

# How can Jesus be the only way to God?

**Series:** The Case for Faith

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Over the past four weeks, we have looked at some of the toughest questions aimed at the Christian faith. Bruce has tackled questions like "If God is so good, why is the world so bad?," "How can miracles be true?," "Can the Bible be trusted?," and just last week, "What about evolution?"

We have based this eight-week series on a book called The Case for Faith , written by Lee Strobel, a former atheist and legal editor for the Chicago Tribune. In his book, Strobel posed these same questions to some of the most brilliant minds that he could find.

This morning I want us to take a look at what I believe to be the most emotionally charged question in the entire series. Much of the emotion stems from the bold words of Jesus to his disciples in John 14:6 ...

"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

For many people these words are down-right offensive and even repulsive.

As I prepared to teach today, I was doing some research on the internet about Ravi Zacharias, the man that Lee Strobel interviewed for this chapter of his book. My searching led me to an angry reply that was posted on the web site [www.hindunet.org](http://www.hindunet.org) in response to a previous posting that must have made mention of the teachings of Ravi Zacharias ...

Religion ... can uplift you or turn you into a fanatic or a lunatic. Enough tears and blood has been shed in the name of religion by misguided people such as Ravi Zacharias, who seem to know, but do not really understand their own or other's religion. I suggest Ravi to read the works of Joseph Campbell, Eknath

Iswaran and such, instead of placing all his bets on one controversial book composed by one tribe in a distant land and time. If the only way he can make his religion great is by denying other scriptures, I really feel sorry for him. By the way, does Ravi think that people of the sort of Buddha, Socrates, Confucius, Mahatma Gandhi, Pythagoras, Plato, Spinoza are all burning in an eternal hell just because of his (mis)interpretation of the Bible and other texts?

If you are anything like me, you have probably wondered if there is any way to respond to the stinging question, "How can you say Jesus is the only way to God?" without sounding insensitive, narrow and exclusive.

This morning, I want to strip away some of the emotion and take a calm, thoughtful look at the question with the hope that you will leave here with a clear understanding of Jesus' claim to be the only way to God.

As we examine the question "How can Jesus be the only way to God," I'd like us to consider three possible logical approaches.

The first approach is to consider the possibility the Jesus never claimed to be the only way to God and therefore Christianity is not narrow and exclusive after all.

The second approach is to consider the possibility that Jesus did indeed claim to be the only way to God but he was wrong and therefore Christianity is not only narrow and exclusive but also wrong.

The third approach is to consider the possibility that Jesus did claim to be the only way to God and he was right and therefore Christianity is narrow and exclusive but it is also right.

## 1. Perhaps Christianity Is Not Narrow

This first approach considers the possibility that Jesus never claimed to be the only way to God and therefore Christianity is not narrow and exclusive, but rather broad and accepting of anyone who sincerely seeks God.

The emphasis is on sincerity, not truth. The concept can be pictured in a number of ways.

Some people see the journey to God as a series of caravans walking through the desert seeking the same destination from many different directions. God is the destination and each caravan represents one of the world's religions, Christianity being among them.

Some people see God as the hub of a wheel with the spokes of the wheel representing the world's religions. It doesn't matter which spoke you're on, because they all converge at the hub.

Others see God sitting at the top of a mountain, and the paths that lead to the peak are the different religions available to us. You can take any path you like because they all go to the top.

All these images look good at first and seem to make sense until we open the Bible and read the exclusive claims made by Jesus and his disciples. Jesus made two claims that separate him from all of the other religious leaders. These two claims were never made by Buddha, Confucius, Mohammed, Krishna, Moses, Abraham or any other recognized religious leader.

Jesus claimed to be the only way to God.

Once again we are faced with the statement of Jesus in John 14:6, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

He didn't claim to be the one showing the way to God nor did he claim to be "a" way to God . He claimed to be the only way to God .

That teaching was affirmed by his disciples who later wrote passages like Acts 4:12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

Jesus claimed to be God.

No other recognized religious leader has ever made that claim either.

In John 10:30 Jesus said, I and the Father are one.

Everyone who heard him make that statement understood that he was claiming to be God. Listen to how they responded in John 10:31-33 ...

the Jews picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" "We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God."

His followers also understood his claim to be God. The apostle Paul reflects that in Titus 2:13 ...

We wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Both the followers of Jesus and the enemies of Jesus recognized his claims to be the only way to God and to actually be God.

So if the founder of Christianity claimed to be God and to be the only way to God, then we must dismiss the possibility that Christianity embraces many ways to God. We have to conclude that Christianity is distinctively narrow and exclusive.

2. Perhaps Christianity is narrow and wrong.

This second approach considers the possibility that Jesus did claim to be the only way to God but he was wrong and therefore Christianity is not only narrow and exclusive but also wrong. Proponents of this view say Christianity is wrong two reasons ...

First, it's wrong because there are millions of sincere worshippers of God out there who don't recognize Jesus Christ as their Savior. They cannot all be wrong.

Second, it's wrong because truth is subjective . What's true for you may not be true for me. So even if Jesus Christ is right for you that doesn't mean he's right for me.

Let's take a look at these two arguments.

First, there is no doubt that there are many sincere worshippers all over the world who don't know Jesus Christ. But does sincerity make they're worship right? Does sincerity make something true?

The followers of Jim Jones were very sincere when they believed him to be the Messiah. Yet on November 17, 1978, 912 of them died in a mass suicide sincerely deluded.

The same thing happened on March 27, 1997 when the followers of Mr. Applewhite and his Heaven's Gate cult died at their own hands wearing purple shrouds and Nike sneakers waiting for aliens to arrive from the Comet Hale-Bopp. Sincerity is admirable, but it doesn't make something true.

It is possible to be sincere and yet wrong.

The second objection is that Jesus Christ may be the only way to God for you, but not for me. That criticism is popular in our relativistic culture. It is based on the assumption that truth is subjective .

But truth is not subjective, truth is objective. Preferences and tastes are subjective. Liver and onions may taste good to you, but they don't taste good to me. Some of you may think Mark's graphic of Jesus is wonderful and others may not like it at all. These are issues of preference and taste and are subjective and since they are subjective we need to be tolerant of one another's differences.

But truth is not subjective. Truth is objective and therefore all objective truth is, by definition, exclusive . Truth excludes its opposite. One plus one equals two, not three, not five. It equals two for me and two for you. It equals two whether I feel like it does or not. It's not up for grabs! Objective truth is narrow.

You cannot conclude that Christianity is wrong just because there are millions of sincere people who don't follow Christ. Sincerity does not make something true or false.

Nor can you conclude that Christianity is right for one and wrong for another because Jesus presented himself as the absolute, objective truth not as a preference or taste.

So that brings us to the third and final logical approach ...

### 3. Perhaps Christianity is narrow and right.

This approach considers the possibility that Jesus did claim to be the only way to God and he was right and therefore Christianity is narrow and exclusive, but it is also right.

C. S. Lewis the well known atheist scholar who became a Christian and went on to be the most thought provoking Christian writer of the 20th century once said this about Jesus Christ, "I'm trying to prevent anyone from saying the really silly thing that people often say about Jesus Christ. Which is, 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God.' That's the one thing we can't say about him. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic on the level of a man who says he's a poached egg. Or else he'd be a devil from hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was and is the Son of God or else he's a mad man or something worse. You can shut him up for a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But don't let us come along with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He hasn't left that open to us.

Lewis is saying that there are really only three alternatives with Jesus Christ. He was either a liar or a lunatic or the Lord.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we conclude that Jesus is the Lord God and Christianity is right. And we have some pretty convincing evidence that support the fact that Jesus was everything he claimed to be ...

- a. Jesus claimed to be sinless and his sinless life supported that claim.
- b. Jesus claimed to have the power to forgive sins and he backed it up with miracles ... often healing people of severe physical infirmities after he had declared their sins forgiven.
- c. Jesus claimed to be the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. His birth, life, death, and resurrection fulfilled hundreds of prophecies.
- d. Jesus claimed he would rise from the dead and to this day the historical record concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ remains extremely compelling.

e. Jesus claimed to be the only way to salvation and over and over again we have witnessed his power to change lives.

An objective look at the objective facts about Jesus Christ can only lead to the conclusion that he is the Lord and the only way to God. And that leaves each of us with two alternatives. We can either come to God on his terms and accept Jesus Christ as our Savior or we can reject Jesus and suffer the consequences of eternal separation from God.

And if you still find that offensive or difficult to understand, consider this ...

ONCHOCERCIASIS, more commonly known as "river blindness" is the world's second leading infectious cause of blindness. It primarily infects people living in West Africa, where in 1974 more than 1 million people suffered from the disease. Of those, 35,000 people were blind.

This picture of a young child leading his blind elder by the end of a long stick was an all-too-frequent sight in West Africa.

River blindness effects villages that are located in the fertile lands along the banks of rivers. The disease is spread through the bite of a blackfly, which breeds in fast-flowing rivers and streams. When the fly bites, it deposits the larvae of a parasitic worm that produces millions of tiny worms that migrate throughout the body.

In the late 1970's, a veterinary researcher at Merck named Dr. William Campbell developed a drug that proved to be extremely effective against parasites in many animals. In his tests he discovered that the drug was also very effective against river blindness.

In 1987, Merck announced that it would donate this drug for the treatment of river blindness to all who needed it for as long as it was needed.

Just one annual dose of Mectizan, one small pill, paralyzes the microscopic worms that cause the intense itching of river blindness.

It is estimated that some 1.5 million people who were once infected no longer have a trace of the disease. It is estimated that the distribution of Mectizan has prevented almost 300,000 cases of blindness.

Now, let's just say, hypothetically, that Dr. Campbell himself flew into West Africa with a cargo plane filled with his pills that cure river blindness and he announced to the 1.5 million people gathered around his plane that he had come to show them the way to be healed of this disease that had plagued them for hundreds of years.

Imagine his surprise when a million of the people walk away and say, "no thank you." After interviewing hundreds of those that turned down the pill, he discovers that they believe he may have "a" cure for river blindness but they were just as happy with the cures they practiced for generations. They would rather continue their practice of packing up entire villages and moving away from the river and the blackflies and settle in far less fertile areas. Some felt their ancient practice of packing their eyes in mud from the river banks was more desirable since they had done it that way for centuries. "Just leave us alone," they said, "leave us to pursue our many different paths to healing."

Another group left because they were offended that he claimed to have the only cure for river blindness. And besides, who was he to say that they were blind to begin with. And what about the cures they had sincerely practiced for generations ... what about their honored loved ones who had gone before them. Taking this pill would be an insult to their memories. Besides, Dr. Campbell's pill may be just great for Dr. Campbell and those who stayed to take it ... it may even work for them but that doesn't mean it works for everyone.

While Dr. Campbell was thrilled with the third of the people stayed and received his cure, his heart was broken by the majority that walked away still infected with the disease, still risking permanent blindness, some of them even declaring their hatred of him and forbidding their children to talk to him.

While it is hard for us to imagine in this relativistic society that we live in, there are some things that are absolutely true and yet rejected by the vast majority.

But what about those who have never heard of Jesus?

I want to close by playing a quote by Ravi Zacharias, the man that Lee Strobel interviewed for this chapter of "The Case for Faith." Ravi Zacharias grew up in India in the midst of all the major religions of the world. At the age of seventeen, while recovering from an attempt to take his own life because of the meaninglessness of it, someone read to him John 14:6 where Jesus said, I am the way and the truth



and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. He committed his life to Christ that day and today is one of the world's most renowned Christian apologists.

Lee Strobel asked Ravi, "What about people who live in places where the gospel isn't routinely discussed or where its dissemination is actually outlawed?" This is how Dr. Zacharias responded, "I have spoken in many Islamic countries, like Syria, which are tough countries to speak in. Virtually every Muslim who's come to know Christ has either come to know Christ, number one, because of the love of Christ expressed through another Christian or because of a vision or a dream or a supernatural intervention. One of India's greatest converts was a Sikh, Sundar Singh. Sundar Singh came to know Christ through an appearance of Christ in his room in a dream one night and had a tremendous impact on his life and he became a Christian and so on. So I say that there are ways that God reveals and speaks that are far beyond our own understanding. Now if God is able to give the word of Christ in various settings within ways which are beyond what you and I can understand. If he can speak through general revelation, speak through the conscience then we have to accept the fact that he tells us that we are without excuse. Every human being, I understand, will know enough truth so that if they respond to that known truth God reveals more to them. Does that mean they have to have as much of a volume of truth as anyone in another setting? I do not believe that to be so."

The prophet Jeremiah (29:13) spoke the word of the Lord when he said, You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

That is the promise of God and it is a reflection of his heart. God desires that all men and women know the truth about him. He does not hide his truth but rather the Bible says it is plainly seen through his creation and it says that God had placed a knowledge of him in our hearts.

That is why when Cherie Benner returned from two weeks in China, she told us story after story of how deeply the Chinese people wanted to hear about Jesus. Why is that? How can that be true in a nation where the government promotes atheism?

One of the marks of follower of Jesus is a desire to share the truth with others who have not heard. One of the things that continues to amaze me in my work with high school students is how eager they are to share Christ with their friends immediately after they have found him for themselves. That is God at work ...

When Bruce got the call from his friend Haje about the need for someone to encourage pastors in Bolivia, the Spirit of God came alive in him, and he could not entertain the notion not to go.

What are you doing with the truth that God has revealed to you? Are you seeking him with all of your heart? Are you actively sharing the truth that he has revealed to you?

That is one of our core values here at Valley View Community Church. We want to be a church that reaches out to seekers with the word of Christ. We want to be used by God to reach the entire world with the message that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life ...