

How Can I Believe in One Ultimate Truth?

Series: How Can I Believe?

Brad Bailey – May 6, 2018

Underlying Current Cultural Mindset (“Worldview” / “Paradigms”)

G_____ (Truth is dangerous because it divides us)

I_____ (Truth is defined by one’s personal preference)

Relativism – the philosophical belief that there is no absolute truth because all perceptions are relative to individual or cultural perspectives.

Problems with “absolute relativism” ... with seeing truth as merely personal... or equal...with no objective reality

Absolute relativism is _____ because the premise itself denies itself.

Absolute relativism is _____ with the order we believe in and live upon.

Absolute relativism is _____ when it seeks to reduce to some “common” blend what others actually believe and teach.

The True Nature of the Gospel

John 14:6 - *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*

Acts 4:12 - *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”*

I Timothy 2:5 - *“There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”*

The Way of Jesus reflects TRUE _____...rooted in a common need with no claim of personal merits.

Isaiah 53:6

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NLT)

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

The Way of Jesus reflects TRUE _____... available to all, not just the “good enough.”

2 Peter 3:9

The Way of Jesus reflects TRUE _____... as it declares that the deepest need we cannot meet is met from outside ourselves.

Galatians 4:4-7 (CEV)

When the time was right, God sent his Son... ⁵ so he could set us free from the Law, and we could become God's children. ⁶ Now that we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts. And his Spirit tells us that God is our Father. ⁷ You are no longer slaves. You are God's children, and you will be given what he has promised.

The Way of Jesus reflects respect for TRUE FREEDOM ... including the freedom to choose separation from God.

John 3:16-18 (NLT)

Romans 10:13

“For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

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Intro

We are continuing in our series entitled: How Can I Believe? We are engaging the questions that can be a natural part of the process of faith. So in the recent past weeks we have engaged the questions of How can I believe in God?...the Bible.. knowing Jesus...and today we are going to engage the question:

How Can I Believe in One Ultimate Truth?

or it might be said as...

How Can I Believe Jesus is the Only Way?

Perhaps the **biggest underlying barrier** to believing is the **aversion** to the very nature of **there being one particular truth**.

A person may be inspired by all they discover in who Jesus was and what he taught...but **shrink at the prospect of believing anything that is considered intolerant of other beliefs**.

There is a **giant cultural confrontation** that has **arisen against the Gospel message** of Christ. It **isn't about** the profound nature of his **teaching...** his profound **works...** or his profound **sacrifice**. **It's about unique role in reconciling us with God**.

Such a belief can be deemed to violate the most sensitive values of our current culture... that of being intolerant, narrow-minded and arrogant.

It may help to understand that the **underlying issue** relates to a shift in what is called a **“worldview”**...that is, the **paradigm** in which **one sees everything** and **evaluates everything**.

A worldview is often described as the grid that we process everything by...or the **wearing some type of colored glasses** that affects what you see and how you see it.

It's vital to understand that **we all have internal grids** that have been shaped by how we have been told we should see things.

My sense is that those who are older have a different set of values related to truth...than those who are younger...and that is because there have been some major cultural ideas which have emerged in the past 20 to 30 years.

Underlying Current Cultural Mindset (“Worldviews” / “Paradigms”)

One such shift has come with...

Globalization / Pluralism (Truth is dangerous because it divides us.)

The world is now **globally interconnected**. There was a time when **America was a more monolithic nation**... with a more common worldview rooted in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures. and dominant majority who shared a common belief in Christ.

That America is **no longer the reality**.

This has come in part from **immigration**. Originally much was from Europe and South America...so much of that worldview was shared. But now the wider breadth of cultures are finding home here. **Look around your neighborhood**. Look around your **child's classroom**. Take a close look at the people in your office, your store, your factory, your industry. [1a] I think it is a rich opportunity that should be welcomed.

But there's something far more engaging than immigration...and that is the **internet**. The internet has brought a globalization unimaginable. We are connected to every culture and idea.

The simple truth is that we live in a day of **increasing religious pluralism**.

This naturally raises concerns for the potential conflict. The world has changed... and everyone is trying to find a way to make it work.

If you ask people today what the biggest cause of division and violence is in our world, your most likely answer would be radical religion--especially a religion that claims to be the only way to God. **Believing that your way is the only way is what causes people to fly planes into buildings, or so people think**.

Here is precisely where we need to think a little more deeply.

The problem we face in today's more diverse world...is not religion...it is human nature which seeks to protect it's own insecurity through every way in which we can claim separate ourselves... claim to be more self-righteous and superior.

This takes many forms... gender... race... education... and certainly religious affiliation. Religious affiliation is a great tool to use...but it is human nature which uses it...and uses it the same way it uses every other way to distinguish ourselves from others. Anyone who looks fairly at the various religious wars... will see that they are usually carried out by the least devout of any religion...usually rooted in ethnic pride...and a desire for power and control.

As soon as people carry a sense of personal superiority related to any distinction... it naturally can elicit a reaction.

Another cultural shift has been what we might call a radical...

Individualism (Truth is defined by one's personal preference)

I am **not referring** to the **recognition** that we are **each individuals with distinct ideas**... but **reducing truth to merely personal preference**. [2]

Sarah Michelle Gellar (star of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the *Scooby Doo* movies) said this about spirituality. *“I consider myself a spiritual person. I believe in an idea of God, although it’s my own personal ideal. I find most religions interesting, and I’ve been to every kind of denomination: Catholic, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist. I’ve taken bits from everything and customized it.”* [3]

In any other time, this would have **sounded absurd**. Truth simply isn’t so relative as to one’s own personal ideal... rooted in nothing more than personal preferences.

But today... it’s a **bold assertion** that personal preference is what matters most... it is a higher value than whether something is actually true.

After all...we are the nation with slogans like: **“Have it Your Way.”**

Oprah Winfrey – *“One of the greatest mistakes humans can make is to believe that there is only one way to God. Because there are actually many diverse paths to God. If Jesus claimed to be the only way to God it would make him the biggest egotist in history.”* [4]

Wow. This is like a new decree coming from what many consider the new priestess of America. Jesus could not have been clearer. God gave his only son...and she denounces it as egotical compared to her preference.

Or perhaps she believes she knows more about who Jesus really was and what he said than the accounts of those with him. That itself might be quite arrogant.

But perhaps most notably... there is not recognition that all roads lead to the same place. There can be paths that are quite different and lead in another direction.

These two ideas... build upon a larger idea...which is generally referred to as...

Relativism – the philosophical belief that there is no absolute truth because all perceptions are relative to individual or cultural perspectives.

There is a **difference** between believing in the **relativity of perspective**...and **absolute relativism**.

Personal relativity acknowledges that I may have a limited perspective of truth based on my personal circumstances or cultural view.

Absolute relativism says that there is no objective truth at all... so nothing is absolutely true. [1b]

Many people have referred to the idea that if you blindfold a few people and bring them to an elephant...and describe the elephant... they will have different perspective. I think we would all agree. But absolute relativism would imply that there isn’t an elephant at all.

There are some common ...

Problems with “absolute relativism” ... with seeing truth as merely personal... or equal...with no objective reality

Absolute relativism is illogical because the premise itself denies itself.

As so many have noted... dismissing a claim of truth by because one believes that there is no absolute truth a total contradiction. The very nature of the premise that there is no absolute truth... is itself an equally absolute claim.

I can understand how people want to avoid the conflict over different beliefs...but it's both illogical and unfair to claim that one claim is any more absolute than another... or any more intolerant than another....or any more exclusive than another. Any claim about truth excludes those which differ from it.

Absolute relativism is inconsistent with the order we believe in and live upon.

We actually do believe there is truth... and not just personal ideas. While it may always be engaged subjectively ...we don't believe that should keep us from believing that there is an objective reality... and therefore actual and absolute truth.

We operate on this every day.

As many have noted... we believe that $2+2 = 4$. You may not like the number "4"...but you generally accept that $2+2=4$.

We don't believe that breathing is only a personal idea related to living.

We generally follow signs on the road....and don't presume we can claim our own path or rules.

We don't consider these a reflection of being narrow minded.

As one man described... his friends baby girl developed jaundice shortly after birth. Jaundice is a liver disorder that caused her skin and the whites of her eyes to turn yellow. The pediatrician told them that this is a potentially devastating disease but it's easily treated. All they had to do was put the baby under a special light for a while and this would stimulate her liver properly and she'd be all right.

Now, the parents could have said, "That sounds too easy. How about instead if we scrubbed her with soap and dipped her in bleach? If we worked hard enough, I'm sure we could get her normal coloring back."

But the doctor would have said, "No, there's only one way to handle this."

They could have replied, "Well, how about if we just sort of ignore this and pretend everything's OK? You know — the jaundice is your truth, Doc, not our truth. And if we sincerely believe that, things will work out for the best."

The doctor would have said, "You'd jeopardize your baby if you did that. Look, there's only one way to cure her. You're hesitant because it sounds too easy, but look at the credentials hanging on my wall. I've studied at medical school and I've used what I've learned to cure countless babies like yours. Trust me!"

Now, would anybody accuse those parents of being narrow-minded if they trusted that doctor and pursued the only course of treatment that was going to cure their little girl? That's not narrow-minded; that's acting rationally in accordance with the evidence. [5]

In the same way... we may not agree with a claim about spiritual truth...but such a claim is not inherently wrong for the nature of it's claim. It could be as true and appropriate as any other.

Absolute relativism is disrespectful when it seeks to reduce to some "common" blend what others actually believe and teach.

(i.e. The very nature of "making" all religions the same... or "all roads" lead to the same... is simply dismissing what they actually teach... and imposing one's own ideas as true.)

I can honestly appreciate why people may want to believe that all beliefs are essentially the same... but the only way to make that true is to deny reality... because **they simply do NOT present the teach the same things.**

They may share some common beliefs and virtues...but they teach very **different truths about reality and who we are...and what we need.**

Imposing one's preferred truth upon the actual teachings is not respectful to either reality nor the teachings.

When I met with Muslim leaders... I expressed the desire to engage in what we believe... to understand our common ground... and our differences... without fear of disagreeing. Because we don't show respect for one another by refusing to acknowledge the differences which reflect what each of us actually believe and value.

Because that is tolerance. True tolerance ... is about how we relate to those we do not agree with...and it is what we so desperately need. The very nature of tolerance has been hijacked. It has been used to now declare that we have to agree... or validate all beliefs as equally true.

I believe that we should lead the way in being tolerant. We were told to love even our enemies. We can certainly love we disagree with.

The nature of relativism...and individualism have become like a cultural chorus.

Some who hold some connection to Jesus have chosen to join the cultural chorus. They don't want to be deemed intolerant...or arrogant...so they may want to affirm that all roads are the same.

But for the reasons I have described...I find that the current cultural chorus of individualism and relativism... is a little hard to sing as best. To me it sounds a bit like elevator music...something that might sound okay if it remains the backdrop...but it's a bit hard to sing boldly. (Better than singing the school fight song...but a bit bland and out of tune.)

We have to restore the true song.

I think many who know Christ naturally want to share the message of what it means to be saved...but what is heard is what it means to be superior.

One thinks they are sharing how they found one who has come to rescue everyone...but what is heard is how one is personally better than they are.

There is an exclusion felt. It sounds like when children form club and deny others saying “you don’t know the password.”

We all have mothers...and nobody wants someone to hear someone claim that their mother is better.

We need to restore that song that understands that Jesus bears exclusive truth claims and inclusive love aims.

I believe there is a **bold song to sing... and the Gospel is that song...if we can learn the true melody. So let me close noting a little of what I believe is...**

The True Nature of the Gospel

Consider the words of Jesus in

John 14:6

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

The words of Peter in ...

Acts 4:12

“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

Finally, consider...

I Timothy 2:5

“There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

These three verses seem to be absolutely definitive. [6]

No other **way**.

No other **name**.

No other **mediator**

> With this **distinct claim** comes **distinct terms**.

The Way of Jesus reflects TRUE HUMILITY ...rooted in a common need and no claim of personal merits.

Isaiah 53:6 (NIV)

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NLT)

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

The Gospel removes any basis for superiority. Jesus confronts and clarifies that there is...

No superiority of culture

No superiority of personal merit

No superiority of religious affiliation

The Gospel is rooted in humility. It forces us to realize that what we need is not rooted in ourselves

No other belief would create as it's most popular song: "**Amazing Grace**... how sweet the sound...that saved a wretch like me."

The Way of Jesus reflects TRUE EQUALITY ... available to all, not just the "good enough."

God desires everyone.

2 Peter 3:9 (NIV)

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

God is not willing that any should perish but for all to come to repentance.

The gospel is an exclusive truth but it's the most inclusive exclusive truth in the world.

Tim Keller

"The universal religion of humankind is: We develop a good record and give it to God, and then he owes us. The gospel is: God develops a good record and gives it to us, then we owe him. In short, to say a good person...can find God ... is really quite exclusive. It says, 'The good people are in, and the bad people are out.' What does this mean for those of us with moral failures? We are excluded. So both approaches are exclusive, but the gospel is the more inclusive exclusivity. It says joyfully, 'It doesn't matter who you are or what you've done. It doesn't matter if you've been at the gates of hell. You can be welcomed and embraced fully and instantly through Christ.'" [7]

The Way of Jesus reflects TRUE HOPE ... as it declares that the deepest need we cannot meet is met from outside ourselves.

All religion formed by man is about **what we do**. But many come to the point of realizing that they cannot escape themselves...that their deepest need cannot be met from within themselves.

Galatians 4:4-7 (CEV)

When the time was right, God sent his Son... ⁵ so he could set us free from the Law, and we could become God's children. ⁶ Now that we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts. And his Spirit tells us that God is our Father. ⁷ You are no longer slaves. You are God's children, and you will be given what he has promised.

The Gospel declares that sin is that which enslaves us. [8]

The Gospel is not about good people being rewarded for good behavior...or belonging to the right system. It's about people enslaved being rescued....about lost children coming home.

The Way of Jesus reflects respect for TRUE FREEDOM ... including the freedom to choose separation from God.

There is an underlying confusion about the nature of believing there is a truth one must believe. The idea is that it isn't right to impose something.

Jesus tells of exactly the opposite.

Prodigal Son... Father lets him.

At some level the challenge we face is the challenge of freedom. What we want...is freedom without responsibility. It doesn't exist.

Sin is ultimately self-imposed separation.

Sin is not simply failing to believe the right doctrines. Sin is not simply making a few mistakes. What we stand responsible for is our defiant choice to go our own way... to claim our freedom from God and the life He is the source of. What the Scriptures capture is the nature by which we defiantly declare to the One to whom we owe life and allegiance: "My will be done!"

C.S. Lewis captured this when he said ...

- "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says in the end, 'Thy will be done.' [9]
- "Hell is the greatest monument to human freedom."
- The characteristic of lost souls is "their rejection of everything that is not simply themselves." [10]

CLOSING:

I've come to the place in which I had to face myself...face my fundamental sinfulness.

I don't mean 'how I did bad things'....I mean something much harder to face...my sheer demand of self...for which I needed a grace I didn't deserve. [11]

Romans 10:13

“For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

This is God’s invitation to all of us.

Prayer: God...forgive us for our desire to separate ourselves from others... for our self-righteousness...and superiority. Forgive us for losing the true song of the Gospel. Help us to boldly embrace our humility...that we too have gone our own way...and become lost.

Resources:

Ray Pritchard - Is Jesus the Only Way to Heaven? - <https://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/is-jesus-the-only-way-to-heaven/>; Paul Wallace - Only One Way?

For further thoughts on the issue of judgment and hell...I would recommend Tim Keller’s thoughts at: Preaching Hell In A Tolerant Age (Sep 1, 2010) - <https://www.sermoncentral.com/pastors-preaching-articles/tim-keller-preaching-hell-in-a-tolerant-age-752>

Notes:

1a. Someone wrote the following which I no longer have the reference for but which is quite likely true: “There are more Muslim Americans than Episcopalians, more Muslims than members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and as many Muslims as there are Jews... Los Angeles is the most complex Buddhist city in the world, with a Buddhist population spanning the whole range of the Asian Buddhist world from Sri Lanka to Korea, along with a multitude of native-born American Buddhists.”

1b. Regarding relativism...

“Relativism reduces every element of absoluteness to relativity while making a completely illogical exception in favor of this reduction itself. Fundamentally it consists in propounding the claim that there is no truth as if this were truth or in declaring it to be absolutely true that there is nothing but the relatively true; one might just as well say that there is no language or write that there is no writing. In short, every idea is reduced to a relativity of some sort, whether psychological, historical, or social; but the assertion nullifies itself by the fact that it too presents itself as a psychological, historical, or social relativity. The assertion nullifies itself if it is true and by nullifying itself logically proves thereby that it is false; its initial absurdity lies in the implicit claim to be unique in escaping, as if by enchantment, from a relativity that is declared to be the only possibility.”

— [Frithjof Schuon, Logic and Transcendence](#)

“Today, people are inclined to think that the sincerity and fervency of one's beliefs are more important than the content. As long as we believe something honestly and strongly, we are told, then that is all that really matters. Reality is basically indifferent to how sincerely we believe something.”

— [J.P. Moreland, Love Your God with All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul](#)

Is Truth Relative or Absolute? By Christopher Jethro

<http://www.godrevelations.com/is-truth-relative-or-absolute.html>

Regarding the problems of moral relativity, see C. S. Lewis's Three Arguments for Moral Objectivity - <http://merechristianitystudyguide.blogspot.com/2008/12/c-s-lewiss-three-arguments-for-moral.html>

2. And when individualization matters so much... many think that sincerity is all that matters.

“It isn’t *what* a person believes that matters, but *how* he or she believes it; all that really matters is one’s sincerity.” Something deep inside of us knows, and I think correctly, that the nature of true spirituality is somehow connected with authenticity. But it is one thing to value sincerity and another to make sincerity the lone characteristic of spiritual truth. *How* you believe matters, but so does *what* you believe. If you say it doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you are sincere, you miss a very important point: You can be sincerely *wrong*. If I have a headache in the middle of the night and I blindly reach into my medicine cabinet, I can sincerely believe I am taking an aspirin. But if I am really taking cyanide, my sincerity will not save me from the perils of the poison I’ve ingested. Sincerity matters, but it cannot be all that matters because sincerity alone cannot alter reality. Therefore, it is not simply the sincerity of our faith that matters but the *object* of our faith as well. Faith is very much like a rope – it matters what you tie it to.

Drawn from [There Can’t Be Only One Way](#) - Adapted from James Emery White, *A Search for the Spiritual* (Baker)

3. Buffy's Religion - TED OLSEN| JULY 8, 2002 - <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2002/july8/36.10.html>

4. Many have noted that Oprah Winfrey has led the way to the greatest shift in belief in modern history...because she developed the largest audience ...and spoke as if she was a Christian while teaching every facet of New Age (Eastern) ideology.

Oprah said that being born again is the same as “being connected to the higher Self,” and she added that when the Bible says, “ask and it shall be given,” we are being prompted to seek answers from our “intuitive Self.” -David Cloud, “Oprah Winfrey: The New Age High Priestess,” www.wayoflife.org, page 1.

Oprah said, “...one of the biggest mistakes humans make is to believe that there is only one way. Actually there are many diverse paths leading to what you call God.” When one of her audience members disagreed, testifying that she believed Jesus is the only way to God, Oprah lost her temper and shouted, “There couldn’t possibly be only one way!” She added that she felt like God cares more about our hearts than He does about what we believe about Jesus. - For a video of this remarkable exchange between Oprah and one of the members of her studio audience, see:

<http://www.wfial.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=resources.oprah>

Oprah claims that one of the most important books she has ever read is one by Eric Butterworth called *Discover the Power Within You*. In that book the author wrote, “Jesus did not come to teach us how divine he was but to teach that divinity was within us.” Commenting on this totally unbiblical and

blasphemous statement, Oprah said that for Jesus to claim exclusive divinity “would make Jesus the biggest egotist that ever lived.” - Watchman Fellowship, “The Gospel According to Oprah,” page 3

Newsweek magazine quoted her in 1997 as saying that spiritual gurus are here “not to teach us about their divinity, but to teach us about our own.” - Wendy Kaminer, “Why We Love Gurus,” *Newsweek*, October 20, 1997

5. From Paul Wallace - Only One Way?

6. A good little video piece using Tim Kellers words about the unique claims of Jesus - Tim Keller Sermon Jam - Jesus: the Only Way - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPh-ICimTkM>

7. Tim Keller, [“Preaching Hell in a Tolerant Age”](#)

8. Regarding the understanding that sin is that which enslaves us,

[2 Peter 2:19](#)

promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.

[Galatians 5:1](#)

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

[Galatians 4:1-7](#)

Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world.

[Romans 8:12-17](#)

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh-- for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

9. The Great Divorce, ch. 9, pp. 72-73

10. Problem of Pain, page 122-123

11. A valuable text to consider regarding judgment is ...

John 3:16-18 (NLT)

“For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ “There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God’s one and only Son.

