

# IS CHRISTIANITY ARROGANT?

Men, I'm glad you're here for another round of Quest.  
This is our tenth year.  
Our twentieth session.

And we're going to do something different.  
Instead of my deciding what to talk about,  
I've let you choose our topics.

I sent an email  
and scores of you sent in questions you wanted me to address.  
Way too many to answer.

And all of them good except for the one that asked me,  
if you were a tree, what kind of tree would you be?

Well, it sounded like a great idea when I came up with it.  
But now I'm not so sure.

We're going to look at some practical questions –  
Why is it so difficult to communicate with my wife?  
How do I live with some kind of balance?

But you've also asked me to speak to some questions that are  
very theological and very controversial.

Homosexuality.  
What happens to people who never hear about Jesus?  
Does God predestine some people to heaven and others to hell?

There's a general rule for getting along with people.  
It's: Don't talk about sex, politics or religion.

We're going to break those rules  
and talk about controversial sexual and religious issues.  
And I can tell you up front we're going to disagree  
and we're going to disagree on topics that are important and emotional.

Here's a little clip of where I hope we don't end up.

**Clip: Back to School – Sam Kinison on Vietnam and Korea.**

I promise not to scream at you.  
And I want you to promise not to get mad and leave the church.  
Deal?

The topics we're looking at,  
good Christians can and do differ on them.

I know that on some of these issues  
I'm going to be too conservative for some of you.  
On others, I'll be too liberal for some of you.

But what unites us is our common faith in Jesus Christ,  
not our views on any particular issue.

I wouldn't take this on if we were just starting Quest.  
But ten years in,  
I'm sure we can address these issues,  
learn from each other,  
and disagree with respect and grace.

Having said that,  
let's jump in.

**Question 1:** Isn't it arrogant for us to believe that Christianity is the only true path to heaven? ... History is chock full of examples of people who have strayed very far from the path while believing they were right (Jones, Koresh, FLDS, Radical Jihadists, Crusades, etc.). Are we like them? If you believe God can do all things, it isn't that much of a stretch to believe He could offer up several different pathways to heaven. He created all of us, He loves all of us, it seems to me a much bigger stretch that He'd omit some simply because they were born and raised in cultures who were following one of the other paths.

This is a great question – so good that we'll address part of it this week and a second part of it next week.

For today: Is it arrogant to claim that our way (Christianity) is the only way?

Before starting, one caveat: I'm not going to try to convince you this morning that Christianity is the only way to God.

I'm going to tackle the question of whether or not it's arrogant to believe that it is.

Let me begin by responding to one of the statements:

**“If you believe God can do all things, it isn't that much of a stretch to believe He could offer up several different pathways to heaven.”**

**Couldn't God Offer Different Paths?**

This is perhaps the easiest part of the question to address.

**Question:** Could God offer several different paths to heaven?

**Answer:** It doesn't matter what God **could** do. It only matters what God **did** do.

It might be fun to speculate what God could do and what God might have done.

If that's what we want to do,  
 then let's go back to college,  
 down a few brewskis,  
 sit in a dorm hallway,  
 and talk late into the night about what is theoretically possible,  
 and then walk away impressed with how intelligent we are.

But if we are concerned about spiritual reality  
 then the game is not,  
 What **could** God have done?

The question, the all-important question is:  
 What **has** God done?

And I'll give you my bias, right up front.

What God did in fact do is probably not what  
 a bunch of prideful, spiritually blind, fallen and sinful, finite human  
 beings who aren't equipped intellectually to fathom the nature or the  
 magnitude of a holy and infinite God who is not bound by time or  
 space –  
 what that kind of God could do and in fact did do,  
 is very likely not what we spiritual neophytes think he could or should do.

Edwin Arlington Robinson explained it this way.

**Edwin Arlington Robinson:** The world is a kind of spiritual kindergarten  
 where millions of bewildered infants are trying to spell 'God' with the  
 wrong blocks.

The Bible states the same thing.

**Isaiah 55.8-9:** "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your  
 ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the  
 earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your  
 thoughts.

Sorry, men, but God is under no compulsion  
 to do what you think he should do or  
 to act in a way that you think makes sense or  
 to offer all the paths you would have provided if you were God.

Create your own universe,  
 and you can run it any stinking way you want to.  
 Until that time, though,  
 it doesn't matter what God **could** have done,  
 it only matters what God in fact **has** done.

**Let's take up the charge of arrogance.**

**Isn't it arrogant for us to believe that Christianity is the only true path  
 to heaven?**

**Clip: Here's Joel Osteen on Larry King.**

Well, you see brother Joel squirming there  
 because he knows that it sounds judgmental and harsh and arrogant  
 to say Jesus is the only way.  
 So, he says a lot without saying much of anything.

Really, it's hard to know what he thinks after that clip.

Is it arrogant to think that Christianity is the only way to God?

Again, there is a simple answer.

No, it's not arrogant to claim that Christianity is the only true path to God  
 if, in fact, Christianity is the only true path to God.

Right?

If there's only one solution to a problem,  
 it's not arrogant to say – this solution, this answer is true,  
 in fact, it's the only true answer.

And if there is one true answer and you believe you have it,  
 saying, "I'm sure there are other answers that are just as good as mine,"  
 wouldn't be humble.

It would be foolish;  
 in fact, it would be disingenuous.

Let's take this idea of arrogance to some other areas for a minute  
 and then come back to religion.

Is it arrogant to believe that the germ theory of disease is correct and that  
 other theories concerning disease are wrong?

Would you charge someone with arrogance  
 if he said I believe that infectious diseases are caused by micro-organisms  
 and I do not believe such diseases are caused by spells, evil spirits, or  
 voodoo?

Of course not.

If a doctor who believes that the germ theory is true,  
 goes into a backwards culture that believes just as sincerely  
 that most diseases are caused by demonic spirits,  
 and the children there are suffering with typhoid or malaria,  
 and he says: “They seem to be happy with their beliefs  
 and who am I to think that my medicine is better than their witch  
 doctors?”  
 and he offered them no help  
 would you think that doctor humble?

No, you’d think him a heartless villain.

Someone comes up with the idea that the earth revolves around the sun  
 and he says that ideas to the contrary are false.  
 Someone purports that the world is round, not flat,  
 and he states that anyone who fails to believe his theory is wrong.  
 Someone teaches the big bang theory  
 and says that the universe had an actual beginning  
 and that those who believe it has always existed are mistaken.

My guess is in none of those instances would you respond:  
 Isn’t he an arrogant jerk for claiming that his view is the only right view?  
 Instead you would ask: Is his theory right or is it wrong?

You can be an arrogant jerk in the way you speak to others  
 who believe differently than you do,  
 but just claiming to have the truth,  
 in fact claiming to have the only true answer to a question,  
 that doesn’t make you arrogant.  
 It makes you right or wrong,  
 but it doesn’t necessarily make you arrogant.

You might respond:  
 Well, you can’t test religions the way you can the hard sciences  
 to determine their validity.

For the sake of argument, I’ll grant you that point.

But neither can you test most philosophical systems,  
and no calls a philosopher arrogant simply because he claims that  
what he believes is the truth.

Philosophers all believe they have a system  
that explains reality better than any other system;  
in fact, they believe they have a system of beliefs that proves other systems  
wrong.

And philosophers may disagree passionately,  
but they don't call each other arrogant.  
They look at each other's ideas  
and try to determine if those ideas are true.

And in the process of doing so,  
they may call each other wrong or misguided,  
but they don't call each other prideful or arrogant.  
In fact, they call each other colleagues.

In my humble opinion the real question we should be asking is  
not: Is it arrogant to claim that Christianity is the truth?  
But: Is what Christianity teaches about God and how to please him  
and how to get to heaven the truth?

And: Is it more true than other religions which claim to be paths to God?

That leads to the next point I want to make.

### **Religions are about truth.**

I think one reason why Christians are sometimes charged with  
arrogance for believing that Jesus is the only way to God is that  
people misunderstand what religions are.

The purpose of religion is not to help us understand ourselves  
or fill our lives with meaning.  
They may do that,  
but so can many secular philosophies.

The purpose of religion is not to help us sleep at night,  
 Religions may do that,  
 but so can a good sedative.

John Lennon sang whatever gets you through the night, it's all right.  
 But the purpose of religion is not to shield us from the harsh realities of life  
 by giving us an illusion to cling to like a soft pillow  
 so we can forget the reality of death and sleep well,  
 comforted by dreams of an afterlife.

A religion's not all right just because it gets you through the night.

The purpose of religion is not to make us more effective human beings  
 or "make our lives work."  
 Again, they may help with that,  
 but that's not a religion's reason for being.

The purpose of every religion is to tell us the truth.  
 And to tell us the truth about spiritual reality.

Every religion makes truth claims.  
 And when we say that what Jesus revealed is the truth  
 and that where it differs from what others taught,  
 he's right and they're not,  
 we're not talking about the sincerity of someone's faith or whether they're  
 good, moral people.  
 We're talking about which truth claims are correct.

Get it?  
 We're not judging people,  
 we're judging ideas and critiquing beliefs and truth claims.

And that doesn't make us arrogant;  
 it makes us thoughtful and rational.

Now I know there are many Christians who are arrogant and ignorant  
 and who do not represent Christ well when they defend his claims.

**1 Peter 3:15:** ... Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give  
 the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect ...

If we fail to share what we believe with gentleness and respect,  
 then no matter how right our answers,  
 we're still getting it wrong,  
 and we fail Christ.

### **Clip: Point Counter Point from SNL**

But if there is truth,  
 and if discovering it and living by it are important,  
 we should be able to seek it and discuss it,  
 and even disagree about it  
 and not have to fear being called arrogant or intolerant.

That brings us back to what I stated a moment ago.

Religions are about truth.  
 Not feelings or sincerity or who's a good person and who's not.

### **Truth Claims are Exclusive**

This is important for us to understand.  
 All truth claims are exclusive.  
 That's what they do – they differentiate what's true from what's false.

**Ravi Zacharias:** If truth does not exclude, it's just an opinion that is being stated. Any time you make a truth claim, you mean something contrary to it is false. Truth excludes its opposite.

Religions, all religions, make truth claims.  
 Every religion claims to explain reality.  
 They all purport to give valid information about reality's most important questions.

Questions such as:

What is God like?  
 Is there a problem with how we human beings are related to God,  
 and if so, how can that problem be overcome?

What does it mean to live a life that pleases God?

How do we honor the answers that other religions give to these questions?

By taking them seriously enough to  
 study them,  
 think them through,  
 and where they are true, accept them;  
 and where they are false, reject them.

Someone tells you what he believes about what matters most,  
 and you think his beliefs are shallow and bogus.

Which honors him most?

You say, "Yeah that could be. I'll look into it."

Like you might say to your wife when she tells you that  
 she thinks the car is pulling to the right because there's a problem with  
 the carburetor.

"Yeah, sweetheart, that could be. I'll look into it."

Or you say to the guy,

"Hmm, that's interesting but let me press you a little bit.  
 How do you account for ...?"

Which honors him and his beliefs?

Not caring enough to engage in a meaningful conversation?  
 Or taking his thoughts seriously enough to ask the kinds of questions  
 that will make him look at them more closely?  
 And maybe even discover that what he thought is true is not.

Religions are about truth;

the most important truths there are.

And so they should be judged on whether or not they are accurate in  
 portraying what's true.

### **The Truth Claims of All Religions Cannot Be Reconciled**

And here's what's important:

The answers that religions give to critically important questions  
 are so different that they can't be reconciled.

In fact they give contradictory answers.  
And that means they can't all be true.

When it comes to morality,  
many of the world's religions share some similarities.  
We'll leave aside the obvious differences  
between the kind of morality taught by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount  
and the kind of morality contained in Sharia Law.

But religions are much more than descriptions of ethical behavior.  
If that's all they are,  
they are moral philosophies,  
not religions – because a religion,  
every religion, claims to tell us the truth about God.

Back to Ravi Zacharias.

**Ravi Zacharias:** If truth does not exclude, it's just an opinion that is being stated. Any time you make a truth claim, you mean something contrary to it is false. Truth excludes its opposite.

Religions do not teach preferences.  
Christianity doesn't teach that Jesus is like vanilla ice cream  
and we think he's the best flavor of all,  
and we think you'll like it too, if only you try him.  
Islam doesn't teach that Mohammed is more like chocolate ice cream,  
and if you give him a chance you'll come to find that chocolate is really,  
really good.

But it doesn't matter,  
after all,  
they're both ice creams.

Jesus claimed that he was God  
and his death would save us from our sins.  
Mohammed claimed that Jesus was not God  
and that the death of Jesus is in no way related to our salvation.

Religions can contain mysteries –  
beliefs and ideas that are beyond our understanding.

Jesus was God and man.  
That's a mystery.

But "Jesus was divine" (Christianity) and "Jesus was not divine" (Islam) –  
that's not a mystery; that's a contradiction.  
Both beliefs cannot both be true.

The death of Jesus on the cross saves us from our sins  
and we receive salvation by faith in Christ (that's Christianity).

The death of Jesus does not make salvation possible  
and faith in him does not save us from our sins (that's Islam).

Those beliefs are not a mystery;  
they are contradictions.  
And they cannot be reconciled  
so that they are just two different paths to the same goal.  
If one is true,  
the other is not.

If one is a path to God,  
the other is not.

Let me give you some other contradictions  
that I believe are so great that you cannot believe that they all lead to the  
same place.

This is going to have to be rather superficial because of time,  
but it's all true.

### **What is God Like?**

In Christianity God is separate from his creation.  
God created the material world,  
and His existence is separate and distinct from the cosmos he spoke into  
existence.

Not so with Hinduism.  
Hindus believe that reality is one.  
God is not distinct from his creation.

Everything that is – is God.  
Including you and me.

If you can believe that a religion that teaches that you are divine  
and a religion that teaches you are a sinner who is not divine  
are just different paths  
leading to the same place,  
I'd love to hear how.

One religion that says you are divine  
and the other that says the original temptation that brought brokenness  
and evil into the world  
was the temptation: eat this fruit and you will be like God,  
knowing right and wrong for yourselves without his guidance,  
if you think these are compatible,  
two different paths to the same God,  
you're capable of some mental gymnastics  
that I haven't yet mastered.

Christians describe God as a personal being.  
By that we mean that God possesses a will and an intellect and he acts  
purposefully in time and space.  
Hinduism believes that God is impersonal,  
possessing none of those qualities.

Buddhists are difficult to pin down.  
Some are agnostic.  
Buddha himself did not claim to know whether or not God existed.  
Other Buddhists believe that there are many gods,  
but not gods like the God of the Bible.  
These gods grow old, get ill and die.  
And some Buddhists are atheists who believe that there is no god at all.

Buddhists themselves disagree whether Buddhism is a religion  
or simply a moral philosophy or a way of life,  
designed to prevent suffering in this life.

## **What is Heaven Like?**

Christians believe that in heaven personal beings (us) will commune with a personal God (Yahweh, aka “not us”).  
We will have a relationship with God.

Hinduism describes heaven as a drop of water returning to the ocean.  
In other words,  
your consciousness melds into the one divine consciousness  
and you no longer exist as an individual.

Buddhism describes enlightenment as a candle being snuffed out.  
Again, you no longer exist as an individual being.

So, are there many true paths to heaven?  
In some ways, it’s a nonsensical question.

Because our heaven – personal beings in relationship with a personal God,  
the eastern religions don’t believe in such a heaven  
and they wouldn’t want to take us there if they could.

Losing our personal identity,  
and no longer existing as a distinct being  
that’s nirvana,  
not remaining as individuals in relationship with a personal God.

What we think of as heaven – they think of as the problem.

That’s not a mystery; that’s a contradiction.

You can think that neither is correct.  
You can think that one or the other is correct.  
But you cannot think that both are correct.

## **What’s the Problem?**

Christianity believes that we were created to have a relationship with God  
but our sinful rebellion against God has broken that relationship.  
Sin is the problem.

Hinduism believes that we have become blind to our divinity.  
Ignorance is our problem.

Buddhism believes that we suffer because we have desires.  
Desire is the problem.

And the point of Buddhism is to help us get to the place where we no longer  
have earthly desires.

Neither Hinduism nor Buddhism  
is designed to help us overcome the effects of sin in our lives  
and the estrangement sin has created in our relationship with God.

How can different religions give you the same answer,  
when they don't even define the question in the same way  
and when they offer contradictory solutions?

Islam and Judaism are closer to Christianity in how God is understood  
and in how the problem is defined (sin).

But their remedies are very different from Christianity.

Let's cut to the chase.

### **How are We Made Right with God?**

Christianity is about Christ.

And what Christianity tells us about Christ is that he is  
the only-begotten Son of God,  
the Savior of the world,  
that his death both was necessary and sufficient to pay for our sins,  
and that salvation is a gift we receive by faith in Jesus.

All other religions deny that Jesus was uniquely divine,  
that he is Lord,  
that his death saves us, and  
salvation is a gift of God's grace.

Practically all other religions,  
 and I'm including Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Islam  
 teach that Jesus was a an enlightened teacher,  
 and that's it.

They do not believe that he died for our sins  
 or was resurrected from the dead.  
 And almost universally they believe that whatever salvation may mean,  
 it is not a gift;  
 it is something we achieve or earn  
 through a life of good works,  
 Hinduism and Buddhism would say through thousands of lifetimes of  
 good works, or  
 through meditation, or  
 through following some religious code.

Here's what Christianity teaches:

**Ephesians 2.8-9:** For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and  
 this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no  
 one can boast.

Salvation by grace based on the death of Christ.

That's Christianity.

Salvation by good works, based on what we achieve.

That in one way or the other is practically every other religion on earth.

And that's not a mystery.

That's a contradiction.

As Zacharias said – these are truth claims that are opposites.

They exclude each other.

So we have to choose,

and we can't act like they're the same

simply because it makes us feel kind or humble or open-minded or tolerant  
 to do so.

You may not believe that Christianity is the true way to God.

You may believe that another religion is superior.

I think you're mistaken.

But to me that has more integrity  
than pretending that all of the world's religions are basically the same,  
and are just slightly different paths to the same goal.

They could hardly be more different in how they  
define God, the human predicament, the solution to our problem,  
heaven and Jesus.

Now you may be thinking,  
well does that mean that people who don't believe in Jesus will spend  
eternity in hell?

That's a different question,  
one that I'll answer before we're through with Quest this semester.

Today,  
I'm not trying to convince you that Christianity is right in what it tells us  
about God  
and all other religions contain so much error that they cannot be trusted  
to bring you to God.  
I do believe that,  
but all I'm trying to do today  
is make the point that that the various world religions are not  
different paths to heaven.  
They could hardly be more different.

And it's not arrogant to say that after careful consideration  
you have come to believe that one of them is right  
and the others was wrong.

But, still, you might say,  
people who follow other religions are sincere.  
Isn't that what really counts?

I'd like to respond to that with a comment the late, great William F. Buckley  
made to someone he was interviewing after his guest had made a  
preposterous statement.

**W. F. Buckley:** I won't insult your intelligence by suggesting that you really believe what you just said.

Were the 9.11 hijackers sincere in their religious beliefs?  
 When you're willing to kill yourself for your beliefs,  
 that pretty much settles the sincerity question.

What about the Aztecs who in their hey-day  
 sacrificed approximately 20,000 captives per year,  
 cutting open their chests and ripping out their hearts.  
 They were sincere in their beliefs  
 that such sacrifices were required to please their gods?

Or what about the Greeks who engaged in temple prostitution  
 in the temple of Diana?

All religious beliefs,  
 claiming to be a path to God.  
 And all religions that people believed in.

Does that mean when they show up at the gate of heaven,  
 God says, "you knuckleheads, you got a few things messed up,  
 but I know you were sincere when you were bringing down those  
 towers, and ripping those chests open, and bopping those prostitutes.  
 And because you were sincere,  
 Come on in, you crazy kids!"

All religious paths lead to God as long as you're sincere.

You don't believe that.  
 You know you don't believe that.

But maybe you'll say,  
 well not the bad religions,  
 but only the good religions are paths to God if people are sincere.

And that's my point exactly.  
 You have to look at what a religion teaches.

Just because many people believe it.  
 Just because many people find comfort in it.  
 Just because many people say it makes them a better person.  
 Just because many people are sincere in their beliefs about it –  
     that doesn't make it true or a pathway to God.

It matters what a religions teaches.  
 And if it teaches beliefs and practices that are contrary  
     to the will of God and his plan of salvation,  
 it's not arrogant to say that they are mistaken – it's essential.

And it's not arrogant to tell them about a God who so loved the world that  
     he gave his only-begotten Son so that whoever believes in him should not  
     perish but have everlasting life.

There's so much more to say,  
     but here's are two last quick thoughts.

**1. You don't have to worry about what God might do or what paths he could have created.**

We know what he did do – he sent Jesus Christ, his Son,  
     to die for your sins and pay a debt you could never pay,  
     and by faith in him you can be reconciled to a holy God,  
     and you can have abundant life in this world  
     and eternal life in the world to come.

**2. Christianity invites inspection.**

I believe Christianity is the most humble of all the religions,  
     not the most arrogant,  
 because it teaches  
     that you have every right to check it out and reject it if it's wrong.

**1 Corinthians 15.14-15:** And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead.

If you're a skeptic,  
fine.  
But, as God says, Come, let us reason together.

Check us out.  
And if the Gospel can't stand the light of scrutiny and investigation,  
then you have every right to reject it.  
But it true,  
it's not one of many truths.  
It is the truth and we ask you to embrace it as such.