

FIRST WEDNESDAY || New Hope Church
Don't All Religions Teach Basically the Same Thing?



Why Study Religion?

Religion has **always existed**.

Religion has had an extensive amount of influence on:

- ▶ **Culture**
- ▶ **Art**
- ▶ **Architecture**
- ▶ **Politics**
- ▶ **History**
- ▶ **Ethics**
- ▶ **Wars**

Religion is **everywhere** you turn.

Religion affects many aspects of our **daily lives**.

Religion affects how countries are **governed** and can determine **elections**.

Questions Religion Tries to Address

- ▶ Who or what is **divine**? (i.e. God, gods)
- ▶ What is the **purpose** or meaning of life?
- ▶ What is **sacred**?
- ▶ What is the **supernatural**?
- ▶ What is **good** and **evil**?
- ▶ Where did we **come from**?
- ▶ Where are we **going**?
- ▶ What happens **after we die**?

What Religion Tries to Offer

- ▶ Purpose or **meaning** for one's life.
- ▶ A sense of belonging and **community**.
- ▶ Hope for the **future**, both immediate and distant.
- ▶ A right **relationship** with the divine.
- ▶ Assurance for the **afterlife**.

The Different Kinds of Religions

- ▶ **Monotheism** – only one deity exists
- ▶ **Polytheism** – many different deities exist
- ▶ **Tritheism** – three deities exist
- ▶ **Henotheism** – many deities but worship only one
- ▶ **Deism** – one or more deities exist but are uninvolved with human affairs
- ▶ **Pantheism** – the universe is deity
- ▶ **Panentheism** – the universe is joined with a deity or deities, but the god(s) are greater than it
- ▶ **Atheism** – no deity exists
- ▶ **Agnosticism** – a deity may exist but it is unknowable
- ▶ **Animism** – non-human spirit beings exist in animals
- ▶ **Non-theism** – the absence of a deity

Monotheism	_____ Monotheism _____	Christianity
Polytheism	_____ Monotheism _____	Catholicism
Tritheism	_____ Monotheism _____	Judaism
Henotheism	_____ Monotheism _____	Islam
Deism	_____ Panentheism _____	Hinduism
Pantheism	_____ Non-theism _____	Buddhism
Panentheism	_____ Henotheism _____	Mormonism
Atheism	_____ Monotheism _____	Jehovah's Witnesses
Agnosticism	_____ Monotheism _____	Christian Science
Animism	_____ Non-theism _____	Church of Scientology
Non-theism		

Critique #1: All Religions are Basically the Same...

The World's religions are fundamentally **different**.

- ▶ These differences include:
 - The nature of **God** (personal, impersonal, transcendent, immanent, monotheism, polytheism, pantheism)
 - How God has **revealed** Himself (holy books, nature, people)
 - The nature of mankind's **problem** (sin, ignorance, lack of enlightenment)
 - The necessary human **response** (faith, obedience, mediation)
 - Mankind's ultimate **destiny** (salvation, liberation, enlightenment)

“Careful examination of the basic tenets of the various religious traditions demonstrate that, far from teaching the same thing, the major religions have radically different perspectives on the religious ultimate.” *Harold A. Netland | Religious Scholar, Author*

Attempts to reduce all religions to a common meaning **doesn't work**.

- ▶ The religions of the world are so **diverse** in belief and in worldview that they defy attempts to reduce them to a **single** common theme or essence.
- ▶ Though we can agree that there are similar ethical values in the various religions, they are grounded in **fundamentally** different views of the nature of reality.

“For as soon as the notion of sameness moves beyond vague generalities – ‘every religion has some version of the Golden Rule’ – it founders to the fact that the religions differ in what they consider essential and nonnegotiable.” *Huston Smith | (Professor, University of California-Berkeley)*

Critique #2: All Religions Lead to God...

The different religious beliefs remain logically **irreconcilable**.

- ▶ Two **contradictory** statements cannot both be true at the same time.
- ▶ For example, Jesus Christ **cannot** be God incarnate (Christianity) and not God incarnate (Judaism, Islam) at the same time.
- ▶ Since Jews, Christians, and Muslims all **conceive** the identity of Jesus differently, their **conceptions** cannot all be true.

What about the analogy of the elephant? (John Hick)

- ▶ Several blind men encounter an elephant and each feel a different part, describing the **same** elephant **differently**.
- ▶ Likewise, each religion has a different perspective of who God is and no single religion has an **accurate** understanding of God.

Two Critiques

- ▶ One: They assume no one religion can really know God and all are **incomplete**. They also assume to know more about God than all of the major world religions **combined**.
- ▶ Two: If the analogy were to reflect Christianity, the elephant would heal the men's **blindness** and introduce himself.

In Christianity, Jesus is the elephant!

John 14:6-7 ⁶ I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

⁷ If you really know me, you will know my Father as well.

John 14:9 ⁹ Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.

Critique #3: What Makes Christianity Unique...

What makes Christianity different is the **means** by which God interacts with people.

- ▶ In Christianity, God does all of the work on His end to **restore** relationship with mankind.
Romans 8:3 ³ For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin.
- ▶ Every other religion requires **man** to reconcile their relationship with God.
 - Prayer, meditation, confession, good works, giving, pilgrimage, etc. are all **required** for salvation.

To Sum It Up in a Word:

The difference is grace.

Ephesians 1:7-8 ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that he lavished on us.

Ephesians 2:8-9 ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

Romans 9:16 ¹⁶ It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy.