

# “Who Cares What I Believe?”

By Stephen Finley

After reading the preceding article about Kieran’s discovery of new life in Jesus Christ, many readers will undoubtedly respond, “Brilliant. Kieran found something that makes him happy. Good for him. But why does he feel that he needs to tell me about it? Does it matter what I believe?”

Perhaps that is the question you find yourself asking. “After all, why do I need a particular belief about God? I’m a decent enough person.” Perhaps you are thinking, “There are so many religions. How could anyone be so arrogant as to say that only one belief is right? I’ll stick with what I know, and I’m sure everything will be fine.” Still others of you might be bold enough to say (or, at least, to think), “I have everything I need—a job, a bank account, a house, a family. So why do I need God? I’ll pay Him my respects when I have the time; but I can manage on my own.”

In a world that has given up on the idea that there could possibly be only one Truth—or, that is too busy and self-satisfied to care—sentiments such as these abound. One T.V. talk show host of international fame summed up many people’s feelings in this statement: “One of the mistakes that human beings make is believing that there is only one way... There are millions of...paths to...God.”



*Are there really many paths to God?*

I would challenge you to evaluate your thoughts on that statement. Are there many paths to God? Undoubtedly, many of you agree.

Perhaps this seems to you like a kind, tolerant, and reasonable statement. Very well. I would challenge you to evaluate the next statement, which comes from a book that this same talk show host is promoting: “The name of Jesus Christ is but a symbol...it is a replacement for the many names...to which you pray.” In other words, it doesn’t matter if you pray to Allah, Mary, Padre Pio, Buddha, Shiva, or Jesus Christ—because these are all mere icons in some kind of vague, universal “spirituality.” Would you still agree with that statement? How about if we just get to the root of our talk show host’s message? Here it is, in one succinct statement: “A slain Christ has no meaning.”

If you claim to be a Christian, then that last statement probably upsets you. Even some of you who do not profess to be Christians may find yourselves offended. The question I would ask you, then, is this: Why does that statement bother you? If there really are many ways to God, then our T.V. talk show host is right: Christ’s death on the cross could not possibly have the slightest value! If there are many ways to God, then Christ’s death was vain, meaningless, and utterly unworthy of our attention—because anyone can get to heaven by any path that he wishes to take. The question that I ask you to consider, reader, is this: “Do I need Jesus Christ?”

## Do I Need Jesus?

Amazingly, few people who consider themselves Christians ever stop to consider whether or not they need Jesus. Many people go through beautiful rites and rituals all their lives, repeating creeds and prayers that mention Jesus; but the overwhelming, gripping thought that they might desperately need Jesus has never seized them.

If this be the case with you, you are not alone. Many highly respected religious people have your same mind. For example, Sister Ann (co-worker with Mother Teresa) was asked this question by Mr. David Cloud in an interview in 1984: “Do you believe if they [Hindus] die believing in Shiva or in Ram, they will go to heaven?” Sister Ann’s response: “Yes...My own faith will lead me to my God. So if they have believed in their god...surely they will be saved.” The interviewer followed this response with, “I know that John Paul II is saying now that those of other religions are saved...you do not believe they are lost...right?” Her conclusion: “No, they are not lost...If they believe whatever they believe, that is their salvation.”

It seems that Pope John Paul II endorsed this all-inclusive salvation, for he heartily beatified Mother Teresa in 2003. His legacy was one of divers inter-religious prayer meetings—such as the Day for Peace in the World in

October 1986 in Assisi, Italy, in which representatives of some 20 world religions prayed, chanted, built fires, burnt incense, and danced, whilst they called upon their numerous gods. John Paul II closed the second Assisi meeting in January 2002 with this benediction: “In the name of God, may every religion bring...forgiveness and life...” The man whom millions of people believe to have been the infallible Vicar of Christ affirmed what multitudes of people in our modern world accept without question—that we’re basically all O.K., and are merely taking different paths to God.

However, I beg you, reader, to consider: Is it possible that these highly respected people, along with multitudes of people in our world, could be tragically wrong? Jesus said, “***I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me***” (John 14:6). This is an incredibly powerful statement—one that, if true, simply cannot be compromised to any degree, and still be true. Yet, such is the uniform testimony of Scripture. On which are you banking your eternity—popular opinion, or God’s Word?

I do not pose this question to you because I am itching for a fight. I pose this question to you, my friend, because it is a question you cannot afford to ignore. I urge you to consider what the Bible says about Jesus Christ:

“Be it known unto you all...that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Spoken by Peter in Acts 4: 10, 12.)

The Apostle Peter proclaimed that a real and living Person, Jesus Christ, is the one and only Saviour of man. Only His name brings salvation. That means Mary cannot save you. The concepts of Buddha cannot save you. No person, living or dead, including yourself, can atone for your sins—except Jesus. No religious “system” or “path” can save you. Salvation is a living Person. Christ *is* Salvation!

Consider the words of the Apostle Paul:

“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.” (1 Timothy 2:5-6)

According to the Apostle Paul, Jesus Christ is the only One Who has the power and authority to mediate (intercede) between you and God! The Bible states repeatedly that only Jesus hears prayers and intercedes between men and the Father. As both Son of God and Son of Man, only He can do this.

The men who wrote the preceding verses spent their lives enduring incredible hardship and persecution. And why? To proclaim to a hostile world that a lowly peasant from a village in Galilee, Who died a criminal’s death on a cross, is the only Saviour of mankind! Were these men mad? No, they were radically transformed and empowered by the Man Who arose from the grave. They knew that His body wasn’t in the grave anymore. They knew they were not preaching a lie. They had personally seen Christ after His resurrection. Peter and the other ten had touched Him and eaten bread with Him after His resurrection. Hundreds of people saw Jesus Christ in the forty days before He ascended back to heaven. They knew He was alive; they knew He had purchased their salvation; and they could not keep their mouths shut about Him!

So, what about Jesus? Do you think you need Him? The men who knew Him personally, and who spent their lives proclaiming His name, all said that you do. Consider Jesus’ own testimony about Himself:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, ***I am.***” (John 8:58)

This claim that Jesus made about Himself— “Before Abraham was, I am”—brought Him within an inch of being stoned for blasphemy. Well did His audience know that one of God’s great names, Yahweh, literally means “I am.” God had addressed Himself to Moses by this name “I AM” fourteen centuries earlier (Exodus 3:14). Jesus’ meaning was clear: He is eternally existent!

Not only did Jesus make this breathtaking claim to be Almighty God, but He made this very non-inclusive, “intolerant” statement:

“Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world. I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that ***I am*** he, ye shall die in your sins.” (John 8:23, 24)

According to Jesus, your eternal destiny depends on whether you believe His claim to be the Great I AM! Try this claim:

***“I am the resurrection, and the life:*** he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?” (John 11: 25, 26)

According to Jesus, those who believe on Him have the sure hope of both bodily resurrection and spiritual resurrection. They will “never die”: that is, they will never experience that awful kind of death—the “second death”—that the Bible warns us about in Revelation 20:11-15 (an eternity in the Lake of Fire).

Jesus was continuously making such claims. For instance, He said, ***“I am the door:*** by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved” (John 10: 9a). On the night before His crucifixion, He symbolically took the fruit of the vine and said, “Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26: 27b, 28).

Was Jesus mad to claim that the shedding of His blood was necessary for the forgiveness of sins? If He was, then the apostles were equally mad for teaching this truth all over the world. Consider the words of Peter and Paul:

“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold [note that paying tithes, alms, or indulgences *cannot* redeem your soul!....but with the precious blood of Christ...” (1 Peter 1:18, 19)

“...and without shedding of blood is no remission [forgiveness].” (Hebrews 9:22)

The contrast between popular opinion and the Bible could not be more stark. Mainstream thinking says that “every religion” can impart “forgiveness and life.” But the Bible says that only Jesus can forgive sins and impart that wonderful life called “eternal life.”

Perhaps you consider this talk about salvation through the blood of Jesus, and only through the blood of Jesus, to be ridiculous. If so, then you may as well stop calling Jesus a “good man,” and instead call Him a liar (or lunatic, whichever you prefer), and pitch the Bible into the rubbish bin—for you are rejecting the entire message of the Bible.

Perhaps you do not necessarily consciously oppose the belief that Jesus’ blood is necessary for your salvation: and yet, this knowledge has never changed your life. Perhaps to you, this is all a creed. The name of Jesus rarely crosses your mind; and you certainly could not say that you have peace about what lies on the other side of death.

As a minister of the Gospel who is constantly confronting people about eternity, *I know* this to be true. In the hundreds of conversations I have had with people in the Athlone area this year, I cannot think of even a handful of times when I have been asked, “So, what do you believe about Jesus?” I have often been asked about outward forms and ceremonies. I have been asked many times about what I believe concerning Mary. But almost never am I asked about Jesus, or even hear His name mentioned—except as an expletive.

Why this total lack of concern about Jesus among so many who believe themselves to be going to heaven—when the Bible solemnly warns us that Jesus is the only Way to heaven? Why this lack of love for Jesus among multitudes of professing Christians, when the Scripture says that love for Jesus is supposed to flow from the Christian’s innermost being like a fountain? Could it be that many people have never truly asked themselves that question, “Do I need Jesus?”

Could it be that Jesus has not changed *your* life...because you do not *know* Him?

### **Why Do I Need Jesus?**

Clearly, the Bible states that you need Jesus. However, in order to *have* Him, you must first understand *why you need* Him. The reason you need Him is simple: Because you are a sinner!

Most people think of sin as a crime against society, such as murder. However, the Bible defines sin as anything that is against God’s holy character. Take the sin of lying, for example. God does not distinguish between a

“mortal, damnable lie” and a “little white lie.” The “dirty, bare-faced lie” and the “convenient, innocent little fib” are alike an abomination to Him. In Proverbs 6:16-19, God names seven things that He “hates,” and which are an “abomination” to Him. In these verses, God ranks “a lying tongue” and a “false witness” right alongside “hands that shed innocent blood.” Likewise, in Revelation 21:8, God solemnly warns that the “fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, *and all liars*, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.” Without any classification, lying is put right alongside murder, whoremongering (fornication), idolatry, and witchcraft, as sins for which people must suffer eternal torment! Jesus informed the Pharisees—who were the most highly respected religious men of their day—that they were liars, and, as such, members of Satan’s family (John 8:44)!



Does this concern you? If you do not have Jesus Christ, you should be very concerned. No matter how much you may try to justify the lies that you have told so thoughtlessly, they are all, every one, spiritually lethal.

*All who do not keep God's Law flawlessly are bearing the full, crushing weight of their own sin, and are under God's dreadful curse.*

How about pride? Many people try to make pride into a virtue: but Proverbs 6:17 names “a proud look” as one of the seven “abominations” that God hates. God views causeless anger in the same light as murder (Matthew 5:21-22), and lustful thoughts in the same light as adultery (Matthew 5:28). God puts rebellion on par with witchcraft, and stubbornness with idolatry (1 Samuel 15:23).

One needn’t read the Bible long before getting the idea that he is in serious trouble with God. Like a flaming torch, the Bible illumines the secrets of your heart, and reveals all the wicked, dirty, vile sin that lies in every corner of it. God knows every lie you have ever told. He knows every single word you have whispered, and every thing your eyes have beheld in secret. The true thoughts and motives of your heart are as open to Him as the noonday. “The eyes of the LORD,” the Bible says, “are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Proverbs 15:3). The LORD knows your “downsitting” and “uprising”; He understands your “thought afar off”; He is acquainted with all your ways; and there is not a word in your tongue that He does not know altogether (Psalm 139:1-4).

Let’s just get to the bottom line. The bottom line is that if you do not have Jesus Christ, you are condemned. It took only one sin for our parents, Adam and Eve, to be condemned (Genesis 2:17); and it took only one sin for you to be condemned. James 2:10 declares, “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.”

Jesus said that people who do not believe on Him are “condemned already” (John 3:18). Galatians 3:10 says, “...Cursed is every one that continueth not in *all things* which are written in the book of the law to do them.”

Can you measure up to that standard? No, you cannot, because you were born with a sin nature (Romans 5:12). The Bible says that you came forth from the womb going astray and speaking lies (Psalm 58:3). That is why trying to keep God’s Law cannot atone for your sins or reconcile you to God. God’s Law can only condemn you, and show you your guilt. Romans 3: 19, 20 sums it up this way: “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight...”

### **Can Jesus Really Meet My Need?**

If, dear reader, you are beginning to perceive that you truly do need Christ, you may find yourself wondering, “Can Jesus really meet my need?” The answer is: He has already fully met your need! The only question is: “Have you accepted His provision?”

Most of you have heard all your lives that Jesus “died for your sins”: yet, you haven’t the faintest idea what that actually means. Here is what it means, straight from the Bible:

“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every



one that hangeth on a tree.” (Galatians 3: 13)



***Christ bore your full sin debt, and satisfied God's wrath. He became a curse for you.***

Take in those words! Jesus Christ was “made a curse for us.” He did not become a *partial* curse for you. If He had left even one of your sins unpaid for, you would have absolutely no hope—for God cannot “overlook” even one sin. Christ paid for your sins in full, leaving nothing for you to pay. Consider Paul’s words to all “the saints” (living, born again Christians) in the church of Colosse:

“And you, being dead in your sins...hath he quickened [made alive to God]...***having forgiven you all trespasses***; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us [the unbearable requirement of God’s Law]...and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.” (Colossians 2: 13, 14)

At this point, many might protest, “If Jesus really paid our sin debt in full, why are we not all on our way to heaven?” The Scripture’s answer is clear: Salvation is a free gift from God, which He has lovingly purchased for you with His own blood. He freely offers that gift to you; ***but you must receive that gift by faith***. Again, consider God’s Word:

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the ***gift*** of God: ***not of works***, lest any man should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8, 9)

“But as many as ***received him***, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” (John 1:12)

As a free gift from God, salvation must either be received or rejected. How can you reject that gift, and miss heaven? Simple. Just ignore God’s free gift. Try to offer Him your own good deeds. Keep trusting in your baptism or confirmation; your participation in church, Mass, mosque, synagogue, temple, or Kingdom Hall; your publishing or evangelising for your religion; your prayers, tithes, or alms; or your all-around goodness. Just keep expecting that God should accept you because you are “religious,” or because you’re “basically a good person.”

My friend, according to the Bible, no amount of good works can save you! By offering your own righteousness to God and expecting Him to receive you, you are turning your back on the Saviour, and telling Him that *you* will not receive *Him*—that you do not believe or accept that His finished sacrifice is sufficient to atone for all your sins. If you are relying on your own merit, you do not have eternal life. If you are relying on Christ’s merit *in addition* to your own merit, you do not have eternal life. There is only one way to receive God’s gift of eternal life: “***Believe on*** the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16: 31).

If you have never truly “believed on the Lord Jesus Christ”—if you have never humbly repented of your sin and self-righteousness, and instead put your complete faith, trust, and confidence in Christ—won’t you take God at His word? He will save you this very hour if you will, in faith, call upon His name and receive Him. Is it possible that you will be rejected by others for putting your faith in Christ? Absolutely. However, you will have this promise for time and eternity: “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1a). As one who has known Christ for many years, I can personally testify that nothing can surpass the incredible peace, joy, and confidence of entering into new life in Christ Jesus! He is a wonderful Saviour. Will you believe on Him?