

Is Jesus Really the Only Way?

by John Hendryx

Is Jesus really the only way? In an environment of such plurality and diversity this really seems an implausible or even arrogant claim of Christians. When confronted with the exclusive claims of Christianity, the question on many people's minds is how can Christians be so narrow as to believe that all non-Christians will be excluded from heaven? There are plenty of good people who are not Christians. Do Christians think they are better than others? So the question often put to Christians is what about a person, a good person who has been good all their life ... will they go to heaven?

Actually, Jesus himself answered this question. When asked by a rich young ruler what must he do to gain eternal life, Jesus answered: "If you want to enter life, obey the commandments" (Matt 19:17). So Jesus himself makes it clear that a good person who obeys all of God's commands would merit or qualify for eternal life. This includes all good people of all time from all nations, peoples, races and languages. The point is that if anyone could obey all God's commandments, they will live (also see Rom 2:6-8). So in answer to the question, yes a good person who has done good all their life would merit eternal life. The Scripture declares, however, that there is no one on earth who fits that description (Rom 3:9-18). There is no one who does not sin when measured against the holiness and majesty of God. That means you ... and that means me ... yes, all of us have utterly failed to follow the law God has given us. Only Jesus Christ alone has obeyed all of God's commands and earned a place at the right hand of God (Hebrews 4:15). You see, it is always important to look at context, for after Jesus tells the rich young ruler, "If you want to enter life, obey the commandments", He then goes on to explain but "With man this is impossible..." (Matt 19:26) So it is very important to note that Jesus teaches that the first prerequisite of eternal life in God, is when by God's grace, we recognize our utter impotence to save ourselves by human effort due to our moral corruption. This slavery we have to our rebellion renders it impossible to obey God's commands. In fact Jesus saved his greatest criticism of people on earth for the Pharisees because they believed and trusted in their own righteousness and moral ability to please God.

So what is Jesus saying here because this is really important? He is saying that in God's economy both moral and immoral people are equally alienated from God. God is equally offended by both. This may be counter-intuitive but moral people are lost because of their "goodness". Why? It is often the case that goodness keeps people from God. In fact many people avoid Jesus by avoiding sin because they are trying to become their own saviors ... attempting to justify themselves. But the gospel is neither moralism nor relativism and so it is equally offensive to the moral and the irreligious. So Christ calls us to repent of both our good and bad works, for we have no righteousness of our own.

If you look to your moral performance as the basis of your relationship with God, then you commit idolatry because inwardly you are setting up self as a false savior which could never be good enough to please God. If we are trusting in being politically active, generous, compassionate, a good parent, a good spouse, or trusting in our moral uprightness or our service to others then we trust in these as our "Saviors". Human beings look everywhere for

significance and worth and if we do not trust God provides this in Christ we will fill that void by our own futile attempts. Dr. Tim Keller once wisely said, "Every sin is rooted in the inordinate lust for something which comes because we are trusting in that thing rather than in Christ for our righteousness or salvation. At the moment we sin it is because we are looking to something to give us what only Jesus can give us. Beneath any particular sin is the general sin of rejecting Christ-salvation and indulging in self-salvation."

Christianity differs from all other religions because the gospel is news we declare about what God has done for us. It is not advice on how to live for him. Jesus came to inform us that every human idea about how to reach God is wrong and He shattered every human category. In the gospel "I am accepted through Christ, therefore I obey" while every other religion operates on the principle of "I obey, therefore I am accepted." The principle of 'religion' is the deep default mode of the human heart. Our hearts are never empty because we are always trying to fill it with something that comforts or justifies us.

As an example of Jesus dislike of people who trusted in their own morality, Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains." (John 9:41) Those who think God will accept us based on goodness actually understand only part of the truth. Yes, God loves what is good. But since He also loves the truth, we must confess that, in light of God's holy law, we are not good and have woefully failed to do what is pleasing to God, replacing God with worthless self-pleasing idol substitutes, and so we justly deserve to be punished for it. Those who think they have done enough to please God have not understood or considered the seriousness of their condition. John Calvin once said, "Man is never sufficiently touched and affected by the awareness of his lowly state until he has compared himself with God's majesty." In light of the holiness of God all persons, even the best of us, would become undone. This was the case even with the holiest of the saints of the Bible. When it pleased God to reveal himself to them, they fell at his feet as though dead. God created us to enjoy and glorify Him, but humans voluntarily rebelled against God falling into the bondage of the self-centeredness of sin and cannot help themselves out of it.

So the point of the exclusiveness of Christianity is not to show the rest of the unbelieving world that Christians are better or more moral than others. Christians are not better. Rather, the purpose is to communicate that we all share the same alienated condition as human beings and so we bring the gospel as beggars pointing other beggars to the only bread. Jesus does not point to some innate goodness in yourself. You have none. I have none. He is a Savior who comes from the outside to save those who acknowledge themselves sinners in need of a Savior.

To understand this more clearly we must not rely on our opinions. Rather we should simply listen as we let God speak. Let us look and see what Jesus states is the means for obtaining eternal life. First, Jesus makes clear that all the law and the prophets are summarized in just two commandments.

"And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the prophets." (Matthew 22:35-40)

Next, God makes it clear that in order to gain entrance into His favor one must not fail to obey and keep all of God's law. "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." (James 2:10).

"And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." (Luke 10:25-28)

But how often have you done this? As I read this and answer honestly, I can only confess that not for a moment do I love God with all my heart nor do I love my neighbor as myself. Each day along with the "good" there is the constant reality of pride, self-righteousness, hypocrisy, lust, hatred, covetousness, jealousy, envy and more. The Scripture says, "For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience."

(Ephesians 5:5-6 ESV) "For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."" (Galatians 3:10 ESV) And the curse described here for violating God's law is eternal. See Matthew 25:41-46. I must admit, that in light of this, in light of God's perfect standard I am undone.

Why? Because God's holy standard is not graded on a curve but calls us to perfectly obey his law in word and deed. So if you look at God's law, and you are honest, you will become increasingly aware that you fall woefully short of having kept any of it. For the purpose of God's law to us is not so that we would see our ability, but that it would reveal our inability, "for through the law comes knowledge of sin." (Rom 3:20).

"But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury." (Romans 2:5-8) "...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed." (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9)

Thankfully God has provided a means apart from his law, lest none of us would have hope. But before you see your need for that you need to recognize your hopeless condition in light of God's standard which is moral perfection for you in light of his holy law. So we implore you on behalf of Christ, take the time to examine yourself; have you ever honored yourself above others, been proud, selfish, put yourself before God, coveted, lusted, lied, envied, stolen, worshipped false gods, hated others, fornicated? If you have committed any of these

sins, even in your heart, then, according to the true testimony of Scripture, then judge yourself truly: the just punishment for your sins is to be cast into the lake of fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

"Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.(1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

"...for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death." (Revelation 21:7-8)

Again, the purpose of showing these passages to you is not for me to look down on you from some higher moral ground ... no, I am right there with you. For all persons who call themselves Christians have been guilty of of the same. So if you have committed any of the above sins, you are not alone. But it is necessary that your true condition before God is revealed and acknowledged, that no one (not you, not me) is capable of keeping God's law through their own effort. There is not a just man on earth who has never sinned for none is righteous, not even one. If by reading God's law you see that you see you are guilty of breaking it, then this is very good. God is working in you.

But now we have a very serious dilemma. If all who do not keep the law of God are to receive just punishment, then the entire human race has no hope of doing anything to please God and we are all without hope of helping ourselves. We are morally unfit for the task. There is no way to free ourselves from this cursed bondage so that we might live. Who will help us?

God resolved the dilemma by coming to earth Himself in the person of Jesus Christ who lived the life we should have lived and died the death we deserve. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Cor 5:21) Jesus humbled himself to become a human being, suffered for sinners the stripes we deserve. He endured on behalf of all his people who would call on his name.

If you are a sinner who acknowledges that you justly deserve the wrath of God save for Christ's mercy ... if you place your trust in Jesus alone who died for sinners and whom God rose from the dead, then God counts His perfectly righteous life as your own. Having no righteousness of your own by sheer grace, he grants to you the perfectly righteous life of Jesus, who justly bore the full wrath of God for your sin. So if you have renounced all self-sufficiency and flee to Him knowing you need mercy, then He not only forgives your sins but adopts you as his very own child. To those who believe, Jesus has redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

"But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith." What we learn from all this is that, apart from Him, we can do nothing. If the Spirit of Christ has opened your heart to place faith in Jesus Christ we must acknowledge that salvation is all

of the Lord, not of yourselves. "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God." (Galatians 4:3-7)

What about faith? Where does one get it? Are some more wise? Do some persons choose Christ because they are more sensitive to spiritual things than others? no. Jesus taught that no one can believe in Him unless it is granted through the gracious work of the Holy Spirit (John 6:63-54) and all persons so granted will believe (John 6:37). therefore the Bible plainly teaches that faith is the gift of God. God requires all persons to believe the gospel. It is his command, but since no one by nature is inclined to do so, God has mercy on those He came to save.

To **Summarize:**
Man was created to glorify God & Enjoy Him forever
"Worthy are you, our Lord and our God to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things." (Rev 4:11) "Do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31)

Man has failed to glorify God & is under His just condemnation
"For all have sinned..." (Rom 3:23) The wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23) "These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction" (2 Thes 1:9)

Jesus fully bore the wrath and suffered the punishment sinners deserve
Not wishing that sinners perish forever, God determined to save a people for Himself in the Eternal Son who became a man and lived the life we should have lived and died the death we justly deserve. God loves sinners and sent His Son to be the wrath absorbing sacrifice for their sin (1 John 4:10; John 6:37) he "...gave His life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45) & "rose again" from the dead (2 Cor 5:15) on their behalf.

All who, by the grace of God, turn to Jesus in repent submissive faith are forgiven

& begin a life-changing, eternally satisfying relationship with God! "Repent and believe the gospel (Mk 1:5) "In Your presence is fullness of Joy (Ps 16:11)