

A Defense of Christian Particularism

HOW CAN JESUS BE THE
ONLY WAY TO GOD?

What is the Problem?

- Moral Issue
- What is hidden behind the question?
- “It is immoral for God to make Jesus the only way of salvation.”



Make the Issue Clear

- We must make the issue crystal clear to the questioner.
- Make sure *they understand* what they are actually asking.
- Is John 14:6 *unfair*?



How to Tackle the Question

- Make your defense a Biblical one, and not a *purely* philosophical one.
- This is an excellent time to *explain* the Gospel instead of only *proclaiming* the Gospel.

What Does the Bible Teach?

1. Since the fall of Adam, all are born spiritually dead and have sinned. No one deserves God's grace and mercy. (**Ephesians 2:1-5; Romans 3:9-20**)
2. Jesus was the only one born of the Holy Spirit who could live a sinless life and pay for our sins. (**Luke 1:35; John 1:4; 1 John 1:2, 5:11**)
3. The payment for sin is death. (**Romans 6:23; Genesis 2:17; Mark 15:34**)
4. Jesus lived a sinless life, and died for us, so that we could have eternal life and have a relationship with God. (**2 Corinthians 5:21; John 17:3**)

What Does the Bible Teach?

1. Since the fall of Adam, all are born spiritually dead and have sinned. No one deserves God's mercy. **Because of this, we cannot even qualify as a sin offering.**
2. Jesus was the only one born of the Holy Spirit who was born spiritually alive. **This qualifies only Jesus as a fitting sacrifice.**
3. The payment for sin is death. **Being already spiritually dead, no one born of man could die in our place.**
4. Jesus lived a sinless life, and died for us, so that we could have eternal life and have a relationship with God. **Jesus is the only person who lived a sinless life, so He is the only one who was fit to die for us.**

What Does the Bible Teach?

- Although Jesus is the only way, the Bible also teaches that *God **does** want every person to be saved.*
- “This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” - **1 Timothy 2:3–4**
- “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.” - **2 Peter 3:9**

What Does the Bible Teach?

“The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;” - **Acts 17:24–27**

Bad Objections

- “...it’s frequently asserted that it’s arrogant and immoral to hold to any kind of religious particularism because you then have to regard everybody who disagrees with you as mistaken. Therefore, religious particularism is false.
- This seems to be a textbook example of the logical fallacy known as “argument ad hominem,” which tries to invalidate a position by attacking the character of those who hold to it.
- This is a fallacy because the truth of a position is independent of the moral character of those who believe it.”

Bad Objections

- “In the same way, even if it were the case that all religious particularists were arrogant and immoral, that would do nothing to prove that their particular views are false.
- Not only that, but why think that arrogance and immorality are necessary conditions of being a particularist? Suppose I’ve done all I can to discover the truth about God. Suppose I’ve studied various religions; I’ve sincerely sought God in prayer. Suppose as a result of my search I’m convinced that Christianity is true, and so I humbly embrace Christian faith as an undeserved gift of God.
- Am I arrogant and immoral for believing what I sincerely think is true? What else can I do but believe it? I think it’s true!”

Bad Objections

- “Finally, and even more fundamentally, this objection is a double-edged sword.
- For the pluralist also believes that his view is right and that all those adherents to particularistic religious traditions are wrong.
- Therefore, if holding to a view that many others disagree with means you’re arrogant and immoral, then the pluralist himself would be convicted of arrogance and immorality.”

Bad Objections

- “...it’s frequently alleged that Christian particularism can’t be correct because religious beliefs are culturally relative.
- For example, if you had been born in Pakistan, you would likely have been a Muslim. Therefore, your belief in Christianity is false or unjustified.
- But again this seems to be a textbook example of what’s called the “genetic fallacy.” This is trying to invalidate a position by criticizing the way a person came to hold that position....
- And once again, the pluralist pulls the rug from beneath his own feet: For had the pluralist been born in Pakistan, then he would likely have been a religious particularist! Thus, on his own analysis his pluralism is merely the product of his being born in late twentieth-century Western society and is therefore false or unjustified.”

Philosophical Reflection

- “What exactly, is the problem supposed to be here? The universalist alleges that the following statements are logically inconsistent:
 1. God is all powerful and all loving.
 2. Some people never hear the gospel and are lost.
- But why think that 1 and 2 are logically incompatible? There is no explicit contradiction between them. If the universalist is claiming that they are implicitly contradictory, he must be assuming some hidden premises that would bring out this contradiction.”

Philosophical Reflection

- “Although universalists have not been forthcoming about their hidden assumptions, the logic of the problem would suggest something akin to these points:
 3. If God is all powerful, He can create a world in which everybody hears the gospel and is freely saved.
 4. If God is all loving, He prefers a world in which everybody hears the gospel and is freely saved.
- But are these premises necessarily true?

Philosophical Reflection

- “Consider 3. It seems incontrovertible that God could create a world in which everybody hears the gospel. But so long as people are free, there is no guarantee that everybody in such a world would be freely saved. In fact, there is no reason to think the balance between saved and lost in such a world would be any better than is that balance in the actual world. Hence 3 is not necessarily true, and the universalist’s argument is false.”
- “But what about 4? Is it necessarily true? Let us suppose for the sake of argument that there are possible worlds that are feasible for God in which everyone hears the gospel and freely accepts it. Does God’s being all loving compel Him to prefer one of these worlds over a world in which some persons are lost? Not necessarily, for these worlds might have other, overriding deficiencies that make them less preferable. For example, suppose that the only worlds in which everybody freely believes the gospel and is saved are worlds with only a handful of people in them. Must God prefer one of these sparsely populated worlds over a world in which multitudes believe in the gospel and are saved, even though other persons freely reject His grace and are lost? No. Thus the universalist’s second assumption is not necessarily true, so that his argument is doubly invalid.”

Philosophical Reflection

- “As a loving God, God wants as many people as possible to be freely saved and as few as possible to be lost. His goal, then, is to achieve an optimal balance between these, to create no more of the lost than are necessary to attain a certain number of the saved. It is possible that in order to create this many people who will be freely saved, God also had to create this many people who will be freely lost... Thus, it is possible that:
 5. God has created a world that has an optimal balance between saved and lost, and those who never hear the gospel and are lost would not have believed in it even if they had heard it.
- So long as 5 is even possibly true, it shows that there is no incompatibility between an all-powerful, all-loving God and some people’s never hearing the gospel and being lost.”

Source: Craig, W. L. (2007). What About Those Who Have Never Heard About Christ? In T. Cabal, C. O. Brand, E. R. Clendenen, P. Copan, & J. P. Moreland (Eds.), *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith*. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

Tim Keller's Response

- “But I’m troubled by the evangelical notion that people go to heaven only if they have a direct relationship with Jesus. Doesn’t that imply that billions of people — Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, Hindus — are consigned to hell because they grew up in non-Christian families around the world? That Gandhi is in hell?”-Nicholas Kristof
- Tim Keller: “You imply that really good people (e.g., Gandhi) should also be saved, not just Christians. The problem is that Christians do not believe anyone can be saved by being good. If you don’t come to God through faith in what Christ has done, you would be approaching on the basis of your own goodness. This would, ironically, actually be more exclusive and unfair, since so often those that we tend to think of as “bad” — the abusers, the haters, the feckless and selfish — have themselves often had abusive and brutal backgrounds. Christians believe that it is those who admit their weakness and need for a savior who get salvation.”