

Jesus –The Only Way by Ron J. Lint

Dear Editor:

In a recent column in your newspaper, you clearly stated your opinion of the Christian doctrine concerning Christ Jesus being the only way to salvation and eternity in heaven. You stated that such religious doctrine was smug, exclusive, and arrogant, not to speak of being politically incorrect. You mentioned that such a teaching is disrespectful and offensive to those who sincerely hold opposing beliefs. Your stabbing assault on Christianity went on to claim that we must respect all faiths and that all are true in their own way. Being the expert on God that you are, you went on to proclaim that the God of Christianity cannot be good and kind when so many good people, many of whom have never heard of Him, and others who are good and decent people, are condemned to hell just because they don't buy off on Jesus being the only way to heaven. You even went so far as to state that such beliefs encourage hate crimes. To your comments, I offer the following response.

First of all, I am struck by the irony of your remarks. You stated that we live in a pluralistic society and that all faiths should be equally respected -- all faiths but Christianity, apparently. You stated that all religions were true in their own way and that the exclusive truth claims of Christianity are smug and disrespectful. You hold to all opinions being considered truth, and to a pluralistic society. Yet you commit the very offense against Christianity that you accuse it of committing. You reject the claims of Christianity and are disrespectful of its 2,000 year history and the currently more than one billion adherents to the faith. Your arguments fail in a sea of inconsistency and incoherence. All religions believe their way is true and all make truth claims. Religion is not meant to be a cafeteria line. Many of these variant truth claims are contradictory, one with another. As a result, they cannot all be true, for truth is mutually exclusive. It cannot be raining and not raining at the same time and in the same place. Moreover, the existence of variant truth claims does not prove that there is no truth, or, alternatively, that all is truth. Fur-

thermore, the belief of a majority of the people does not make truth, as was exemplified prior to Columbus' journeys proving that the earth was not flat, as was previously and nearly universally believed. Similarly, sincerity does not make truth, for one can surely be sincerely wrong.

But I do agree with you that the claims of Christianity can be offensive to the secular world, particularly the doctrine of Christ being the only way to salvation, and the doctrine of sin (i.e.: all have sinned and no one is without sin). As articulated by Alister E. McGrath in his apologetic work, Intellectuals Don't Need God & Other Modern Myths, "We do not become sinners by committing sins; we demonstrate that we are already sinners by those acts." We are born sinners; it is part of our DNA, our brokenness, our natural state of separation from God. So, the issue is, are the claims of Christianity true with respect to Christ? Jesus was not crucified for His teachings, much of which originated in Hebrew literature. He was crucified for who He said He was. The single most central issue with respect to Jesus is His identity. Jesus claimed to be God incarnate, the Messiah, the son of the living God. Now, either this is true or it is not. The late C. S. Lewis, Ph.D., Professor at Oxford University rightly proclaimed that Jesus was either a Liar, a Lunatic, or Lord. If Jesus knew that His claims were false, then He was a liar. If, on the other hand, He truly believed that He was God incarnate, but in reality was only an ordinary man, then He was a Lunatic. But if neither of these two possibilities is true, then He is, indeed, Lord. I have never seen a serious claim, even by avowed skeptics or atheists, as to the lack of truthfulness in the character of Jesus; nor have I ever become aware of a claim that Jesus was a lunatic. The character of Jesus of Nazareth is unimpeachable, and has remained so throughout the millennia.

If all humans are sinners, then a just God is right to punish the transgressors. Justice requires punishment for transgressions against the almighty God of all creation. God hates sin and cannot tolerate being in its presence. The natural result of sin is eternal separation from a pure and Holy God. But our Lord is fair. He provided a way out; He provided a way for all our sins to be forgiven and remembered no more. Now, He was not obligated to provide forgive-

ness – no judge is so obligated. He did so out of His grace, mercy, and love for us, the created. His provision for our sins is His substitutionary atonement on the cross through Jesus the Christ. Sin is so serious a matter that God Himself, in the person of Jesus (the second person of a Trinitarian God) offered Himself as a sacrifice for you and for me. He took the punishment for us. He was tortured to death and humiliated on the cross so that we would not have to suffer the ultimate penalty for our own disobedience.

“But I haven’t sinned much,” you say. “I have generally been moral and honest, treating others as I would want to be treated.” Well, the amount of sin is not the issue. The issue is have you ever sinned. If you say, “No, I haven’t,” then the depth of your sin of pride is enormous. If you say, “Yes, I have sinned,” then you are guilty and in need of salvation. Consider being pulled over for running a stop sign. You might say to the officer, “But, officer, you apparently are unaware of all the stop signs I have obeyed, coming to a total and complete stop. This is the only stop sign in years that I have not obeyed. Surely, you will take into consideration all that I have done right.” No, the law requires total obedience. The fact that you stopped previously for hundreds or even thousands of stop signs does not obviate the fact that you broke the law at this stop sign and will be cited. So it is with God and His hatred of sin. Not sinning is what you are expected and required to do. If you sin one time, that will cause you to be cited – “You are hereby eternally separated from the pure and holy God.” It is not as we humans would prefer: if we do more good than evil, then we are out of harm's way. If this were the case, then we could earn our way to heaven, and there would be no need for the atonement of Christ on the cross. But, we cannot earn our way to heaven. Only the saving grace of Christ will ensure our eternal salvation.

Now, given that God is not ephemeral, but the always existing, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent creator of all that was created, He then can set the rules. His rule is: no sin allowed. He held to His own rule and required justice for the sins of mankind; He took the punishment out of unfathomable love for His creation. He sent His Son to die on the cross as

atonement for our sins, and the sins of the world. This is why Christians hold to Jesus being the only way to salvation and eternity in heaven. We Christians did not set the rules, and our input was not solicited. We are not claiming to be better or more holy than anyone else. We are not claiming to be without sin. Again quoting McGrath: "Christians are those who a. have been delivered from the penalty of sin; b. are being delivered from the power of sin; and c. will finally be delivered from the presence of sin." Christians are, therefore, merely proclaiming the Truth of the Gospel Message: All humans sin and are subject to eternal separation from God. God, in His infinite kindness and love, has provided a way – one specific way – to be forgiven. He sets the rules. That way is to believe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior and to accept His substitutory atonement for your sins.

But that's still not fair, you say. What about all the people who have never heard about Jesus due to the place of their birth or the particular culture into which they were born? After all, there are many good, moral people in the world who have never heard of Christ. To say that they will all go to hell because they were never evangelized is simply unthinkable, offensive, and outrageous to any understanding of fairness. I think that there are two glaringly false assumptions making their way through our culture: 1) all who have never heard of Jesus go to hell, and 2) there are millions of people who really want to know God but are isolated and cannot learn of Him.

As to the first point, it is not a failure to hear about Jesus and be evangelized that sends one to hell; it is sinning against the Holy God that sends one to hell. A perfectly moral person would have no need for Christ, but none of us is without sin, so all need His saving grace. God only punishes the guilty. Moreover, God does not hide Himself from anyone. He makes Himself known to all who seek Him; to all who genuinely inquire; to all who listen for His voice (Acts 14:16-17; Romans 1:20; 10:18).

As to the second point, humans generally do not seek God. They hide from Him; they ignore His laws; they invest in themselves, not in the kingdom of heaven; they suppress truth;

they refuse to submit to His laws and His lordship. This is the human condition, the truth of which has been demonstrated throughout the ages – wars, hatred, malice, greed, pride, envy, self-sufficiency, et al. The history of mankind is indelibly marked with perfidy.

But through all of this, God still aggressively seeks His people. He loves us and wants a relationship with us. As to our sin, He has provided a path to salvation through Christ Jesus. But it is He who sets the rules, not you, not me. The cross is the only place of safety. God hates sin. Either He will pay for your sin, or you will. Respectfully submitted...