

Are All Religions The Same?

Many people in the world believe that all religions are the same. This belief will often be coupled with the ideas that God is one or that God makes himself known to different people in different ways. This can be illustrated with the picture of many different paths leading to the top of the mountain where God resides. Whether you are a Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Buddhist or the follower of any other religion, just follow the teachings of your religion as best you can and you will eventually make it to the top and achieve union with God.

One problem with this belief is that there are major differences between religions. For example, compare the doctrine or characteristics of God in a few of the major religions. Hindus believe that God is an impersonal force or that God is in all things or that God is within each person. Muslims believe in a God who is all-powerful, but who will not incarnate into the world. Christians believe in a God who not only came into the world, but who also died for the sins of mankind. Buddhists don't even believe in the existence of God.

Or consider how the various religions handle the problem of sin. Hindus believe that sin is a problem of enlightenment. Christians believe that sin is man's rebellion against God. From just this quick glance at the various beliefs in God and sin, it can be seen that there are BIG differences between religions. How could they all lead to the same place or the same God?

Those who believe that all religions are the same may defend this belief against the exclusivity of Christianity or Islam by saying that each religion only sees part of spiritual truth. This can be illustrated by two blind men touching different parts of an elephant. One man will say that the elephant is a tree because he is touching the leg. Another may say that the elephant is a snake because he is touching the trunk. In the same way, it is believed that each religion in the world only has a grasp of some part of spiritual truth and does not know the whole truth. The problem with this illustration is that it is told from the point of view of someone who is not blind and who sees the entire truth of the elephant. To say that no religion can see the whole truth is really a claim that contradicts itself.¹

Going back to the picture of various paths leading up to God, Christianity is unique among all religions because it has the message that no person can make it to the top of the mountain because each person has a serious handicap called sin. Christianity also has the amazing message that God came down from the top of the mountain, picked up the handicapped man, and carried him to Himself. In Jesus Christ, God entered the world, died for the sins of mankind, and offers each person his perfect record that allows for a relationship with Himself. In John 14:6, Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." That's because, through his sacrifice on the cross, Jesus answered the fundamental problem of man's sinfulness. The God of the Bible both provides a path and is the path to salvation. No other religion has this message! It is exclusive, but it is the only message that truly meets man's deepest need.

¹ More on this illustration can be found in Chapter One of Timothy Keller's book, *The Reason for God* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2008).