

The Grad Experience Week 5



Religion and What makes Christianity so Special

Key Lesson: What makes Christianity special is the freedom from endless performance of acceptance; it is not what I do, but who I am as God's creation and the acceptance of Christ's sacrifice. Grace is not deserved, it is given when the opposite is earned, understanding the depth of this gift, we are also able to give. As God has shown His love by the gift of unmerited grace, so we are called to show grace to others.

Welcome to Week 5 of the Grad Experience. **Each week as we look at specific topics that are extremely present in your world today. Our goal is for you to spend some time discussing in a safe place so you ask questions and develop a stronger viewpoint on each of them.** Even if they are not present in your high school right now, they will eventually be present on a college campus, workforce, or military ... or just in the general culture of the world you live in.

Our goal isn't for you to leave here each week with a definitive answer to some of life's tough questions when it comes to living life after high school, but to get you at least **thinking about the topic and determining how that connects with whatever faith you claim to have.**

Last week we talked about science, and whether or not we can embrace science and still be a Christian or if we have to be an atheist just to believe scientific ideas.

This week we are going to look at the idea of religion and what makes Christianity special. Many of you have friends who see a definition of Christianity in the media/online that seems offensive and disturbing to others – so how do we defend a faith that seems to be defined by other “seemingly Christian” actions seen in the world?

I want to show you a quick video to get you thinking about this subject:

WATCH VIDEO – 2 ½ min

After watching this video, what's the most interesting thing you heard or question that came up?

So let's just ask the big question:

What about other religions? Don't all roads lead to the same God? Why or why not?

The guy in the social media video she watches says this:

What feels offensive today is that there's only one way to God, and one religion to show us the way ... what's actually insulting is that all religions are the same.” – Marcus800

In your own words, what makes Christianity different from other religions?

Why aren't all religions the same?

- Especially if many of these people with different faiths behave in ways similar to Christians and appear to be “good people.”

Compare a few religions just on their main points (MAYBE WRITE ON BOARD):

- **Christianity** claims that we can only be reconciled to God by Christ's atoning death on the cross, and through that reconciliation we experience the joy of his presence for eternity.
- **Islam** teaches that if our good deeds outweigh our bad deeds and Allah chooses to have mercy on us based on the "good" we do, we will enter into his paradise. But even Allah won't be there because he does not condescend to dwell among humans. (different road and different destination)
- **Hinduism**, one is not trying to *reach* God, but to *become* God. Hinduism teaches that every person's soul--their *Atman*--is one with the divine, eternal absolute, the *Brahman*.
- **Classical Buddhism** recognizes no self at all, and no divine being. Atman doesn't become Brahman, because to the Buddhist, neither exists. The end is simply the Void, and the goal at death is to become extinguished into the Void.
- **Judaism** shares much of the history and teaching of Christianity, Jews do not believe that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, nor do they believe his resurrection claims.

Among other world religions **only Christianity** proclaims that salvation is by grace--a gift of unmerited favor by God--rather than by human striving.

Only Christianity proclaims that **God is the seeker and man the object of his search, and not the reverse.**

So, is it impossible for "all roads" or religions to lead to the same God?

- They don't even claim to.
- And it's equally impossible to accept two or more conflicting truth claims as true.
 - **Even though religious pluralism seems smart, kind, and tolerant, if it is untrue, it is none of these.**

Unfortunately we see a lot of "Christians" in the media not living out true faith in Jesus.

- Because God has shown us his love by the gift of unmerited grace, we are called to show grace to those around us--even to those who may criticize our faith. Grace is, by definition, undeserved, given to us when the opposite was earned. When we understand the depth of God's gift of grace to us, we are better able to deal graciously with others, regardless of whether they share our belief that Christ is the only way.

Here's another statement I hear a lot:

Faith is just a personal ting, right? Does it really matter what you believe as long as you are sincere?

We live in a **culture where truth is spoken of as relative more than objective.**

- **Relative truth** – truth that is subjective or simply based on one's feeling. (What is true for me, may not be true for you.)
- **Objective truth** – truth that is true regardless of feelings, preference, emotions. It is true for all people, all places, all times.

Our culture now often professes – there are objective truths that exist, but "I don't care – my feelings and preferences matter more."

- Or objective truths exist but “I deny them because they don't support my agenda, so I'm justified in lying about them.” **This kind of thinking is almost impossible to reason with.**

Think about it – **it's not uncommon to hear people speak about God in terms of how they'd like Him to be.**

- For example, “I like to think of God as a loving, universal spirit, who isn't bothered about how we worship him or what name we call him.”
- Most people put God in their story, when in fact, if the Bible is true, **we are in His story.**
 - **He made us in His image, and we don't have the liberty of making him in ours. AGREE OR DISAGREE?**

This type of thinking places ultimate value on **expressive individualism – the belief that the definition and fulfillment of an individual's identity is the highest good, and that one possesses the capacity to define the terms of their own existence.**

- “You be you,” or “Find yourself,” or “Follow your heart wherever it goes.”
- **Where do you see this philosophy being played out in your culture today?**
- **SHOW VIDEO: boy identifies as a cat – viral video of mom (this is extreme)**
 - These types of statements don't work when forms of authority are rejected, or the idea of individual authenticity is valued above all else – chaos happens. Relationships break down, and communities disintegrate.

Think about it: **sincerity cannot trump truth.**

- **Example:** You can't sincerely believe you can fly. Jump from a plane and your sincerity will not save you.

What about Christians whose “sincere” actions aren't very Christ-like? How do we defend this to our friends?

Have you ever had others point out “Christians” who are acting in seemingly unchristian ways or are using the Bible or Christianity with anger and judgment toward others?

- **We may agree with our friends who point these actions out. Are we required to “defend a definition of Christianity we don't even believe in”?**

When Christians are “unlike our Christ,” the whole reputation of Christianity may be called into question. We can expect that.

- **But we can also reason that it is irresponsible to condemn an entire population based on the shortcomings of a few.**
 - **Example:** If you are buying fruit and find one that is bruised or overripe you don't decide to go home without fruit. You look at individual fruits and judge it's worth by the standard for “good” fruit.

It's also important to understand that all Christians are fallible human beings and can be expected to make mistakes and sin. None of us are fully going to act like Jesus all the time.

- **The beauty and power of the gospel of the Christian faith is not found in excellent human behavior, but in extravagant, divine grace.**
 - **What does this statement make you think about?**

Look at Paul – the same guy who said, *“Be imitators of me as I am of Christ.” – 1 Cor. 11:1*

Also said this ...

15 I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. 16 But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. 17 So I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. 18 And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. 19 I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. – Romans 7:15-19

Paul's desire is clearly to imitate Christ in all he does. **But he is well aware of his fallibility in doing the right thing**--the very thing that Jesus would do.

- He's honest.
- He's not a hypocrite, professing one thing and doing another, banging a self-righteous drum the whole time.
- He's both **aspirational** ("I want to be like Jesus") and **confessional** ("sometimes I am not.")

Is Christianity just a set of rules, or things we have to do or not do to be good enough so God won't judge us?

First:

According to the Bible we've all rejected God and deserve his judgment.

- This is not unjust or unfair; the God who made us has the right to judge us. He alone has defined good and evil, He knows our thoughts, words and deeds, and none of us can stand before His judgment.

Second:

He has the right to judge us--but the astonishing message of the Bible is that He loved us enough to send His Son to die for us, so that we can be embraced by Him in love forever.

- That is grace...**grace that does not deny the reality of His holiness or the reality of our sin.**

Third:

God made the rules, but he also made a way for them to be satisfied that doesn't depend on us.

- Our sin becomes His sin, and He takes it to the cross on our behalf. He takes our death and gives us His life in exchange.

The idea that Jesus is the only way to God is shocking to our society. Many are okay with the idea that Jesus is "the way, the truth and the life" for Christians, so long as Christians don't claim He must be "the way, the truth and the life" for everyone else. But **Jesus can't be less than He is. He is the same for everyone the way the same sun shines on us all.**

- **What are your thoughts about this statement?**

If time persists, ask these questions ...

The one thing that confuses me most about my faith is ...?"

The one thing that would make me more confident about what I believe is?

I want to close with this one last quote from the historical writer C.S. Lewis:

In Christ, we find everything for nothing. The whole of the Christian experience consists of receiving this remarkable offer. This does not mean that we stop trying to be obedient or

righteous in God's eyes, but it does mean that we begin trying in a new way. Not in order to be saved, but because God has already begun the process of saving us. Not in the hope of getting into heaven as a reward for our efforts, but because the light of heaven is already in us. Thus, while Christianity seems at first to be all about rules and guilt and virtue, it actually leads us away from all that. (*Mere Christianity*, CS Lewis)

Remember this: *What makes Christianity special is the freedom from endless performance of acceptance; it is not what I do, but who I am as God's creation and the acceptance of Christ's sacrifice. Grace is not deserved, it is given when the opposite is earned, understanding the depth of this gift, we are also able to give. As God has shown His love by the gift of unmerited grace, so we are called to show grace to others.*

QR Code for the church Darkroom website

Close with prayer