

Is there only one way to God?

By Dr. Jim Denison

Poliomyelitis, or polio, is a disease caused by tiny virus particles which attack the brain and spinal cord. Until this generation, polio was a kind of AIDS in American society. Why is polio not feared as it once was? The answer is named Jonas Edward Salk. Dr. Salk, an American research scientist, announced in 1953 that he had developed a trial vaccine for polio. By 1955, his discovery was being used across the world.

In those exciting days, there were two questions no one thought to ask. First, aren't all vaccines basically the same? They knew that all others had failed, and that Dr. Salk's had succeeded. And second, why only one vaccine? For the simple reason that only one was needed. No one asked these questions, for the answers were obvious. And across the world, millions of people made sure they were vaccinated, and those they cared about as well. Today polio is virtually no threat to world health.

Unfortunately, there is another disease which still exists today, and is far worse even than polio. This disease has infected every person who has ever lived, and is always fatal. Fortunately, there is a vaccine which will work for every person on earth, and is free of charge. The disease, of course, is sin, our broken relationship with God. The cure is salvation through Jesus Christ, his Son. And yet questions persist about this spiritual, eternal "vaccine": aren't all faiths the same?

Why is there only one way to God?

What does the Bible say?

Several facts are clear in God's word, and essential to our question. First, *Jesus alone claimed divinity*. In John 14:9 he asserted, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." Earlier the authorities tried to stone him to death "because you claim to be God" (John 10:33). Other religious leaders claimed to reveal God; Jesus alone claims to *be* God.

Second, *Jesus is preparing our place in heaven* (John 14:2). Other religious leaders taught about heaven or the afterlife; Jesus alone claims to be preparing it for us. Third, *Jesus will take us to heaven personally* (John 14:3). Other religious leaders taught about the way to heaven; Jesus alone claims to take us there.

Fourth, *Jesus is the only way to the Father* (John 14:6). His Greek was emphatic: "I am *the way, the truth, and the life*." Later he was even more emphatic: "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). No one in all of human history ever made this claim. Peter would later make the same announcement (Acts 4:12).

We may agree or disagree with Jesus, but we need to know what he believed about himself. He never claimed to be a religious teacher or leader, or one way to God among many. He claimed to be the only way to eternity in heaven.

Three popular isms

Jesus' statements are politically incorrect, to say the least. Three "isms" dominate our culture and reject everything we've learned so far. The first is *relativism*, the idea that all truth is relative and subjective. We're taught that language is only a convention of human power; words do not describe reality, but only our version of it. There can be no objective truth claims, only subjective experiences. It's fine if Jesus is your way to God, but don't insist that he must be mine.

The second word for our society is *pluralism*: different religions are roads up the same mountain. They're all worshipping the same God, just by different names. A recent poll revealed that 64% of Americans believe all religions pray to the same God. It's fine if Jesus is your road to God, but don't make the rest of us travel it.

And pluralism typically leads to *universalism*, the idea that everyone is going to heaven, no matter what they believe. Only 2% of Americans are afraid that they might go to hell. 62% say it doesn't matter which God we believe in, so long as we're sincere. We're all on the road to God, whatever we might believe about him.

A reasoned response

First, we can respond to *relativism* with the fact that objective truth is an intellectual and practical necessity in life. To deny absolutes is to affirm them. If I say, "There is no such thing as absolute truth," haven't I made a claim to absolute truth? We don't accept relativism with regard to the historicity of the Holocaust, or our doctor's diagnosis, or the aircraft mechanic's assurance that the plane is safe. Objective truth is an intellectual and practical necessity in life.

Next, let's respond to *pluralism* with the fact that the world's religions teach radically different truth. If one is right, the others are wrong. These cannot be different roads up the same mountain—they are different mountains.

Third, we can respond to *universalism* with the fact that Jesus is the only way to God we need, or can trust. It doesn't bother me that only one key in my pocket will start my car, so long as it works. And only Christianity works. Our basic problem with God is called "sin." We have all made mistakes and committed sins in our lives. These failures have separated us from a righteous and pure God. The only way to heaven which works is the way which deals with these sins. And only Christianity does. No other religion offers forgiveness for sins, grace for sinners, and the security of salvation. Only Jesus.

Conclusion

If your daughter were facing the threat of polio in 1955, would you accept a doctor's relative assurances that she would be well? Would you try every possible vaccine, in the belief that they're all the same? Would you complain if you were given only one proven option? Or would you gladly vaccinate your child?

What about your soul?