

Are All Religions Not The Same

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, friends, in your conversation with people, you will find, if you haven't already, that when you talk about religion, it is usually a very sensitive topic, isn't it? Or it's something you just don't talk about.
- It's a no-go zone. Now, it could be because there are so many religions in the world. And so we have to start by asking the questions. One, are all the religions right?
- Or is there one right and everyone else wrong? Sounds a bit harsh, doesn't it? Are they all mutually exclusive? Or is religion just a matter of opinion? I guess that's why the debates are so hotly contested.
- We all have our own beliefs in the world. And nobody wants to be wrong, especially when the stakes are as high as heaven and hell. The word we use today is the word tolerance.
- It seems that if you have an idea that's different to somebody else with regards to religion especially, then you can't really say that they are wrong and you are right. You are supposed to be happy to say that we are all the same and that we all believe in the same God, just different roads up the same mountain kind of thing.
- [1 : 0 7] That's what you're supposed to do. You are not supposed to rock the boat because if you claim exclusivity, that is what you will do. Then you might be branded, right?
- Intolerant or prejudiced or someone who discriminates. And with our country and our history, that is not what you want to be known as, is it?
- It's not a label you want to carry. But if religion is a matter of opinion, then no one person's opinion would be weightier than another person's opinion because they're both opinions.
- But I think at the heart of the issue is this question, which is the real question. It's this, how do we get to know God? Assuming that God wants to be known, assuming that he's knowable.
- How can we approach him, assuming that he's approachable? What is the thing we need to do in order to gain an audience with him, in order to get into his presence?
- [2 : 0 5] And this is the thing that separates the different religious groupings of the different religious beliefs. Christians will say, if you're sitting here this morning, you are a Christian.
- If you're not yet a Christian, this is what Christians say. That you have to believe in Jesus alone, his death on the cross, which you'll remember as we share the Lord's Supper. Jesus who claimed to be God in the flesh.
- Jews will tell you, no, Jesus is not the one to save us. He's not the Messiah. We're waiting for the Messiah, as promised through the pages of the Old Testament. My aunt, who is Hindu, will tell you that there are many different gods.
- So just worship the ones that are most applicable to you. While Buddhists, they will say you must hold to the teachings of Buddha. You must pursue peace and non-violence.
- My uncle, who is Muslim, will say that while Jesus is a great prophet, Muhammad is the last prophet, and so you must listen to him. And do what has been written in the Quran.

- [3 : 08] Well, my sister, who lives in Australia now, she was, I think, Roman Catholic. And then atheist. No, then agnostic. Now she's Baha'i.
- I can't keep up. You know, it's about being good, doing good, living a moral life, and then that will be okay. It's something that fits into their lifestyle.
- Now, we all can't be right, can we? See, if we truly believe that all religions lead to the same God, just different roads up the same mountain, then can I suggest that you're actually committing intellectual suicide?
- I mean, it's obvious, just by naming those few religions, that all religions don't believe in the same God, do they? Worse than that, if we are all right, well, then God comes across as rather schizophrenic.
- He can't decide how to approach him. He can't even decide who he is. Well, this morning we will see, friends, that religion is not a matter of opinion. God is noble.
- [4 : 15] God desires that we know him. And he has made it possible. So the first thing to notice this morning is that Paul preaches God's gospel. Paul preaches God's gospel.
- Have a look again at Galatians 1, verse 1. Paul, an apostle, sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead, and all the brothers with me, to the churches in Galatia.
- So notice the apostle Paul has been sent by God the Father and Jesus Christ. See, the gospel message that Paul preaches has been given to him by God.
- No one else has been given to him by God. He hasn't invented the message. He hasn't made up a story. He's not writing fiction. Paul is merely the mouthpiece that God chooses to use to speak his message to the Galatian church.
- Now, who of you here has heard of His Excellency, Mr. V.W. Mavimbella? No one. Well, if you knew him, then you would actually know the South African ambassador to Brazil.
- [5 : 30] So if you're ever in Brazil, look him up. I'm sure he'll want to see you. He represents you and I when it comes to foreign matters with Brazil. He represents South Africa, doesn't he?
- Speaks for our country. He can't make up foreign policy, can he? That's what the government here does. He just implements it. He speaks it. But we do it.
- Similar to what Paul's situation is here. Paul stands as God's representative. He's been sent by God. He's been commissioned by God. In other words, Paul is God's ambassador to planet Earth.
- Friends, that has very serious consequences, doesn't it? Because if Paul speaks God's words, then Muhammad doesn't.
- If Paul speaks God's words, then they carry with them the authority of God. Because they are God's words, not his words. And that's not Paul's opinion.
- [6 : 33] That's God's authoritative word. And when God speaks, we must listen. And if it is God's message, then we must understand the content, don't you think?
- If it is God's message, if we don't understand the content, we don't know what he is saying, and then we don't know what needs to be done. So if the apostle Paul has been chosen by God, and then sent by God, with a message from God, it would be good to know what the content of that message is.
- See, God's gospel is all about Jesus. God's gospel is all about Jesus. Have a look again at verse 3. Paul writes, he says, So the content of God's message, of God's gospel, is about Jesus, who gave himself for our sin to rescue us from this present evil age.
- And it is done, did you notice, according to the will of God the Father. And we see earlier on in verses 1 and 2, what this gave himself means.

Jesus died and was raised to life again. And in doing that, Jesus has secured a relationship with God for anyone who will believe that particular truth.

[8 : 13] Jesus puts us in touch with God. Jesus helps us get to know who God is. We cannot do it on our own. See, the content of the gospel message is steeped in history.

Friends, this is not a matter of opinion. It is a matter of truth. Many of us would have been glued to our TV screens on the 2nd of November 2019, watching the World Cup rugby final.

You will remember South Africa made history in being the first team to have lost a game in the tournament and then won the actual cup. I mean, I'm sure after we watched them lose that first game, we're going, oh my word, not again.

You know, like we do with our pro tears. Most of the world didn't even think we'd get into the final. I thought many of us doubted that too, didn't we? However, when the final whistle went, it was red.

And if you remember, the score was South Africa, 32. England, 12. There were thousands of witnesses. Friends, that was not fake news.

[9 : 23] Now, you can choose to believe it or not, right? However, if you just decide that it's not true, that's not going to make it any less true, will it? It still happened.

It doesn't mean it changes just because you refuse to believe it. The facts speak for themselves. And to deny the facts in favor of what you might think or what you might want to think for whatever reason, our friends, that is just intellectual suicide, isn't it?

You can't change what happened. It's part of history. Jesus died for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age and was raised to life again.

Friends, that is Paul's message. It is part of history. And it has consequences. Because if Jesus died and was raised to life again to save us, then nobody else has dealt with our sin.

It's only Jesus. Jesus clearly states in John's Gospel that nobody gets to the Father, nobody will see God unless they go through him and him alone.

[10 : 42] That is because he is the one who died and was raised to life again. He is the one who has dealt with our sin and no one else. That is not my opinion.

That is not Paul's opinion. It's a fact. You can go back into history. You can do the research. Look at the facts. God's Gospel is all about Jesus dying and being raised to life again to rescue us.

That's the Gospel. Well, friends, if the Gospel is all about Jesus and nobody else, well, then it stands to reason that God's Gospel is the only Gospel, isn't it?

God's Gospel is the only Gospel. Have a look at verse 6. You can almost sense a bit of Paul's frustration in verse 6, can't you? We'll read that for you. I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ, not turning to a different Gospel, which is really no Gospel at all.

Evidently, some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the Gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a Gospel other than the one we already preached to you, let them be eternally condemned.

[11 : 57] As we have already said, so I now say again, if anybody is preaching to you a Gospel other than what you accepted, let them be eternally condemned. Am I not trying to win the approval of human beings or of God?

Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ. Can you sense Paul's frustration? Maybe a bit of, he's a bit angry, he's almost scolding them like naughty children.

I can't believe you're doing this. Again. Paul is adamant, isn't he? That if anybody, irrespective of who it is, if anybody preaches a Gospel different to this one, even if they had to come back later with a different Gospel, or an angel from heaven had to come and preach a different Gospel, what does Paul say?

Let them be eternally condemned. Let them fall under the curse of God. Let them be judged by God. Because friends, there is only one Gospel.

There is only one message. It's not a variety. Anything different, Paul doesn't say, Ach shame, they got it mostly right. He doesn't say that, does it?

[13 : 09] It's not mostly true. Paul doesn't say it's okay. Give them a break. No. If it is not the Gospel, then it's not the Gospel. I mean, it sounds like a silly thing to have to say, right?

But if it's not the Gospel, it's not the Gospel. It is no Gospel. That's what Paul says.

If someone is preaching a Gospel message that is not the real thing, it is not the Gospel. Even if it's an angel from heaven. What that means, friends, is that if anybody adds to the Gospel, it becomes no Gospel.

Someone might say, Well, believing in Jesus is fine, but you also, oh, really, what do I also need? See, they are adding, aren't they? It's no Gospel. And if anything is subtracted from the Gospel, again, it is no Gospel at all.

There are so many preachers today who are amongst the super wealthy of the world. Did you know that? They have thousands of people in their churches, tens of thousands sometimes, because they continually tell their people what they want to hear.

[14 : 23] One such preacher, who owns a garage of expensive cars, owns a yacht, and of course, he has his own private jet. This is what you'll find on his website, and I quote, Jesus came that we might have a more abundant life.

He came to carry our weaknesses, our sickness, our pain, so that we can walk in total freedom, peace, power, and purpose.

Well, that's great alliteration. But that's not the Gospel. That's his Gospel. Can I say, it doesn't sound much like Paul's Gospel, does it?

Jesus came, died, and rose again to rescue us from this present evil age. Friends, that's the Gospel.

That's Paul's Gospel. That is not this preacher's Gospel. See, in order to preach Paul's Gospel, you will need to talk about sin. You will need to talk about judgment, which you will not hear from this preacher's pulpit.

[15 : 39] You will hear it from this pulpit, though. And note, the Apostle Paul doesn't call it a false Gospel. Did you notice that? Sometimes we say, it's just a false Gospel.

That's not what Paul says. Paul says, it is no Gospel at all. Don't even call it a false Gospel, because it's not a Gospel. It's nothing.

And Paul is clear on the consequences for preachers like this, and by extension, for anyone who believes their message. Paul says, preaching any other Gospel leads to condemnation.

Do you notice? Paul does not mince his words, does he? He doesn't beat around the bush. He is absolutely clear on the future of these preachers. Let them be cursed, he says.

He double stamps it and says it twice. Let them be cursed. Now, back in the first century, they never had computers. So if they wanted to highlight something, they would say it twice.

[16 : 41] If it was us and we wanted to highlight something, I don't know if you ever sent an email or a text. You know, you put it in capitals, right? Make the font a little bigger, bold, italics, underlined, because this is important, pay attention.

Well, that's what it's like when someone repeats themselves when it comes to the Bible. They're saying, this is important. Friends, religion is not a matter of opinion. It's a matter of truth.

And if this is the only gospel, then all other beliefs, all other so-called gospels are wrong.

Not merely misguided. Not mostly true. Not okay. It's wrong. And we mustn't be too afraid to say it. There is wrong belief and there is right belief.

That's what the Bible tells us. I mean, many people today still believe that the world is flat. Maybe you are part of the flat earth society. I don't know. Now, friends, in the wake of all the evidence, it does seem more reasonable to believe that the earth is not flat, right?

[17 : 51] If you're not sure, why don't you phone Elon Musk, take a trip out and have a look for yourself, see, they are wrong, aren't they? We can't affirm them in their wrong belief and say, it's okay, you can believe the world is flat.

No. We can't do that. We've got to point them to the evidence. Encourage them to change their belief because what they believe is wrong. Friends, that would be the right and the loving thing to do, wouldn't it?

And the same is true in thinking about God. God is knowable. God desires that we know him. It's wonderful news, isn't it?

And he's made a way for that to happen and it's only through the person of Jesus. He's the one who has died for our sin to rescue us from this present evil age. He is the one who was raised to life again and he is the one who will return.

And if you preach a different gospel to this one, if you share your opinions, you know, when people say if you preach a different gospel, maybe people then think about just the preacher. But if you are telling people a different gospel, you are preaching it, aren't you?

[18 : 59] Then you will be cursed by God. You will be eternally condemned. All those who are not Christians, all those who have not yet believed this gospel and are just sharing or preaching their opinions to others, they will be eternally condemned.

And the question I always have is why would you preach falsehood anyway? Why would you alter this amazing gospel that God has given us? This free gift of grace that God, why would you change that?

Why would you preach your own opinions or your own ideas which is not nearly as glorious as God's gospel? Well, if you've ever watched or read Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, I read it and watched it.

Surprise. You will know about the five golden tickets, right? Willy Wonka hides five golden tickets to be won by children so that they can come into his chocolate factory and tour the chocolate factory.

That sounds amazing. If I was a child, I'd want to be there. And as the movie goes on, one by one, the tickets are found and Charlie finally goes off to the local shop and buys a chocolate bar and when he opens it, he finds the last golden ticket.

[20 : 17] He rushes home, excited, shows it to his family and then announces to his family, I'm not going to use the ticket. I'm going to sell it. They were ridiculously poor and he thought that at least if he sold the ticket, that could help his family.

Well, at that point in the movie, some profound words get said by his grandfather. His grandfather looks Charlie in the eyes and says to him, Charlie, they print money every day.

There are only five of these tickets in the whole world and you have the last one. Why would you want to trade that ticket for something as common as money? Profound, isn't it?

There's only one gospel. Why would you want to trade that for something as worthless? For something that is no gospel at all?

For something that is as common as opinion. Because that's what those who preach no gospel do, isn't it? They are telling you what they think.

[21 : 23] It's just their opinion. And why? Well, Paul gives us a clue in verse 10. Have a look at it again. Am I trying to win the approval of human beings or of God?

Or am I trying to please people? If I was still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ. It seems that those who preach no gospel are those who are trying to win the approval of men.

They don't want to rock the boat. They don't want to have the reputation of being called my personal favorite, one of the frozen chosen. They don't want to be called intolerant.

They don't want to be called prejudiced or someone who discriminates. They want people to like them. They want people to attend their churches. They want a great income.

They want to be liked by people. Pleasing God, well, that seems to be secondary. Paul is a servant of Christ and as such preaches God's gospel as he was given it.

[22 : 31] We must not get thrown into confusion by those who would have us change the gospel just a little bit to make it more palatable in our society, more appealing.

Now, we can't say this because people aren't going to come to church. Maybe we should just leave that part out. Friends, we must not listen to them. Those who want to add or take something away from the pure, unadulterated gospel of God.

Because if we do listen to them, we'll believe a different gospel, which is no gospel. We will believe what they believe, which is no gospel. And then like them, we will also be eternally condemned.

So Zach and Leticia Zahara, remember, this is God's gospel. that's what you're taking your stand on.

It's all about Jesus who died for you to rescue you from this present evil age. It is true. It is steeped in history.

[23 : 36] It's not a matter of opinion. And I am thrilled that you have believed this gospel and you've taken a stand on this gospel and that your future secured in eternity by Jesus for you so that you can spend eternity with him.

St. Mark's, for the rest of you, what are you going to do in the light of this? See, you can choose to believe or you can choose not to, right? That's a choice you have.

You're free to make that choice. But whatever you decide is not going to make it more true or less true. It's still going to be true whether you choose to believe it or not. And for those of us who have already believed God's gospel, can I encourage you not to get confused?

Don't let people sway you. Don't wander away. There's only one gospel. Continue to believe it. To trust that Jesus Christ died and rose to life again.

He died. To rescue you from this present evil age. That's the gospel. Will you pray with me? Father, we thank you for the gospel.

[24 : 54] Thank you for all the faithful who have believed this gospel over the ages and who have faithfully passed it on to us. Please help us in our understanding. Help us to see the truth and then believe it.

I once again want to commit these young people to you. Thank you for calling them into relationship with you. I pray that you would strengthen them for the life you have called them to and that they will not be ashamed to testify about Jesus.

The fact that you died for them to save them from this present evil age. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.