

# The Trouble with Christianity: Why It's So Hard to Believe It Exclusive: How can there be just one true religion?

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1

## SCRIPTURE | 1 John 4:1–10 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

<sup>2</sup> This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, <sup>3</sup> but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

<sup>4</sup> You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. <sup>5</sup> They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. <sup>6</sup> We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

<sup>7</sup> Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. <sup>9</sup> This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup> This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

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2

## FOR REFLECTION

This series will consider some of the biggest problems people have with Christianity. Each problem is a major objection to Christianity that keeps people doubting its credibility and, therefore, keeps them from believing it.

The first objection involves Christianity's exclusivity. People often ask, "How can Christianity be the only true religion when there are so many other religions in existence?" Many who ask this question are dismayed (at the very least) that Christianity does not seem to accept other religions as equally valid. But one of the realities this study seeks to make plain is that all religions (and all life philosophies) make exclusive truth claims. They all believe that they are right and true while others are wrong and false.

This holds true even for people who claim to be atheists or agnostics. The atheist makes the hard and fast claim that says, "There is no God," and the agnostic does the same by saying, "I can't know if there is a God." In each case, this claim excludes and nullifies other claims about God and the nature of reality (such as Christianity's claim that there is only one true God). Intellectual honesty is needed to move forward in this discussion. No matter what people say they believe, everyone is making an exclusive statement about reality and its most important questions, including who God is, who we are, what is wrong, and what is the solution.

The 1 John passage cited above makes it clear that the problem of exclusivity is not a modern problem. During the first century A.D., all religions and life philosophies demanded exclusive worship and adherence. When Julius Caesar imagined himself to be a god, he was demanding exclusive worship from all Roman citizens.

Moreover, religion has never been a private endeavor. Thinking of religion that way is a post-Enlightenment phenomenon that post-modernity has revealed as problematic: There is no way to separate what one believes from the rest of life. PERIOD! The verses cited above from John's first letter provide a context to grapple with these thoughts.

1. How are all statements about reality exclusive religious truth claims? Are there ways you have seen that what a person believes cannot be separated from the rest of life?
2. Many believe that Christianity is solely concerned with the salvation of individuals (which it is undoubtedly concerned with). But how does John's statement that "Jesus has come in the flesh" show us God's wider concern? Why would Jesus' incarnation be an important element in this discussion?
3. If there is one verse in the Bible that everyone knows, it is John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." How does John echo that verse here? How does he expand on it and apply it to the Christian life?
4. One scholar has suggested that to be a Christian is to experience being truly or more fully human, since God is concerned with the restoration of all things, including us. How do John's words about love reveal that? How is a Christian understanding of love intended to express true humanity?