion Mix?
- III. Does God Exist?
- IV. Can We Know the True God?
- V. Is Jesus God?
- VI. Does God Care about Me?

CONCLUSION:

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INTRODUCTION:

Have you seen the bumper sticker that features various religious symbols forming the word "coexist"? I understand the sentiment. It would be nice if we could all live in harmony, no matter what we believe. But this sentiment suggests that all religions are pretty much the same. But the reality is that not all religious beliefs can be equally true. They teach conflicting things about reality. They lead to different behaviors and different conclusions.

Treating all religions as equally true or valid is both lazy and disrespectful. It is **lazy** because confronting with the differences is not easy. It is **disrespectful** because it means ignoring what sincere people believe in favor of something you would **prefer** to imagine instead.

So, if there are that many different religious ideas, how are we supposed to know which one is true or correct?

There is no doubt that the number of different religions in the world makes it a challenge to know which one is correct. First, let's consider some thoughts on the overall subject and then look at how one might approach the topic in a manner that can actually get to a right conclusion about God. The challenge of different answers to a particular issue is not unique to the topic of religion. For example, you can sit 100 math students down, give them a complex problem to solve, and it is likely that some will get the answer wrong. But does this mean that a correct answer does not exist? Not at all. Those who get the answer wrong simply need to be shown their error and know the techniques necessary to arrive at the correct answer.

The Bible makes it clear that God wants us to look for truth, because He knows the search leads to Him. God actually **requires** us to make an honest attempt to know what is true.

All Stand and Read Scripture

Colossians 2:8 (NASB)

⁸ See to it that there is no one who takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception in accordance with human tradition, in accordance with the elementary principles of the world, rather than in accordance with Christ.

Matthew 7:7-8 (NASB)

⁷“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.

Prayer

So how do we arrive at the truth about God? We use a systematic methodology that is designed to separate truth from error by using various tests for truth, with the end result being a set of right conclusions.

Illustration:

Can you imagine the end results a scientist would arrive at if he went into the lab and just started mixing things together with no rhyme or reason? Or if a physician just started treating a patient with random medicines in the hope of making him well? Neither the scientist nor the physician takes this approach; instead, they use systematic methods that are methodical, logical, evidential, and proven to yield the right end result.

This being the case, why should theology—the study of God—be any different? Why would one believe that it can be approached in a haphazard and undisciplined way and still yield right conclusions? Unfortunately, this is the approach many take, and this is one of the reasons why so many religions exist. That said, we now return to the question of how to reach truthful conclusions about God.

What systematic approach should be used?

First, we need to establish a framework for testing various truth claims, and then we need a roadmap to follow to reach a right conclusion. Here is a good framework to use:

1. **Logical consistency.** The claims of a belief system must be logically coherent to each other and not contradict in any way. As an example, the end goal of Buddhism is to **rid oneself of all desires**. Yet, a devout Buddhist must have a desire to rid oneself of all desires, which is a contradictory and illogical rule.
2. **Verifiable Evidence.** Is there evidence to support the belief system? Is the evidence rational? Is there external evidence for its claims? Naturally, it is only right to want proof for important claims being made so the assertions can be verified. For example, Mormons teach that Jesus visited North America. Yet there is absolutely no proof, archaeological or otherwise, to support such a claim.
3. **Explanations as to our existence.** The belief system should address the big questions of life and the teachings should be accurately reflected in the world in which we live. Christianity, for example, provides good answers for the large questions of life.

The above framework, when applied to the topic of religion, will help lead one to a right view of God and will answer the four big questions of life:

1. Where did we come from?
2. How should we live?
3. What is the purpose for life?
4. Where is mankind heading?

But how does one go about applying this framework in the pursuit of God? A step-by-step question and answer approach is one of the best ways to find God among all of the

religions. When you narrow down the list of possible questions it produces the following questions to be considered:

1. Does absolute truth exist?
2. Does logic and religion mix?
3. Does God exist?
4. Can we know the true God?
5. Is Jesus God?
6. Does God care about me?

BODY:

I. Does Absolute Truth Exist?

First we need to know if absolute truth exists. If it does not, then we really cannot be sure of anything (spiritual or not), and we end up either an agnostic, unsure if we can really know anything, or a pluralist, accepting every position because we are not sure which, if any, is right.

The dangers of postmodernism can be viewed as a downward spiral that begins with the rejection of absolute truth, which then leads to a loss of distinctions in matters of religion and faith, and culminates in a philosophy of religious pluralism that says no faith or religion is objectively true and therefore no one can claim his or her religion is true and another is false.

Postmodernism was the son of Modernism and the grandson of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment proclaimed that God was not the center of truth any longer – man was. “I think, therefore I am”. Modernism claimed that only scientific data could be objectively understood, defined, and defended. Truth as it pertained to religion was discarded. “Facts have nothing to do with religion.” The result was that spiritual matters were assigned to the realm of opinion, and only the sciences were allowed to speak of truth.

From modernism came postmodernism which says that all knowledge (including science) is a matter of perspective and interpretation. This philosophical war against objective truth has resulted in postmodernism being completely averse to any claim to absolutes. Such a mindset naturally rejects anything that declares to be absolute truth, such as the Bible.

If objective and absolute truth does not exist, then everything becomes a matter of personal interpretation. To the postmodern thinker, the author of a book does not possess the correct interpretation of his work; it is the reader who actually determines what the book means – a process called deconstruction. And given that there are multiple readers and only one author, there are naturally multiple valid interpretations.

Such a chaotic situation makes it impossible to make meaningful or lasting distinctions between interpretations because there is no standard that can be used. This especially applies to matters of faith and religion. **Attempting to make proper and meaningful distinctions in the area of religion is no more meaningful than arguing that chocolate tastes better than vanilla.** Postmodernism says that it is impossible to objectively decide between competing truth claims.

If absolute truth does not exist, and if there is no way to make meaningful, right/wrong distinctions between different faiths and religions, then the natural conclusion is that all beliefs must be considered equally valid. The proper term for this philosophy is called

"pluralism." With pluralism, no religion has the right to pronounce itself true and the other competing faiths false, or even inferior.

Just as it is not arrogant for a math teacher to insist that $2+2=4$ or for a locksmith to insist that only one key will fit a locked door, it is not arrogant for the Christian to stand against postmodernist thinking and insist that Christianity is true and anything opposed to it is false. Absolute truth does exist, and consequences do exist for being wrong. While pluralism may be desirable in matters of food preferences, it is not helpful in matters of truth.

Absolute truth is defined as that which matches reality. Some say there is no such thing as absolute truth, but taking such a position becomes self-defeating. **For example, the relativist will say, "All truth is relative," yet one must ask: is that statement absolutely true? If so, then absolute truth exists; if not, then why consider it?** Postmodernism affirms no truth, yet it affirms at least one absolute truth: postmodernism is true. In the end, absolute truth becomes undeniable.

Further, absolute truth is naturally narrow and excludes its opposite. **Two plus two equals four, with no other answer being possible.** This point becomes critical as different belief systems and worldviews are compared. If one belief system has components that are proven true, then any competing belief system with contrary claims must be false. Also, we must keep in mind that absolute truth is not impacted by sincerity and desire. No matter how sincerely someone embraces a lie, it is still a lie. And no desire in the world can make something true that is false.

The answer of question one is that absolute truth does exist. This being the case, agnosticism, postmodernism, relativism, and skepticism are all false positions.

II. Do Logic and Religion Mix?

This leads us to the next question of whether reason/logic can be used in matters of religion. Some say this is not possible, but—why not? The truth is, logic is vital when examining spiritual claims because it helps us understand why some claims should be excluded and others embraced. Logic is absolutely critical in dismantling pluralism (which says that all truth claims, even those that oppose each other, are equal and valid).

For example, Islam and Judaism claim that Jesus is not God, whereas Christianity claims He is. One of the core laws of logic is the law of non-contradiction, which says something cannot be both "A" and "non-A" at the same time and in the same sense. Applying this law to these claims of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity means that one claim is right and the other is wrong. Jesus cannot be both God and not God. Used properly, logic is a potent weapon against pluralism because it clearly demonstrates that contrary truth claims cannot both be true. This understanding topples the whole "true for you but not for me" mindset.

Logic also dispels the whole "all roads lead to the top of the mountain" analogy that pluralists use. Logic shows that each belief system has its own set of signs that point to radically different locations in the end. Logic shows that the proper illustration of a search for spiritual truth is more like a maze—one path makes it through to truth, while all others arrive at dead ends. All faiths may have some surface similarities, but they differ in major ways in their core doctrines.

The conclusion is that you can use reason and logic in matters of religion. That being the case, pluralism (the belief that all truth claims are equally true and valid) is ruled out because it is illogical and contradictory to believe that diametrically opposing truth claims can both be right.

III. Does God Exist?

Next comes the big question: does God exist? Atheists and naturalists (who do not accept anything beyond this physical world and universe) say “no.” To give it proper attention, you must first ask this question: Why do we have something rather than nothing at all? In other words, how did you and everything around you get here? The argument for God can be presented very simply: **Something exists. You do not get something from nothing. Therefore, a necessary and eternal Being exists.**

You cannot deny you exist because you have to exist in order to deny your own existence (which is self-defeating), so the first premise above is true. No one has ever demonstrated that something can come from nothing so the second premise rings true. Therefore, the conclusion naturally follows—an eternal Being is responsible for everything that exists.

This is a position no thinking atheist denies; they just claim that the universe is that eternal being. However, the problem with that stance is that all scientific evidence points to the fact that the universe had a beginning (they call it the ‘big bang’). And everything that has a beginning must have a cause; therefore, the universe had a cause and is not eternal. Because the only two sources of eternality are an eternal universe (denied by all current scientific evidence) or an eternal Creator, **the only logical conclusion is that God exists and created the universe.** Answering the question of God’s existence in the affirmative rules out atheism as a valid belief system.

Now, this conclusion does do one sweeping thing—it rules out all pantheistic religions. All pantheistic worldviews say that the universe is God and is eternal. And this assertion is false. So, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism (Jane' ism) , and all other pantheistic religions are ruled out as valid belief systems.

This "Creator God" exhibits characteristics very similar to the God of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, which interestingly enough, are the only core faiths left standing after atheism and pantheism have been eliminated. Note also that one of the big questions concerning the origins of life is now answered: **We know where we came from.**

IV. Can We Know the True God?

This leads to the next question: can we know this true God? At this point, the need for religion is replaced by something more important—the need for revelation. If mankind is to know the true God, it is up to God to reveal Himself to His creation. Judaism, Islam, and Christianity all claim to have a book that is God’s revelation to man, but the question is which (if any) is actually true? Pushing aside minor differences, the **two core areas of dispute are the New Testament of the Bible and the person of Jesus Christ.**

Islam and Judaism both claim the New Testament of the Bible is untrue in what it claims, and both deny that Jesus is God incarnate, while Christianity affirms both to be true.

There is no religion or worldly view on the planet that can match the mountains of evidence that exist for Christianity. From the voluminous number of ancient manuscripts, to the very early dating of the documents written during the lifetime of the eyewitnesses

(some only 15 years after Christ's death), to the numerous accounts (nine authors in 27 books of the New Testament), to the archaeological evidence—none of which has ever contradicted a single claim the New Testament makes. Just **from** the fact that the apostles went to their deaths claiming they had seen Jesus in action and that He had come back from the dead, Christianity sets the bar in terms of providing the proof to back up its claims. The New Testament's historical authenticity—that it conveys a truthful account of the actual events as they occurred—is the only right conclusion to reach once all the evidence has been examined.

V. Is Jesus God?

When it comes to Jesus, one finds a very curious thing about Him—He claimed to be God in the flesh. Jesus' own words (e.g., "Before Abraham was born I AM"), His actions (e.g., forgiving sins, accepting worship), His sinless and miraculous life (which He used to prove His truth claims over opposing claims), and His resurrection all support His claims to be God. The New Testament writers affirm this fact over and over again in their writings.

Now, if Jesus is God, then what He says must be true. And if Jesus said that the Bible is inerrant and true in everything it says (which He did), this must mean that the Bible is true in what it proclaims. As we have already learned, two competing truth claims cannot both be right. So anything in the Islamic Koran or writings of Judaism that contradict the Bible cannot be true. In fact, both Islam and Judaism fail since they both say that Jesus is not God incarnate, while the evidence says otherwise. And because we can indeed know God (because He has revealed Himself in His creation, His written Word, and in Christ), all forms of agnosticism are refuted. Lastly, another big question of life is answered—that of ethics—as the Bible contains **clear instructions on how mankind ought to live**.

VI. Does God Care about Me?

This same Bible proclaims that God cares deeply for mankind and wishes all to know Him intimately. In fact, He cares so much that He became a man to show His creation exactly what He is like. **There are many men who have sought to be God, but only one God who sought to be man** so He could save those He deeply loves from an eternity separated from Him. This fact demonstrates the relevancy of Christianity and also **answers that last two big questions of life—meaning and destiny**. Each person has been designed by God for a purpose, and each has a destiny that awaits him—one of eternal life with God or eternal separation from Him. This deduction (and the point of God becoming a man in Christ) also refutes Deism, which says God is not interested in the affairs of mankind.

CONCLUSION:

In the end, we see that the ultimate truth about God can be found and the worldview maze successfully navigated by testing various truth claims and systematically pushing aside falsehoods so that only the truth remains. Everyone should agree that the only reason to believe something is because it is true—nothing more. Sadly, true belief is a matter of the will, and no matter how much logical evidence is presented, some will still choose to deny the God who is there and miss the one true path to harmony with Him.

He Is Lord!