

Do All Roads Lead To Rome?

It is rather fashionable in our day of tolerance and political correctness to say that it doesn't really matter what one believes about God as long as one is sincere. After all, don't all roads lead to Rome? Don't all religions lead to the same God?

I see a couple of dangers with this type of thinking: the first is the matter of truth. It is possible to be sincere but sincerely wrong. As a lady from Europe once told me. "*All roads don't lead to Rome. I know. I've gotten lost driving there.*"—When it comes to God, the major world religions say a whole bunch of contradictory things about God. Some say He is *one*, others that God is three-in-one. Some say God is personal and others that He is impersonal, etc. Logically speaking, they can't all be right.

The second problem is that people who take the all-roads-lead-to-Rome approach to religion rarely ask themselves which God they're going to face on the other side of death. Who is the true God? Who will they truly encounter?

For example, when you die, what if you face Allah, the God of Islam? If so, you better pray you've been a Muslim, because if you're not, putting it bluntly, you're in *big trouble*. If you haven't followed Allah's teachings, and honored Muhammad as his prophet, you're likely bound for hell. Islam has its basic pillars of faith. If you haven't diligently followed these, you're going to encounter an angry God, the same God who instructed his followers to kill infidels who dishonor Allah and Muhammad. Further, if you've ever believed in Jesus Christ as God, or believed in the Trinity, you're guilty of an unpardonable sin. (See: *Qur'an*, Surah 5:17,73) In short, if you're not a Muslim, you'd better pray that you *don't* meet Allah after death.

What about Hinduism? In Hinduism, Bramah, the World Soul (God) of Hinduism, is impersonal, and is both good and evil. There are also millions of lesser gods. The goal of every Hindu is to be reunited with Bramah and be absorbed back into him, like a drop of water being absorbed back into the great ocean. This is done through meditation and reincarnations. After possibly hundreds, or even thousands, of reincarnations, you may just possibly get it right. Once you're absorbed back into Brahman, you will cease to exist as "you." You will lose all self-identity.

Also, are you a vegetarian? If you have eaten beef, then you may be guilty of having eaten someone's uncle George who blew it in his last life and was reincarnated as a cow. Oops! You'll probably be reincarnated, but in a much worse life than you experienced this go-round. Who knows, you might even end up as a cow. The deeds you've done in this life (karma), whether good or bad, stick to your soul. Ignorance is no excuse. There is really no forgiveness, grace, or mercy with Bramah. If I were you, I'd hope and pray that Bramah is not who you encounter after death, and if you do, pray you encounter his good side.

Are you an orthodox Jew? Have you ever violated the Ten Commandments? Have you ever told a lie, stolen, committed adultery, been disrespectful to your parents, or coveted what is not yours? If so, you're now guilty before a holy God. Do you have an atoning blood sacrifice for your sins? The Old Testament portion of what many call the Bible says, "*Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin.*" (Leviticus 17:11). In your all-roads-lead-to-Rome religion, you'd better pray you don't meet Yahweh (the Jewish name for God) without a blood sacrifice to atone for your sins. The God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses is a forgiving God, but on His terms. The main problem is that since the fall of the last temple in 70 A.D (A.C.E.), there have been no blood sacrifices. Technically speaking, Judaism has had no true forgiveness to offer its followers other than following the law sinlessly from birth to death (which is no small feat).

Do you expect to meet the Buddha after death? Have you lead a life of meditation and self-renunciation? Have you renounced the desires of this life which are the root of all evil? Have you followed the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path as taught by Buddha? If not, much like Hinduism, you may be in for a series of not-so-good reincarnations.

Time and space do not allow me to explore Confucianism, Taoism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, etc. But, in each of them, as with the religions I have just discussed, there is little hope for you if you've not belonged to their religion and lead a life of good works based on their teachings; which is hard to do if you don't know what those teachings are.

With so many religions, and major differing views regarding God, who's to say who or what God is really like? Which God will you meet after death?—What is God really like? Who is right?—There is actually a very simple answer. The only One who can say for sure who and what God is like is God. This is an important point to grasp.

Only God can give the final word on Himself.

Now, let's suppose that one day a man stood up and boldly proclaimed, "*To clear up all the confusion about God, I want you to know that I AM GOD! I am THE way, THE truth, and THE life!*"? (cf., John 14:6). This gets into the verifiable. Anyone claiming to be God would be one of three things: psychotic with delusions of grandeur, a deceiver out to pull off the greatest hoax of all time, or he would be God. What if God chose to write Himself into His own story and become a man? This is the staggering claim the New Testament makes concerning Jesus Christ.

Jesus' resurrection from the dead, the reliability of the witnesses, the miracles He performed, His character, and teachings all attest and prove He was/is who He claimed to be. There were no Bible prophecies foretelling Muhammad's coming, but there were nearly one hundred prophecies about Jesus' first coming including where he was to be born (Micah 5:2), that he would die having his hands and feet pierced (Psalm 22:16; cf., Isaiah 53; Zechariah 12:10), and even the exact week and year He would die. (Daniel 9:25,26). To take a middle-of-the-road position concerning Christ is to totally fail to grasp the claims He made. Just as no one is ever half pregnant (either they're pregnant or they're not), in like manner, either Jesus is God or He isn't. There is no middle ground.

C.S. Lewis—author, professor, and Christian intellectual wrote, "*A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon, or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.*" (From *Mere Christianity*, MacMillan Pub.)

There is only one major religion on the face of this earth that offers real hope to sinners, who tells a thief on a cross that "*Today you will be with me in paradise,*" who offers hope and forgiveness to prostitutes and adulterers, who portrays a God who would run after a rebellious prodigal son—a God who would greet his wayward son with hugs and kisses, who would put a ring of inheritance on his finger, place a beautiful robe on his back, kill the fatted calf and throw a party. (Luke 15:11-32) Who offers such hope, love and forgiveness?—Jesus.

There is a story told of a brother and sister who got their school pictures. The sister complained about how bad her pictures looked. She said, "*These pictures just don't do me justice!*" Her brother replied, "*You don't want justice, you want mercy!*"—You see, virtually every religion you can think of, except one, offers very little hope of forgiveness as they're almost all based on works and an unbending law. If you haven't performed enough good works, based on their teachings, you may not make it to Heaven.—Do not pass go, do not collect \$200.

I don't know about you, but I am in need of mercy when I die. I don't want justice. I don't want my sins (bad karma) clinging to my soul like black road tar one can't wash off.

The story is told of a young woman who received a phone call at 2:00 A.M. from the emergency room of a hospital stating that her dad was deathly ill and may only have hours to live. She threw on some clothes, jumped in her car, and began speeding the 200 miles she had to drive to see her father. As she was going through a small town, she looked in her rear view mirror, and there was a police car chasing her. Because she was going so fast, the officer didn't merely give her a ticket, he arrested her. The next day she appeared before the judge who told her that for going 50 miles per hour above the speed limit, her fine would be \$300 or three days in jail.

She pleaded with the judge: "*Your honor, you don't understand. My father is dying, and when I left home, I forgot my money.*" The judge said, "*I'm sorry, young lady, but the law says you must pay \$300 or spend three days in jail.*"

She began to weep. For some reason, it touched the old judge's heart. To the surprise of everyone in the court, he stood up, stepped down from the bench, took off his robe, put on his sports coat, walked around in front of the bench, pulled out his check-book, wrote a check for \$300, and laid it on the bench. Then he put back on his robe, and resumed his seat. He said, "*Young lady, the law says you must pay \$300 or spend three days in jail, but I see someone has paid the fine for you. Case dismissed!*"

In essence, this is what the Bible says God did for us. God took off his robe of deity, entered this world in the person of Jesus Christ [Philippians 2:6-11], and died to pay a fine we could not pay, which was death [Romans 3:23; 5:8; 6:23]. He gave the ultimate blood sacrifice for us. [Ephesians 1:7] The good news is that if we receive his gift of salvation [John 1:12], when we stand before God on the day of judgment, we will be standing before the one who died for us.—"*Case dismissed!*" [Romans 4:7,8; Ephesians 2:8,9; I John 4:16-18; 5:11-13.]

The story is also told of an old art collector who had an only son. Over the years he had amassed hundreds of thousands of dollars of very valuable paintings. It was his desire, upon his death, to leave his inheritance to his only son. However, Viet Nam came along, his son got drafted, and in the course of the war his son was killed. Upon hearing of his son's death, the old gentleman sank into a deep depression which lasted almost two years.

Then, one day, there was a knock at his front door. When he opened the door, there stood a rather young hippie looking fellow with a beard and long hair. The young man said, *"Sir, you don't know me, but I served in Viet Nam with your son. In fact, if it weren't for your son, I wouldn't be here today because he gave his life to save my life. Now I know you collect artwork, and while I am not a great artist, I painted a portrait of your son when I was in Viet Nam and I would like you to have it."*

Well, sure enough, it wasn't a great artwork, but it really did capture the likeness of the son. The father loved the painting so much so that he took down one of his very valuable paintings above his fireplace and hung the picture of his son there. Often at night he'd have a fire going, some soft music playing, and as he'd stare at the painting his heart would be warmed.

As the years went by eventually the old art collector died, and because there was no one to leave his inheritance to, art dealers from all around the world came to bid on his very valuable paintings which were to be auctioned off.

As the auctioneer began the auction, he said, *"It was in the father's will that the first painting to be auctioned off is the picture of his son."* As you can imagine, no one wanted it because it wasn't great artwork, and so there was silence. Eventually, the old gardner spoke up. He said, *"Ya know, I worked for that family for many a year and their son was like a son to me. Now, I'm not a wealthy man, but I will gladly bid \$35."*

And, again, there was silence. Eventually the auctioneer said, *"Going . . . going . . . Gone!"* Then he said, *"The auction is now over."* There was a loud gasp and a stunned silence. Then the auctioneer spoke, *"It was in the father's will that, 'Whoever receives my son, receives it all.'"*

The same is true with Jesus, God's Son. If you receive him, you receive it all. John 1:12 says, *"To as many as received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."* All things become yours once you belong to God [Romans 8:31,32; I Corinthians 3:21-23].

You could take Buddha out of Buddhism and it would remain basically unchanged. You could take Muhammad out of Islam and it would continue to exist. But, if you took Jesus Christ out of Christianity, it would collapse because Christianity is not merely a religion, a set of teachings, or way of life. Rather it is having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as God. To know Him is to have life. To not know Him is to miss life itself. (See: I John 5:11-13, John 3:16-21; 14:6; etc.) When you die, it is not Allah, Buddha, or Bramah you'll meet, but rather Jesus.

According to scripture, you can know Jesus Christ and have total forgiveness for all your sins. What greater joy than to know you have been given eternal life, and that you are prepared to meet a God of grace and mercy when you die? As you pray, study, and reflect on what I've written, and if you feel God's Holy Spirit speaking to your heart that you need a Savior, may I suggest you commit your life to Christ by praying the following prayer, or one like it. These words are not magical. The important thing is that they come from your heart. This is your time to get real with God.

"Dear Lord Jesus, I thank you for loving me. I am sorry for the sin, pride, and lack of trust that has kept me from you. I believe you died on the cross and rose again to pay for my sin. As best as I know how, right now, I invite you to come into my life. Forgive me of my sin, and make me the person you want me to be. Calm my fears, carry my burdens, and open my heart to receive your love. Thank you for hearing this prayer. Amen."

Once you have invited Jesus Christ into your life, I encourage you to find a loving church where the Bible is both honored and taught. Make public your commitment to Christ by getting baptized [Matthew 28:19,20; Acts 10:47, 48a]. Visit several churches before you pick one. Pray and listen to your heart. God can lead you to the right church. It is like trying on a new pair of shoes. You don't necessarily want to buy the first pair you try on. Some churches are much better and stronger than others.

Continue to pray, read scripture, and allow God to speak to you. Remember, He loves you and with Him there is grace, mercy and forgiveness. C.S. Lewis was once asked what made Christ-ianity unique among all other religions. He responded with one word, *"Grace!"*—Grace is defined as receiving an unmerited, undeserved gift. There is only one major religion on the face of this earth that offers unmerited grace to sinners like you and me, and that is Christianity. According to scripture not all roads lead to Rome; really there is only one—Jesus. (John 14:6).

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. May I suggest you take that first step now. Please don't procrastinate. Eternal issues are at stake. My prayers go with you.