

Hikers & Icy Lake (to illustrate that faith is only as valid as the object in which it is placed)

Two men are hiking in Colorado in January. When dusk came upon them quickly, their only hope for getting back to the lodge before dark was to cut across the lake. One of the men was afraid that the ice would not support him and hesitated. His experienced friend reminded him that it was the middle of January, the ice had to be at least six feet thick, and they had no reason to worry. The frightened man had little faith and so he inched his way back to the lodge. The ice supported him; his faith was small but its object was strong. Later that year the two men were again hiking and dusk came upon them suddenly. The once fearful man now suggested they cut across the lake. The first man, however, told his now brave friend that it was now late May and the ice was no thicker than a quarter of an inch. But he could not be dissuaded, for his faith was great. So he ventured a few feet from shore and crashed through the ice. His faith was much stronger the second time, but the object of his faith far less sound. Our faith is only as good as its object. Restated, the validity of the object is more important than the strength of the faith.

Aids Illustration (to illustrate works-based solutions vs. grace)

Three men are dying of AIDS. One contracted the HIV virus through promiscuous sexual activity, another – a lifelong heroin addict – got it through a dirty needle. The third man, a hemophiliac, was infected by a transfusion with contaminated blood. Two of the individuals were involved in illicit or illegal activities, but all three face the same prognosis – an untimely demise to an incurable disease.

They are all taking AZT to treat the symptoms. Although not a cure, AZT slows the effects of the virus, prolonging and enhancing the life of an AIDS victim.

Today the cure for AIDS is discovered, a completely different compound: TZA. While this new compound appears to cure AIDS, it has disastrous effects if combined with AZT – patients must choose one or the other.

The hemophiliac has attained a pretty normal life with AZT, so he continues his normal treatments. The druggie resolves to clean up his life. He kicks his habit, gets a job, and starts taking care of himself in addition to the AZT treatments. Quite frankly, he feels as good now as he's ever felt, and doesn't want to risk another change. The selfishly promiscuous man accepts the offer to take TZA.

This last man is cured. The other two men, in spite of their good lives and best efforts, will still die from the complications of AIDS someday.

All systems of *good works* operate like spiritual AZT – almost any system of good works *prolongs* and *enhances* this life. Where do good works fit into people's eternal destiny? They don't. Just like AZT, giving a better life, but failing to change the eventual outcome. We all have an incurable disease called sin. No amount of "getting better" will let us reach "sinless." No amount of future good can undo the damage already done. We don't need a spiritual crutch, we need a cure.

Former Hindu Ravi Zacharias on the differences

"At the heart of every major religion is a leading exponent. As the exposition is studied, something very significant emerges. There comes a bifurcation, or a distinction, between the person and the teaching. Mohammed, to the Koran. Buddha, to the Noble Path. Krishna, to his philosophizing. Zoroaster, to his ethics.

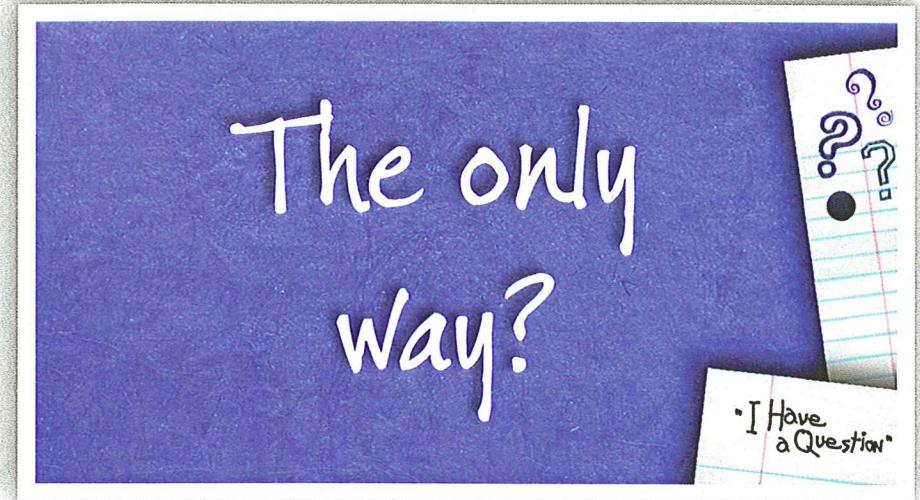
"Whatever we make of their claims, one reality is inescapable. They are all teachers who point to their teaching or show some particular way. In all of these, there emerges an instruction, a way of living. It is not Zoroaster to whom you turn. It is Zoroaster to whom you listen. It is not Buddha who delivers you; it is his Noble Truths which instruct you. It is not Mohammed who transforms you, it is the beauty of the Koran that woos you.

"By contrast, Jesus did not only teach or expound his message. He was identical with his message... He did not just proclaim the truth. He said, 'I am the truth.' He did not just show a way. He said, 'I am the way.' He did not just open up vistas. He said, 'I am the door.' 'I am the Good Shepherd.' 'I am the resurrection and the life.'"

- Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods*.



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John Stott on the uniqueness of Jesus Christ: The reason we must reject this increasingly popular position (that Jesus is just one of many ways) is that we are committed to the uniqueness of Jesus (he has no competitors) and his finality (he has no successors). It is not the uniqueness of "Christianity" as a system that we defend, but the uniqueness of Christ. He is unique in his incarnation (which is quite different from the ahistorical and plural "avatars" of Hinduism); in his atonement (dying once for all for our sins); in his resurrection (breaking the power of death); and in his gift of the Spirit (to indwell and transform us). So, because in no other person but Jesus of Nazareth did God first become human (in his birth), then bear our sins (in his death), then conquer death (in his resurrection) and then enter his people (by his Spirit), he is uniquely able to save sinners. Nobody else has his qualifications.

On the "problems" of Intolerance and Proselytism: Much of our debate is conducted in what might be called "conditions of low visibility," because we do not always pause to define our terms. This is evidently so in relation to these two words. **Tolerance** is one of today's most coveted virtues. But there are at least three different kinds of tolerance.

- First, there is **legal tolerance**: fighting for the equal rights before the law of all ethnic and religious minorities. Christians should be in the forefront of this campaign.
- Second, there is **social tolerance**, going out of our way to make friends with adherents of other faiths, since they are God's creation who bear his image.
- Third, there is **intellectual tolerance**. This is to cultivate a mind so broad and open as to accommodate all views and reject none. This is to forget G. K. Chesterton's bon mot that "the purpose of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid." To open the mind so wide as to keep nothing in it or out of it is not a virtue; it is the vice of the feeble-minded.

The other word we need to define is **proselytism**. *To proselytize and to evangelize are not synonymous*. The best way to distinguish them is to understand proselytism as "unworthy witness." The World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church produced a helpful study document in 1970 titled *Common Witness and Proselytism*. It identified three aspects of proselytism. Proselytism takes place (1) whenever our motives are unworthy (when our concern is for our glory rather than God's), (2) whenever our methods are unworthy (when we resort to any kind of "physical coercion, moral constraint, or psychological pressure"), and (3) whenever our message is unworthy (whenever we deliberately misrepresent other people's beliefs).

In contrast, to evangelize is (in the words of the Manila Manifesto) "to make an open and honest statement of the gospel, which leaves the hearers entirely free to make up their own minds about it. We wish to be sensitive to those of other faiths, and we reject any approach that seeks to force conversion on them."

(Excerpted from *Interview in Christianity Today*, September 2003)

A Basic Comparison of the "big 5" World Religions as they describe themselves

	Who or What is God?	Life or lives?	Eternal Destiny?	To achieve eternal destiny?	Any other ways?	Who was Jesus? (According to modern religious leaders)	Did Jesus die on the cross, and was he physically resurrected?
Judaism	Monotheistic - One God, infinite and personal	One life of obedience to the Law, then ?	Some believe Paradise with Messiah, others do not believe in any kind of afterlife.	Turn back to God and live a moral life under the Law	No	A wise teacher, perhaps a prophet, but not the Messiah of Israel, nor divine in any way.	He died, but was not resurrected.
Christianity	Monotheistic - Trinity, one God existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit	One life, then judgement	Eternity in Heaven	Accept Christ's payment on the cross for sin	No	Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully man. God in human form.	Yes.
Islam	Monotheistic - Allah, the one eternal, omnipotent God, unable to be reduced to a name.	One life, then judgement of works on a scale	Eternity in Paradise	Believe in the 5 doctrines of Islam and perform the 5 pillars of faith.	No	A virgin born, sinless, miracle working prophet of God, but not divine, and superceded by Mohommed.	No. A prophet of God would not be killed like that. Jesus was taken to heaven without being crucified.
Hinduism (Views differ greatly across sects)	Monistic, Pantheistic, Polytheistic	Many reincarnations following rules of Karma	Nirvana, a oneness with Brahman, end of individual	Live a pious life, and after a series of reincarnations, live a pious life in a Hindu family	No	A great son of God like Ramakrishna, partly divine, perhaps enlightened.	No official teaching, but some teach that an enlightened being would have passed peacefully into the next phase of existence.
Buddhism (Views differ greatly across sects)	Polytheistic, Pantheistic, Atheistic	Many reincarnations following rules of Karma	Nirvana, a state of nothingness, peace	Follow the 4 Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path to be released from chain of reincarnations	No	An enlightened being like the Buddha.	No official teaching, but some teach that Jesus "coming alive" in his followers hearts is far more significant than whatever might or might not have happened in history.

To claim that the world's religions are essentially the same is to deny or change the essentials of the world's religions.

All religions are different. Different in big ways, like what they say about God, our Eternal Destiny, and what we have to do to have a happy eternity. Different in little ways, like the specific rules for living life (to eat pig or not, to consume alcohol or not, to marry one woman or four, etc...).

All religions are exclusive. They all claim to have found the only true way to God.

They cannot all be true. Either one is right and the rest are wrong, or they are all wrong, but they cannot all be right.



Helpful Illustrations for communicating difficult ideas:

Flat Earth Theory (to illustrate that sincere belief doesn't make something true)

For centuries, the vast majority of people believed that the earth was flat. Did their belief in a flat earth make it true for them? They may have thought it was truth, but this belief has always been wrong. The earth has always been round, and no amount of belief can make it flat.

Who determines truth?

If an individual can declare truth, then there is no room to criticize Charles Manson or Ted Bundy. They just acted according to what was true for them. If a societal group can determine truth for itself, then we have no room to criticize the actions of inner city gangs or the Ku Klux Klan. They simply acted according to what they had determined to be truth. If truth can be determined by larger groups, like nations and kingdoms, then we have no room to criticize Hitler's Germany, Europe's crusades, or Stalin's USSR.

Only if truth is an objective standard outside of people, groups, nations can we rightfully condemn the horrific actions of these people and regimes.

Unleaded Gas (to illustrate that exclusivity doesn't make something false)

Suppose someone feels that the auto makers are cramping his style by specifying "unleaded gas only" for his automobile. If he resisted this narrow confine by using diesel fuel or, worse yet, water, his car would cease to operate. The specifications may be narrow, but nevertheless they are valid.

Travel Directions (to illustrate the Law of Non-contradiction)

If I say that one can get from Baltimore to Washington by driving on Interstate 95, and you say that one can get to the same place by taking 295 or 70 and 29, we might both be right. But if I say that the ONLY way to get from Baltimore to Washington is on Interstate 95, and you say, "There is another way, on 295," Then we have a contradiction. Either one of us could be right, or we could both be wrong. But we cannot both be correct.

Every religion claims to be the only way to gain the most from the afterlife. They may all be wrong, but they cannot all be right.

Airplane (to illustrate that faith is only as good as the object in which it is placed)

Every time you get on an airplane, you put faith in the plane and the pilot. Trusting that the plane is well made and the pilot is well trained, you believe that you will arrive safely at your destination within a matter of hours. Millions of these acts of faith take place every day around the world. 99.999% of the time the faith is well-placed. The objects of their faith – the plane and the pilot – get the passengers safely to their destination. Sometimes their faith is misplaced. Either the pilot or the plane was not up to the task. The object of the passengers' faith failed, and the faith was useless. Faith is only as good as the object in which it is placed.