

The Faith We Believe, Share, and Defend Part 8 - Can Jesus Be True for You but Not For Me?

"In Western countries like Britain and America, most people think it's okay to say you're a Christian, so long as you leave other people alone. I can say that Jesus is true for me. But if I say that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life for everyone everywhere (John 14:6)—regardless of their culture, race, or current religious beliefs—that's seen as offensive. So what are we to make of this? Can Jesus be true for me, but not for you?"¹

EXCLUSIVITY

How can Christianity be the one true religion? What about Muslims, Jews, Hindus, spiritual people, atheists? How can Jesus be the only way? Do you think people who don't believe in Jesus are going to hell?

Whenever you have a debate on anything of real substance, especially conversations on religion, it usually ends with one side saying, *"Well, that may be true for you but it's not true for me."* And that's the end of the conversation. And as soon as you say, *"No there's a problem with that. There is truth and we can know that truth..."* - the immediate response is, *"Don't tell me your truth is right and mine is wrong. The problem with you Christians is you think you have the truth and others don't. You think your religion is right and other religions are wrong. And that leads to exclusion and oppression and abuse. That leads to people bashing other people."*

Problem of Universal Truth: "All Religions Are Equally True"

One way people object Christianity is exclusive is to say, *"All religions are equally true."*

¹ Rachel McLaughlin, *10 Questions Every Teen Should Ask about Christianity* (Crossway, Wheaton 2021), 55.

"You have the truth and I have the truth. They're different truths but they both work; they're both true." It's like saying there are many roads up the same mountain. Doesn't matter which road you take, they'll all get you to the same place: to the top.

Answer According to Folly²

That sounds pretty open minded. But the people who say that never reconcile the totally different and contradictory claims of different religions. So, Islam says Jesus could not be the Son of God. Christianity says Jesus is the Son of God. Who's right?

So, where did this objection come from? How can anyone say all religions are equally true? It's because a guy named Immanuel Kant, a 19th century German philosopher, said all religions are subjectively helpful for you in your private life but no religious claims are actually objectively true. So all religions can be "true" as long as you don't say one is better than the other; they're all helpful for the people who believe them.

Our response: When it's said, *"No one's take on truth is superior to another..."* - that is a take on truth. When it's said, *"People are intolerant when they think their truth is the right one..."* what they're really saying is, *"People who don't have my Kantian view of truth are wrong."* You have a right to believe that. BUT, why should that view of truth be privileged over anyone else's? And someone will say, *"Oh no, I'm not saying that. I'm just*

² This methodological approach, the "how do we defend the faith?"-approach, is summarized in Proverbs 26:4, 5: "4 Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. 5 Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes." That's a two step approach. Prov 24:5 (answer a fool according to his folly = enter into the unbeliever's worldview in order to point out its contradictions). Prov 24:4 (answer not a fool according to his folly = answer the unbeliever according to the Christian worldview).

saying nobody's view of truth is superior to anyone else's." BUT that is a view of truth that they want to hold sway in the world. So to say, *"All truths are equally true,"* is a very particular view of the truth. You're believing it, you're sharing it, you're wanting it to influence the world. That's not any more tolerant than any other exclusive view.

Problem of Universal Truth: "All Religions Are Equally False"

Another way people object Christianity is exclusive is they say: *"All religions are equally wrong, or at best, they're all equally incomplete."*

There's this famous Indian parable about the blind men and the elephant. There are a bunch of blind men who are trying to figure out what an elephant is like. Each blind man holds onto one part of the elephant. And each blind man mistakes his part for the whole thing. So the blind man who feels the trunk says, *"I think the elephant is long and flexible like a snake."* But the blind man feeling the leg says, *"No the elephant is like a pillar and short and stumpy and thick."* But the blind man who has the ear says, *"No it's broad and thin."* And the one feeling the tail says, *"No, it's like a piece of rope."* And the one with the body says, *"No it's big and it's like a wall."* And the one with the tusk says, *"No it's sharp and smooth like a spear."*

This is a picture of religions. All the world religions are the blind men trying to figure out what truth looks like but each religion only has a part of the truth that they mistake for the whole. So each religion is equally wrong; each religion only has part of the truth. And this is really popular today. People say, *"Yeah, I'm a spiritual person. I pick and choose what I like from different religions because each one has something to offer me."*

Answer According to Folly

There's a problem with their problem. There was a missionary to India, Leslie Newbigin, who heard this all the time and so he thought about this Indian parable forever. Then it hit him. *"Wait, the only person who could know that every blind man was only holding only part of the elephant would be somebody who could see the whole elephant. The parable is an arrogant claim to have the kind of knowledge which it insists is impossible. To any person who claims that no religion has all the truth we have to ask, 'What is the superior vantage ground from which you can make that claim?' To know that, 'All religions only have part of the truth,' YOU must somehow know the whole truth. Aren't you just claiming the same knowledge that you just said no one else has?"*

Problem of Universal Truth: "All Religions Are Power Plays"

One more way people make the objection that Christianity is exclusive: *"All religions are just power plays."*

Friedrich Nietzsche and Karl Marx, two more 19th century German philosophers, said, *"All claims to truth are just power plays. There is no actual truth. If you insist that you have a truth that other people have to bow to then you're not just being narrow; you're being oppressive. It's a power play. You're coming to my group and telling my group that we have to bow to your group. You're just trying to put your group on top."*

This idea has evolved now so that these objectors don't talk about truth. They talk about meta-narratives. *"There is no truth. All you got is a narrative. All you've got is a story. And you tell these stories to give your group an identity and to make your group feel like it's better than other groups. BUT there are no meta-narratives. There are no narratives that are true for everybody. And*

Apr 16, 2023

the only way to stop oppressing each other is to get rid of this thing we call truth. You Christians, you have a story that works for you but stop trying to tell me that's my story too."

Answer According to Folly

One response is to use Nietzsche against himself and these objectors. If this objection is true the most consistent response, according to Nietzsche himself, is to embrace the meaninglessness of life. If nothing is real then that means nothing matters. Nothing means anything. There's no point to anything. There's no good, no bad, no right, no wrong. Doesn't matter if you love people or kill people. Nothing lasts. In the end there will be nothing. And Nietzsche admits the full embrace of the meaningless of life is to take your own life.

Most people don't like that Debbie Downer response. So most people who follow Nietzsche go with the fun option and they follow Johnny Rotten of the Sex Pistols who said in one of his songs: *"if nothing true, everything possible."* They hope Dostoyevsky was right, *"If God is dead, everything is permitted."*

Or people go with the third option and live for power, like Pilate, like Pharaoh - you live to get and exert power because that's all that's left. There's no truth, just power. It's what Voldemort said to Harry Potter at the end of The Sorcerer's Stone: *"There is no good and evil. There is only power, and those too weak to seek it."*

Here's the problem: if Nietzsche says every truth claim is a power play then his truth claim is just a power play so why listen to it? As soon as someone says that you must not impose your views on other people - they're imposing their view on you.

Here's the irony: everyone lives like there is absolute truth because deep down everyone knows there is absolute truth. At the same time you both use absolute truth when it's convenient to get around in your day to day life and then you suppress that truth when it's inconvenient.

Here's another problem: who told Nietzsche power is good, that power is something you should want? That's poaching on Christian land. He only knows that man is to desire power because he's made in the image of God. That's part of God's glory - having dominion, which we pursue because we're God's image and supposed to mirror his glory. And, wanting happiness and beauty and heaven and spirituality and morality and justice is also poaching on Christian land.

Answer Not According to Folly: Exodus 5 Says There's a Problem with the Problem

God sends Moses to Pharaoh with a message, *"You've enslaved God's people, Israel. Let my people go so they may worship their God, YHWH."* And Pharaoh's response to Moses is, *"Who is YHWH and why should I obey him?"* Now when Pharaoh says, *"Who is YHWH that I should obey him?"* - he is not saying that as a religious atheist, he is saying that as a religious pluralist. There were no religious atheists in ANE Egypt. Here's what Pharaoh is saying, *"Listen Moses, I'm not saying This YHWH fellow doesn't exist, I'm saying, I don't know the guy. You've got your one God, YHWH, I've got hundreds and hundreds of my gods, which I'm one of btw - you've got your God, I've got my gods - This is Egypt - why should I have to convert and listen to and obey your God?"* That kind of thinking and reasoning and arguing should sound super familiar because that kind of thinking has persisted through the ages, so that we can get super practical right here.

Religious pluralism won't work today, like it didn't work back in the day. That response from Pharaoh to Moses, *"Who is this YHWH that I should obey **him**?"* - that refusal from Pharaoh in Exodus triggers the plagues from God. Which means the plagues answer that question - who is YHWH? The plagues over and over and over expose that Pharaoh is mistaken. All the plagues are direct attacks and judgments on the supposed gods of Egypt. Right before God strikes the very first plague on the Nile, Moses gives Pharaoh one more chance and then God says, through Moses, to Pharaoh, in Ex 7:17, *"Thus says YHWH 'By this [plague] you shall know that I am YHWH...'"* But Pharaoh continues to refuse and God continues to strike down their false gods with plagues giving Pharaoh every chance to repent. At another point, in Ex 9:14, before a plague God says, *"This time I will send all my plagues on you yourself, and on your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth."* The religious pluralist view that everyone has their own god and every religion is equally valid and every god equally good for the people who worship them - God is saying, *"No, that is exclusive because it excludes me as the one and only true God - that there is none like me in all the earth."*

Answer Not According to Folly: John 18:28-38 Says There Is An Answer to the Problem

Jesus has just been arrested and the Jewish religious leaders put him on trial. And Jesus makes these big claims that he's the king of the Jews, king of Israel, king of the world and so the Jewish religious leaders feel threatened by him. So they take him before the Roman governor of Judea, a guy named Pontius Pilate and they say Jesus is guilty of treason: *"He says he's king instead of Caesar."* So Pilate questions Jesus, *"Are you the king of the Jews?"* And Jesus says, *"Is that your own conclusion or did somebody*

tell you that about me?" And Pilate, a little shocked, says, *"Am I a Jew?" [I don't know anything about you.] Your own leaders, your own people brought you here and delivered you over to me. Now, what have you done?"* And Jesus answered, *"My kingdom is not of this world..."* And Pilate says to him, *"AHA, so you are a king?"* And Jesus throwing around his authority and power says back to Pilate, *"You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."* And all Pilate can come back with is, *"Well, what is truth?"*

We suppress the truth like Pilate because the truth hurts! The truth is hard. Commentators agree that when Pilate asks this question, what is truth?, he's not really asking a question - he's making a claim. You can ask the question, what is truth?, in a sincere way: *"What is truth? I want to know."* Pilate asked that question, what is truth?, so he could say, *"Nobody knows what truth is!"* This idea was popular back then too! It's this idea that allows you to avoid facing your own sins and even allows you to doubt your own reality. You can ask, is there such a thing as truth? You can say, truth is a relative thing. Truth is just something we make up SO we're right in doing whatever seems convenient to us.

But the truth is - TRUTH is a reality that's there whether you believe it or not. *"You believe this and I believe this = they're both truths"* - that will get you killed. If you drive with your eyes closed and say, *"OK I feel like turning left right now because that'll be a good reality for me..."* - reality is going to catch up and smash you. Knowledge is recognizing the truth, recognizing the reality that's there and believing that reality. Knowledge is not opinion. There's knowledge and then there's opinion. They're different.

Apr 16, 2023

The question is: "*How do you KNOW what is true?*"

Well, when we can finally all agree we're on the same page and all being very exclusive - how do we know who's right and who is dead? God is alone the unique God not only because he is infinitely more powerful than the demons posing as gods, not only because he is actually the only God, but because he is the only God who judges and saves. Again, think of the judgment of the plagues on Egypt.

1 The plagues are judgment but they are saving the Hebrews. Israel is saved from Pharaoh and Egypt through judgment.

2 But the plagues are also judgment that expose Egypt's gods as false gods which is meant to jolt the Egyptians awake. In Exodus 9 it says there are Egyptians who are heeding Moses' warning and fearing the word of YHWH and begin to do what he says. A whole multitude of Egyptians leave with Israel in the Exodus and become Israelites.

3 And the plagues are judgment that will call all people of the world. In Exodus 9 God says to Pharaoh, "*By now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.*"

Because of these judgments - nations then and the nations to come will know what is sin, what is salvation, and who can bring it.

Every exclusive faith and worldview has to look at Jesus and ask, "Who are you Jesus and why should we follow you?" And the answer is the gospel of Jesus - that Jesus brings judgment, but this God saves through judgment.

Answer According to Folly

Let's get ironic. Christianity is routinely mocked as being exclusively exclusive. The world and the people in the world will make those absolute statements and say, "*Christians are so exclusive - they're so judgey, I don't like that judgment stuff.*" Make no mistake - every other religion and worldview says you have to be good enough or you will be judged. You have to think like us and say what we say or you'll be canceled. Even Buddhism - which says be good enough or you will be judged unworthy and have to be reincarnated in this life over and over until you live a good enough life to escape this life. Every religion and worldview says you have to be good enough or you will be judged.

Answer Not According to Folly

More irony. Pharaoh interrogates Moses, "*Who is YHWH?*" Then in the NT, the Jews and the Romans interrogate Jesus, "*Who is Jesus?*" No one gets it but it's the same question.

More irony. In Exodus Pharaoh acts like Moses and the Israelites and YHWH are on trial. In the NT, the Jews and the Romans act like Jesus and the disciples are on trial. But, it's Pharaoh and the Egyptians, it's the Jews and the Romans who are on trial before Moses, YHWH, and Jesus.

Greatest irony. The gospel of Jesus says the Judge of all creation came down and stood trial at the ultimate tribunal of God's justice and bore judgment for you and me. This is such a sham trial and yet what's going on in heaven - Jesus stands trial in our place. The gospel alone says you're saved by judgment.

[Jesus] Look at Jesus. He knew who he was. He didn't have truth in him. HE WAS THE TRUTH. The irony of Pilate's question is that Truth is staring him in the face. Christianity says there is such a thing as truth and you

Apr 16, 2023

can know that truth AND every person in every culture NEEDS to know and believe and follow that truth. And you can know for certain that Christianity is true because Jesus says so? Jesus says, *"Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice"* (John 18:37).