

JESUS THE CHRIST COMPARED TO OTHER RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Many today are saying we are in the process of arriving at a single world religion. It is a fact that the non-Christian religions are growing at a phenomenal rate. We are told this religion will be syncretistic, that it will include in itself all the elements of the various religions of the world. While individuals will be allowed to choose the components that they want to include, no one will say that their personal choice is the only truth, or that the choices of others are wrong. This sounds much like an older branch of psychology called Transactional Analysis whose buzzword was "I'm O.K., You're O.K." God's answer to that is "I'm O.K., and you're not O.K., but I can make you O.K. through Christ."

In this time of tolerance, the above idea is attractive to many. While Christians have maintained that each person has a right to make his/her individual choice of belief they have never accepted that something that is false becomes true merely because someone believes it (John 8:32, 2 Corinthians 4:1-7). Christians have also believed that there is such a thing as absolute truth, and that this truth comes from God and is found in the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17). However, postmodern thinking has so influenced people in the United States, that George Barna, a well-known researcher, found in a study he made in 1994 that two out of three adults think it makes no difference which religion a person chooses because they all teach essentially the same things.

In our media oriented society, the media seeks out the unusual, the strange, or the exciting to keep their public. Some time ago, a lot of attention was given to a group of self-evaluated religious scholars who met together to undertake what they called "The Jesus Seminar." In 1993, seventy-four self-proclaimed Biblical scholars released to the public a "corrected copy" of the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) from which they eliminated all of the teachings which they said did not come from Jesus. Two basic premises had dictated their work: (1) the real Jesus was not divine, did not die on the cross, and was not raised from the dead, and (2), the bulk of the teachings attributed to Jesus really came from believers in Him many years later, believers who falsified his real teachings by putting their ideas in His mouth. As a result, they found only fifteen sayings of Jesus in the four Gospels. They found none at all in the Gospel of John, and only one in the Gospel of Mark which was, "Give unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." They said that "He did not claim to be the Messiah or God incarnate; he did not speak of his second coming; he did not promise to forgive sins; and he did not preach the Sermon on the Mount" (Jesus In An Age of Controversy, Douglas Groothuis, Kingsway Publications, Lottbridge Drove, Eastbourne, E. Sussex, BN23 6NT, p. 18-20). One of the members said the real Jesus was more like a comedian than like a theologian.

A second, and slightly more recent group involving 600 religious leaders from all the religions of the world, met in Chicago in 1995 to lay plans for a ONE WORLD RELIGION. The avowed purpose of their meeting was to learn from each other for the common good, in order to break down the historic barrier which has separated them and has kept them from uniting together. They believe that by uniting they can bring an end to poverty, to war, to human suffering and finally bring about the long awaited Utopian world. In their meetings, Christ was occasionally mentioned as an exceptional man in his day, but not as God in human flesh.

To justify their position they presented four major ideas: (1) the doctrines of the world religions should not be considered truths, but instead basic principles that have in them the seeds of thought found in all the great faiths, and in all the great religious traditions, (2) it should never be thought that one of these religions is superior to others. In fact, the ideas that a particular religion is better than the others is the cause of the divisions that exist among the religions, (3) through meditation, one must progress in

his/her spiritual life in such a manner as to go beyond his/her particular religion to a higher spirituality in which unity will be found, and (4), proselytism is bigotry, and should never exist in religious faith. Instead, all should help others to discover the most profound teachings of their own faith, a process that will finally bring unity.

While it may be possible for almost all the religious faiths of the world to say “yes” to the above, it is not possible for Christianity! There are many reasons for this. However, the most important one is that it is not possible to put Buddha, Krishna, Baha’u liah, Zoroaster or any other founder of a religion on the same plane as Jesus Christ! Notice the following differences:

1. Only Christ had prophetic testimony to His life and works that began to be given 1500 years before His birth, prophetic statements that included over 300 precise statements about Him... statements that said He would be a great prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:18-19); that He would enter the world to establish His kingdom during the time of the Roman empire (Daniel 2:31-46), Note: the vision showed that God would set up His eternal Kingdom during the fourth world empire. The first three are mentioned by name in Daniel: the Babylonian [2:36-38], followed by the Medes/Persians, followed by the Greek [8:20-21]...Only the fourth is not named, but we know the kingdom following the Greek was the Roman; that He would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14, 9:6-7, Matthew 1:18-25); that He would be born in the city of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2, Matthew 2:1-6); the nature of His life and teaching, including His death for the sins of the world, that He would come back to life and share His victory with His followers (Isaiah 53); that He would be crucified (Psalms 22:16, Luke 23:33); that He would return to life (Psalms 16:7-10); and that at a time decided by God, He would return to judge the world and the saved going to heaven and the lost going to hell (Matthew 25:31, 44).
2. None of them claimed to be born of a virgin. About one thousand years after His birth, Buddha’s followers began to make that claim about Him no doubt due to the virgin birth of Christ.
3. None of them claimed to be God in the flesh, as Jesus did (John 14:9, 1:1-14).
4. None of them claimed to be sinless as Jesus did (John 8:46), as claimed by Judas (Matthew 27:3-4), by Pilate (Luke 23:4), and by Paul (2 Corinthians 5:21).
5. None of them did miracles like Jesus did (John 20:30-31, 21:25).
6. None of them claimed that salvation could be given only through them as Jesus did (John 14:6, 8:23-24).
7. Only Jesus claimed to have the power to forgive sins (Luke 5:20-25).
8. None of them was raised from the dead! Today, the tombs of all of them are still occupied...only the tomb of Christ is empty (Luke 24:1-3). That Jesus was raised and for forty days lived again with His followers was attested to by at least 519 witnesses who were for the most part still living when this testimony was written (1 Corinthians 15:1-8).

For many years, there were sources that claimed that there was no historical proof that a man such as Jesus ever existed. Today, that report can no longer be made. There are at least five early historical

reports of his life that come to us from sources outside of the Bible. The following are my translations of documents written in Italian...CM:

1. Thallus, a historian (perhaps a Samaritan) writing in about 52 AD (only a few papyrus fragments of his work remain), attempted to explain the darkness that came over the earth at the crucifixion of Christ (Luke 23:44) by saying it was actually a solar eclipse and therefore did not prove the Divinity of Christ. Julius Africanus (220 AD), commenting on this said such could not be true for it was not the correct time for a solar eclipse to occur (an Italian journal *Visto*, Year IX, N. 10, Milan, March 5, 1960, p. 34).
2. Josephus, a Jewish historian born in Jerusalem in 37 AD, wrote the following about Christ: "Now there was in this time a wise man, if it is possible to call him a man, for he was the doer of marvelous works, a teacher of men who accept the truth gladly. He gathered to himself many Jews and also many Greeks. He was the Messiah. When Pilate, due to the accusations of many of our principal men, punished him on a cross, those who loved him did not cease believing in him. In fact, on the third day he presented himself again to them alive, even as the Prophets had said, including thousands of other admirable things about him. Today, the tribe of his followers, who are called Christians, has no diminished" (Josephus, *The Judaic Wars*...the above are in all Josephus' writings, both the Latin and Arabic, that have survived to our times).
3. Cornelius Tacitus (65-115 AD), a Roman historian, wrote of Christ in his *Annals*, written in 117 BC, describing the accusation made by Nero in 64 AD that the burning of Rome was caused by the Christians. He said Nero persecuted "a people hated because of their evil customs, called Christians by the vulgar, and subjected them to the most refined slaughter. This name was derived from Christ who in the reign of Tiberius was sent to his death under the Procurator Pontus Pilate." (*Annals* XV, p. 44).
4. Suetonius (122 AD), Roman historian, also mentions Christ and his followers. In commenting on the reason Emperor Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome, he said it was due to rioting that had occurred among them concerning a certain Cresto. (*Life of the Twelve Caesars*).
5. Pliny The Younger, governor of Bithania, in 112 AD wrote a letter to the Emperor Trajan in which he spoke of Christ and his followers. When those that are called Christians come before my court, I have followed this procedure: I would ask them if they are Christians. If they confess it, I ask them again one or two times threatening them with death. If they continue to confess that they are, I send them to prison. When in my presence some of them have called upon the names of the gods, and have sacrificed with wine and incense before your image...then I have let them go. I am told, however, that it is impossible to force true Christians to do this. In as much as regards their guilt and their errors, it is told to me that their principal guilt is that they meet on a determined day before dawn to sing together a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and vow, promising that they will commit no wrong, nor thievery, nor adultery, nor swear falsely.

According to the New Testament, all the teaching of Christ, His miracles, His claim to be God in the flesh, His offer of salvation, His coming again to judge the living and the dead; stands or falls on the truth or the falsehood of His resurrection from the dead! "If there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised; then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover we are found to be false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that He raised Christ, whom he did not raise, if in fact the dead are not

raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless, you are still in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:12-19). However since the four Gospels have all the required controls that are ordinarily used to decide if an ancient account is true or not, we may be sure of their historical accuracy. Those historical controls are as follows:

- a. Physical presence. No one has been able to show the Gospel writers were not physically present. On the other hand, their account is filled with small intimate details that could be known only by persons present. If the enemies of Christ could have shown that the writers were not present, they would have done so immediately. Long ago, an unbeliever, Sir William Ramsey was so sure that Luke had just made up his description of Paul’s first missionary journey (Acts chapters 13, 14), and that he could prove it by making the same journey and showing the mistakes that Luke had made in his narrative. Before he came to the end of that journey, Ramsey became a believer due to the accuracy of the account and spend the rest of his life as an apologist for Christ.
- b. Number. Up to a certain point, the greater the number of witnesses the surer the witness. In this case, there were at least 519 witnesses of Christ after He was raised from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:1-8), the majority of them were still alive when this number was given. It would have been possible to go personally to talk with many who were there. If just one had said it did not occur it would have been damaging. NONE DID!
- c. Character. If a witness were known to be dishonest, a person given to lying, his or her witness would not be valid. However, in this case, there has never been a company of persons who were so strong in the importance of telling the truth. Eventually, many of them went to their death rather than change their witness.
- d. Mental competency. If these witnesses had been mad men, no one would have listened to them...but many thousand believed their testimony. Today, in the great universities of the world, the New Testament written by these men is studied as a literary masterpiece.
- e. Agreement. If several people witnessed a happening, but their accounts were not in agreement, but were contradictory, their witness could not be used. In this case, there is wonderful agreement in the accounts that have come down to us from the various writers of the life and happenings of Christ.
- f. The consistency of the witness when cross examined. The cross examination that eventually came had to do with the violent death of all the Apostles, with the exception of John. All of them went to violent deaths, as did countless others, rather than say they had given an untrue account.

In addition, it can be said that Jesus has shown all the characteristics that one would expect to be shown by God if he were to come to the earth in the form of a human being:

IF the Son of God were to become a man, one would expect such a man to be without sin.

IF the Son of God were to become a man, one would expect that He would be the most unique person who had ever lived on this earth.

IF the Son of God were to become a man, one would expect that His words would be the greatest words ever spoken.

IF the Son of God were to become a man, one would expect that He would make a profound impression on His followers.

IF the Son of God were to become a man, one would expect Him to perform superhuman works, works not possible to any ordinary human being.

IF the Son of God were to become a man, one would expect Him to share with us the love of God, and would reveal to us God's will for our lives, and for our future.

(These points were adapted from a chapter entitled "Verification by the Supernatural Character of the Founder," in Protestant Christian Evidences by Bernard Ramm).

THEREFORE WE CAN SAFELY CONCLUDE THAT THE WITNESSES OF LIFE, TEACHINGS, AND EVENTUAL DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF CHRIST WERE FAITHFUL WITNESSES. CONSEQUENTLY, THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST IS TRUE WHICH MEANS ALL THE REST OF THE TEACHINGS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT ARE LIKEWISE TRUE!

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