

Our Only Hope

Christian pastor and author, Timothy Keller, once told of a time when he was invited to a local college for a panel discussion on different religions. Keller represented the Christian position and there was also a Jewish rabbi and a leader in the Muslim faith. Throughout the discussion, each man was respectful and courteous and each affirmed that there were various differences between the major religions. One significant issue pertained to the question, “Who is Jesus?” All of the men agreed on this statement: “If Christians are right about Jesus being God, then Muslims and Jews fail in a serious way to love God as God really is. But if Muslims and Jews are right that Jesus is not God but rather a teacher or a prophet, then Christians fail in a serious way to love God as God really is.” The bottom line was that all the men could not be equally right about the nature of God. Several of the students of the college were quite disturbed by what was being said by the three panelists. One student insisted that what mattered most was to believe in God and to be a loving person yourself. To insist that one faith had a better grasp of the truth than all others was intolerant. Another student looked at the men and said in frustration, “We will never come to know peace on earth if religious leaders keep on making such exclusive claims!”

While it is obvious that not all people believe the teaching of the Holy Bible, it is equally obvious that the Bible itself makes exclusive claims. The Christian church insists that there is only one God who eternally exists in three distinct persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Bible also teaches that there is only one way that a sinner can be in a right relationship with this one holy God and that is by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ alone. It was Jesus himself who said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Sadly we are living in a time when everyone cries for complete tolerance pertaining to their beliefs and yet, Christians may never truthfully say that Jesus Christ is just one of many ways to God or that the Bible is only one of many valid expressions of religious truth. The Bible is very clear that all of us are born in sin and that sin separates us from God.

Unfortunately, there are many who teach that to be right with God is like balancing a set of scales in which our ‘good deeds’ must outweigh our ‘bad deeds.’ But the problem with that is that we have no ‘good deeds’ that could ever commend us to God (Romans 3:10-18). The only standard that God accepts is perfection in thought, word and deed every day of our lives (Mt. 5:48). If we’re to be honest we’ve never been perfect in any way, not even for a moment. The problem is that we need a righteousness that we do not have. The answer is in receiving a righteousness that is not ours but is given to us freely by another. The apostle Paul said it this way, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Succinctly stated, the perfect life of Jesus Christ is imputed (credited) to the account of all those who trust him by faith. In addition to this, Jesus Christ was punished on the cross for all of the sins of his people. God the Father poured out his holy wrath on his perfect sinless Son of God on our behalf.

This sin cursed world needs to hear the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ alone and we must share this news in loving and respectful ways. The apostle Peter writes, "...but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect." (1 Peter 3:15) Jesus truly is our only hope.

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