

C H R I S T I A N I T Y and A T H E I S M

6. The Offense of Salvation Only in Jesus

Introduction

One of the essential teachings of the Bible is that salvation is found only in Jesus. But this very teaching that gives Christians comfort and assurance is very offensive to many people. Francois Marie Arouet (pen name Voltaire) was one of France's most brilliant philosophers. He attacked the errors of the church with clever wit. But unlike the reformers Voltaire never intended to reform the church but to remove it. Voltaire, like many today, was offended by exclusive claims of truth. In his *Treatise on Tolerance* (1763) he wrote:



"This little globe, which is but a point, rolls through space, as do many other globes; we are lost in the immensity of the universe. Man, only five feet high, is assuredly only a small thing in creation. One of these imperceptible beings says to another one of his neighbors, in Arabia or South Africa: 'Listen to me, because God of all these worlds has enlightened me: there are nine hundred million little ants like us on the earth, but my ant-hole is

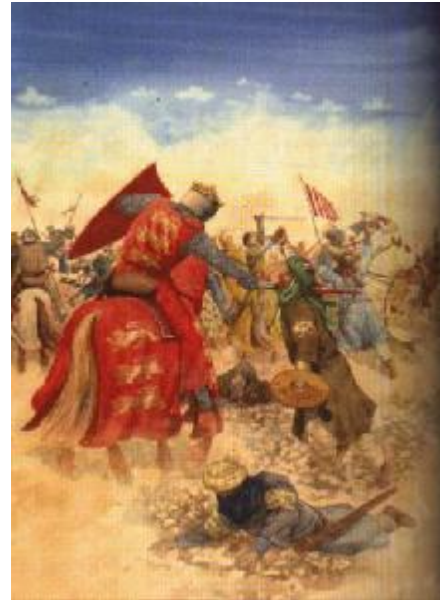
the only one dear to God; all the other are cast off by Him for eternity; mine alone will be happy, and all the others will be eternally damned."

Development of the Argument

Early Christians – One of the unique beliefs of the early Christians (compared to their pagan neighbors) was their insistence in the one true God and the one way of salvation in Jesus. Edward Gibbon writes:

The condemnation of the wisest and most virtuous of the Pagans, on account of their ignorance or disbelief of the divine truth, seems to offend the reason and the humanity of the present age. (*Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chapter 15, <http://www.ccel.org/g/gibbon/decline/home.html>)

From Commitment to Persecution – Unfortunately in the Medieval Church commitment to Christ developed into persecution. Atheists have a long list of abuses to draw from: The Crusades and the Inquisition. (Responding to this problem is the topic of our next class.)



Rejecting Any Claim to Truth – At the heart of the debate is the very idea of truth itself. Voltaire's call for tolerance (technically Voltaire was a Deist) has transformed into the total rejection of absolute truth (postmodernism). There is no such thing as "truth." There are only "truths." With amazing speed this view is taking root in our culture. In a 2001 Barna survey on 22% of those polled agreed that there was absolute truth. In a sense this idea can work against atheism, because atheists have long claimed that the non-existence of God is "the truth." But on a practical level the "indifferentism" of postmodernism also undermines Christianity. Agnosticism, which says we can't be sure whether there is or isn't a God, works well in this context.



Logical Response

The Truth is Out There – Even though the battle for the truth left everyone exhausted, and though most have given up on the idea of truth, the world still depends upon the reality of truth. Everyday we live our lives according to fixed laws of nature.

Truth is "Exclusive" When someone says, "there is no such thing as truth," they have made an exclusive truth claim. They exclude those who say, "there is such a thing as truth."

Biblical Response

Jesus Claims to Be the Only Way of Salvation

John 3:36 "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

John 10:9 "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.



John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

Acts 4:12 "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

1 Cor 3:11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

1 John 5:11 And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. ¹² He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Put the Claim to the Test – The teaching of Jesus boils down to two things: Sin and Salvation.

Sin – 1. Do the teachings of Jesus regarding man's sinfulness fit with reality?

2. Do the teachings of Jesus regarding man's sinfulness fit with my own personal reality?

Salvation – 1. Do you think you can save yourself?



2. Do you think you need God to save you?

3. Do the words and works of Jesus seem to be the words and works of God?

Matt. 11:2-6 ² And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples ³ and said to Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" ⁴ Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: ⁵ "The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. ⁶ "And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."

Matt. 11:25-30 ²⁵ At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. ²⁶ "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. ²⁷ "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. ²⁸ "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Do you believe that Jesus has saved you?