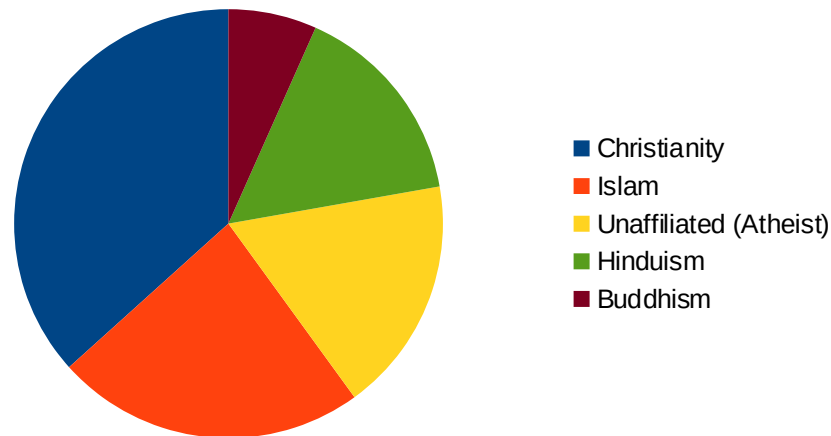


World Religions

(Rev. 05/25)

Aren't all religions basically the same?



Religion	Estimated Adherents	Percent of Population
Christianity	2.53 Billion	31.6%
Islam	2.06 Billion	25.8%
Hinduism	1.20 Billion	15.1%
Unaffiliated / Atheist	1.15 Billion	14.4%
Buddhism	528 Million	6.6%
Judaism	1.6 Million	.2%

(Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/374704/share-of-global-population-by-religion/> © 2022)

Islam (26%)

Islam is based on the claims of Muhammad from around 610 AD. Muhammad had visions in a cave in which, according to some sources, he would have fits, foam at the mouth and perspire. (Source: Ravi Zacharias Ministries) During these this time, according to Muhammad, the angel Gabriel revealed to him the words of Allah, which probably comes from the Arabic words “al” (“the”) and “Illah” (“god”). This shows that the one, true God – and all others are considered false or even unreal gods – is the ultimate source for Islam. (Source: The Religions of Man by Huston Smith)

When Muhammad had his first vision, he was reluctant to tell anyone about it because he feared that it may not have come from God, but Satan! (Source: gotquestions.org) It wasn't until his second, more painful vision that Muhammad decided that these were angelic utterances and needed to be shared with the world. (Source: The Difference Is The Son, by Daniel Shayesteh)

From there, Muhammad first won over his wife and his cousin. After that time, however, not many people would listen to his claims. Instead, they demanded that he perform miracles to prove that he

was a Prophet of Allah. This he refused to do. He claimed that there was only one miracle in his life – the receiving of the Qur’an – and he refused to put on a “show” for anyone. (Source: The Religions of Man)

After being unsuccessful at establishing a new religion, Islam (literally “submission”), in his hometown, Muhammad moved from Mecca to Medina. There he found fertile ground for the new religion among people who didn’t know him and who considered him a prophet. (Source: The Difference Is The Son and The Religions Of Man)

In Islam, Allah, the god of Islam, sets the standards of right and wrong. Unfortunately, because we can never follow all of the laws of the Qur’an (or Koran), we are condemned already. According to one prophetic tradition in the Hadith (Sahih Al-Bukhari), up to 99% of women go to Hell immediately! The only guaranteed way to reach Heaven is to die in a Holy War. (This is why there are suicide bombers.)

There are two “holy books” in Islam: the Qur’an, the poetic words that Muhammad claimed to receive from Gabriel; and the Hadith, which is a collection of the sayings of Muhammad. (Islam also acknowledges the first five books of the Old Testament – the Torah – but they feel that Jews and Christians have corrupted the rest of the text.) (Source: gotquestions.org)

So, you have the word of one man (no one else heard the message from Gabriel), no miracles supporting it (Muhammad specifically mentions that he refused to do any), and standards of behavior that are based on you reaching a level of “goodness” that is not specifically defined, and eternal punishment if you don’t get it right. (See Q 46:9 and Q19:66-72)

Problems With Islam

Although there are many people who attempt to defend Islam, there are some significant problems that we need to exam:

1. In the beginning, Muhammad praised al-Lot (the goddess of fertility), al-Uzza (the goddess of power), and Manat (the goddess of fate) – you can read about this in Qur’an 53:19-20. Unfortunately, this goes directly against the monotheism - “there is no god but Allah” - that he later espoused.

Coincidentally, Muhammad allowed these other “gods” when he lived in Mecca, a place that already had a belief in “One God”, but also had a lot of idolatry that was supported by the rich and powerful. (Allah had been worshiped for centuries before at Mecca. In other words, to make the rich and powerful happy, Muhammad allowed them to keep their “gods” while he tried to talk about the “One God” that many of them, including his grandfather, had already chosen to believe in! (Source: The Difference Is The Son)

2. The Qur’an has undergone revisions. Muhammad himself mentioned that Allah had allowed Satan to write verses in the Qur’an to mislead people and that these verses have since been updated to reveal Allah’s true will. In fact, Muhammad wrote:

Those who strive to invalidate our signs shall be inmates of Hell. We have not sent any apostle

or prophet before thee, among whose desires Satan injected not some wrong desires, but God shall bring to nought that which Satan had suggested. Thus God shall affirm His revelations for God is Knowing, Wise! That He may make that which Satan hath injected, a trial to those in whose hearts is a disease, and whose hearts are hardened. - Verily, the wicked are in a far-gone severance from the truth! - Q 22:51-53)

In other words, not everything in the Qur'an is from God and, if you aren't wise enough, it will trip you up! When critics commented on this to Muhammad, he declared that they were people "whose hearts were hardened" because they did not believe that Muhammad had the ability/right to change the Qur'an whenever he received a new revelation!

3. Islam has, um, "interesting" views on sex... Rather than go into it in detail, you can read it for yourself...if you can find an unedited version of the Qur'an. In it, you'll read about sex with children (Tarikh-al-rosol val-molouk pages 930-933 and 1290-1292); female slaves being forced into prostitution for the gain of money (Q 24:33), men being allowed to beat women who didn't do what they desired (Q 4:34), sexual promiscuity (Q 33:50), etc. (Source: The Difference Is The Son)
4. No matter what people on the news may say, Islam openly calls for killing those of different religions:

And when the sacred months are passed, kill those who join other gods with God where ye shall find them; and seize them, besiege them, and lay wait for them with every kind of ambush: but if they shall convert, and observe prayer, and pay the obligatory alms, then let them go their way, for God is Gracious, Merciful. - Q 9:5

You can also read this in Q 2:28-29, Q 47:4, Q 8:38-39, Q 8:7, etc. In none of these verses in the Qur'an do we find the "religion of peace" that is widely talked about. (This despite the fact that Muhammad says that those who follow Jesus or who are Jewish, will receive a reward from their Lord! See Q 3:55 and Q 2:62) (Source: The Difference Is The Son)

Please understand, however, that just because the Qur'an commands it, it doesn't mean that everyone who follows Islam will do this! We do not judge people, as a whole, but rather individuals based on their individual actions! I have known people from many different religions and we have been able to sit down, drink coffee, and talk about what we believe without fear and without offense.

Barry's Note: Dr. Daniel Shayesteh, author of The Difference Is The Son, is the Director of "Exodus From Darkness". He was born in Iran and was a politician and a teacher of Islam during the Iranian Islamic Fundamentalist Revolution. His passions for truth led him to reject Islam and embrace Christianity as the one, true religion.

Hinduism (15%)

Hinduism is a belief system that is predominantly found in India, Nepal, and the surrounding countries.

It is one of the oldest of the “organized” world religions, with sacred texts going back to around 1,500 B.C. (Source: gotquestions.org) It is a common religion and forms the foundation for much of what we consider to be “New Age” nowadays.

For Hindus, there are multiple “sacred texts”. These include: the Vedas (considered the most important), the Upanishads, the Mahabharata, and the Ramayana. In addition, you can also include the Brahmanas, the Sutras, and the Aranyakas. (That’s a lot of “sacred texts”!) (Source: gotquestions.org)

Not to be outdone, however, Hinduism also holds the record for the most different “gods” that can be worshiped – there are up to 330 million of them! The problem with Hinduism is that the gods of it are removed; most take no notice of humans.

The one exception to this rule is the “supreme god”, Brahma. Brahma inhabits every portion of reality, thus we all have “god” inside of us; this makes everyone, on some level, divine; and this leads many Hindus to have a high reverence for life. (Unless, you’re part of the “Untouchables”, the lowest caste system; then you deserve misery and pain because you must have been very bad in the past!) At the same time, however, Brahma is impersonal and unknowable. He is said to exist in three parts: Brahma (Creator), Vishnu (Preserver), and Shiva (Destroyer).

Because of all of these gods, all of the texts, and the variety of belief systems, Hinduism can vary greatly from place to place and from person to person. The only unifying belief system is the idea that the Vedas are considered sacred. If you do, you’re Hindu; if not, you aren’t. (The Vedas not only contain theology, but they also tell stories about the gods.)

The spiritual goal of Hinduism is to become one with Brahma. We do this by letting go of our “individual self” and working toward a self-realizing “truth”.

Unfortunately, being humans, we miss the mark...repeatedly. Because of that, the Hindus believe in “Karma”, a system of rewards and punishment that is balanced against our actions. If we live good lives with fewer sins, we are reincarnated as a “higher order”; if we live lives of sin, we are reincarnated on a “lower order”. We stay in this cycle of reincarnation until we reach perfection, with each reincarnation a continuation of your past existence as you work your way to being absorbed in the “divine essence”.

In Hinduism, the essential essence of who we are is transmitted into the next life; on some level we’re still the same person as we were in the previous life.

Okay, for those of you unfamiliar with the idea, reincarnation says that after we die, we are judged – the judgment is different in different religions – and we either move on to a “higher consciousness” or we’re sent backward in punishment for doing bad things.

Problems With Hinduism

The hardest part to understanding Hinduism and reincarnation is that we’re from a Western culture, not an Eastern. Because of that, I’m going to try to comment on this in a very basic way. (If you want more, let me know!) The problems with reincarnation come down to one logical problem:

- Premise 1: The soul is eternal.
Premise 2: Because of this, the soul has had an infinite amount of times to live a perfect life.
Premise 3: The soul has not achieved this goal (you're still stuck on earth).
Conclusion: Because of that, the soul is not eternal.

Other issues with reincarnation include the fact that Hinduism began around 1,500 BC the population of the Earth was around 98 million people. (Yep! There are people who spend their time calculating stuff like that!) Now, the population of the Earth is around eight billion. Where did the extra souls come from? Were they just waiting somewhere for their chance to appear? Are there more out there who are waiting to be born now, too?

When you look at it logically, there are some issues with reincarnation. One of the reasons that people want to believe in it, though, is because it offers them a sense of hope. "Yeah, this life sucks but maybe my next one will be better." "Yeah, I screwed up, but I can fix it next time!"

Another problem with Hinduism is the lack of a coherent religious system – which god do you want to worship today? With so much diversity of thought and opinion on the gods, it seems hard to believe that they have discovered who "god" truly is.

Finally, claims by Hindu mystics of being able to perform miracles have been thoroughly investigated by magicians from around the world...and determined to be simply magic tricks. Thus, even the "miracles" associated with the religion turn out to be empty.

Unaffiliated / Atheist (14%)

The third major percentage are those who identify as "unaffiliated". In other words, they don't claim to have a particular belief system or identify with a specific religion. Among these are the "atheists" - people who claim that there is no God or "gods"; "agnostics" - people who claim that we don't know or can't know if there is a God or "gods"; and people who simply don't want to be bothered with religion because it might interfere with their lives.

Of all of these groups, the one that I respect the most is agnostics. While I can show you convincing proofs for Christianity, I realize that, at the end of the day, we still must accept it on faith. Because of that, agnostics say, we can never be 100% certain which belief system is correct. In my opinion, I can be 99% certain of where I put my faith and that, for me, is close enough, but at least I can understand their hesitation. ☺

The one that I respect the least is those who don't want to be "bothered with religion" because they're pursuing their own desires. If I'm hurting someone else, I know that every religion calls it wrong, and I ignore religion so that I can keep hurting other people, that's just selfish. Which almost every other religion calls wrong, too, but they're still trying to ignore that...

I've personally known people who called themselves "Christians" and who left the church because they were being told they were sinning. Because the church wouldn't support their own selfish desires, they

walked away from the church...instead of asking if maybe they were doing something wrong...

The Supreme Court ruled in 1985 that atheism was to be held equivalent to a religion, and so we're going to treat it as a religious viewpoint. (Source: atheist-community.org) Atheism holds a naturalistic viewpoint, which means that we're never allowed to consider anything supernatural, even if there may be indications of it. Most atheists think science holds all of the answers, or at least the potential to figure them out. Also, being an atheist, there is no concept of Heaven or Hell; life simply ends at death.

If atheism is true, then you are an accident of the universe and anything you do – either for good or for bad – is meaningless. (In fact, there is no “good” or “bad” in a universe without purpose.) In the end, you die and that's it. Whether you selflessly served others or were a murdering tyrant like Hitler, you all get the same reward: nothing. So nothing “good” that you do in life has values; nothing “evil” has consequences.

Atheism runs into a couple of problems: first, the only way to KNOW there's no God requires you to search the entire universe from beginning to end, top to bottom. To do that, you have to be God. Second, you cannot have a standard of “right” and “wrong” in a universe that is created by accident; this means that any ideas of good and bad are based on what I think are good and bad. Finally, people – including you and I, have no value, except for the value we give ourselves.

(On a final note, an atheist was asked what he would think if someone broke into his house and tortured his children to death. Would he look at that person and say, “Well, from my own subjective experience, that person did something bad; but I also acknowledge that it isn't really “evil” because evil doesn't exist.”? After a long pause, he said, “I think I need to rethink what I believe about good and evil.”)

Buddhism (7%)

Siddhartha Guatama, the founder of Buddhism, was born into royalty in Nepal around 600 B.C. and started life as a Hindu. Over time, he came to view the Vedas (the holy texts of Hinduism) and the caste system (sinners are punished by being born into a lesser social stratus) as untrue. This led him to abandon Hinduism and attempt to find “enlightenment” on his own. (Source: Ravi Zacharias)

Although Buddha left Hinduism, he took with him some of Hindus major teachings like Karma (cause-and-effect ethics), Maya (the illusory nature of the world), and Samsara (the cycle of reincarnation). (Source: gotquestions.org)

To find truth, the story says that Guatama ate a bowl of rice and then sat under a tree with the intention of achieving enlightenment or dying in the attempt; 24-hours later, he reached it. At that time, he became known as the “enlightened one” or “Buddha”.

Based on this, Buddha propose the “Four Noble Truths”:

1. To live is to suffer. (Dukha)
2. Suffering is caused by attachment. (Tanha)

3. One can eliminate suffering by eliminating attachments.
4. To eliminate attachments, you need to follow the “Eight-fold Path”:

Having a right:

1. View
2. Intention
3. Speech
4. Action
5. Livelihood (by being a monk)
6. Effort (properly directing your energies)
7. Mindfulness (meditation)
8. Concentration (focus)

In Buddhism, the goal is to extinguish personal desire. You are not allowed to want anything, because “wants” hinder us, they restrain us from moving forward on our own spiritual journey. This includes family, friends, wealth, social justice, etc. (Source: Ravi Zacharias)

While technically there is no “god” in Buddhism, like Hinduism there are many different branches. Some of the types of Buddhism are atheistic, with the cycle of reincarnation driven by “karma” which acts as a “god” in determining right and wrong; others are pantheistic, which means that “god” is within all of us and we are all facets of “god”; and others are even theistic, with specific gods. In addition, Buddhism also features a collection of deities and “exalted beings”.

In Buddhism, sin is largely considered to be understood as “ignorance”. It’s not that man is intentionally evil to other men, it’s that they are ignorant of who they are and who the other person is. Karma, the balance, is not personally enforced, is not considered a “moral code”, and sin is not considered to be ultimately “immoral”. (In other words, you only acted that way because you didn’t know there was a better way. It’s not really your fault, it’s your lack of knowledge.) Besides, with no “god” to set the objective moral standard, there is no one to “sin” against.

In Buddhism, you learn to think the right things and live the right way and, if you get it right, you will attain Nibbana (Nirvana). If you mess it up, you die, are reincarnated, and get another chance to make it right. By the way, according to Buddhism, Nirvana (pure being) is relative to the individual and therefore cannot be “taught” but only “realized”.

Problems With Buddhism

In Buddhism, some part of us is reincarnated, although it differs from traditional Hinduism as there is some debate if it is our personal identity that is reincarnated – we’re the same person, essentially – or just some aspect of our existence.

Buddhism teaches that there’s no “beginning” to the universe; just an infinite number of rebirths (reincarnation) and that the goal is to be good enough to reach Nirvana, or perfection. The problem with this is two questions: (1) how can you have any infinite number of rebirths if there is an end when you reach perfection; and (2) how can you define “good” and “evil” if there is no God? In Buddhism, they teach a moral and ethical standard of perfection, but they don’t have a “ruler” to base it on. So, if I

believe killing is okay and you think it's not, do we both reach Nirvana? If so, how does that make sense?

Judaism (.2%)

Real quick: even though this isn't part of the discussion above, I just wanted to hit a couple of "highlights" when dealing with Judaism.

Judaism is the religion of the Old Testament. The Jews were the chosen people of God who served as His priests and became the nation of Israel. Many of the views of Judaism are similar to Christians, except Christianity claims that the Messiah – Jesus – came and saved us, ending the sacrifices laid out in the Old Testament.

Salvation for Jews comes from keeping the Torah (Law) and worshiping God through the Old Testament traditions. According to my Jewish friends, those who do evil are sent to Gehinnom after they die for a period of up to 12 months of torture / purification before they go to "heaven".

At best, for all religions, there are "superficial" similarities between the religions. However, at the end of the day, there are "fundamental" differences. All world religions seek to answer four main areas: origin, meaning, morality, and destiny. These four answers need to be determined in one of two ways: empirical truth or through logical reasoning and the truths must be coherent when completed. (Source: Ravi Zacharias)

Can different philosophies be right?

Sure! If my philosophy is that weekends are for vegging out and yours is that they're for working, we can both be right! In small, unimportant ways, you can always have differences in philosophies. Unfortunately, that's philosophies; if you are talking theology, then...no.

There are logical reasons why all theologies can't be right. For example, the Bible teaches about Hell being a place of separation from God for those who don't want to spend eternity with Him; while the Jehovah's Witnesses claim that the wicked, when they die, simply cease to exist. Either there is a place called "Hell" where bad people go or there isn't; you can't have both "Hell" and "Not Hell".

If you read through the world's religions, some say you can earn Heaven on your own while others say you can't while others teach that there is no Heaven! They can't all be right!

Another example comes from the Bible:

Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me." - John 14:6 (NLT)

If Jesus is right, then no other religion can lead us into a relationship with God. Either Jesus is telling the truth or He's lying. If He's telling the truth, other religions are wrong; if Jesus is lying, Christianity is wrong. You can't have both.

Does that mean that all aspects of different religions are wrong? Nope! A lot of religions – and even some atheists that I know – believe it's important to take care of widows and orphans, to say and do nice things for other people, and to live a moral life. Those ideas aren't incompatible!

What IS incompatible is how do we get to Heaven? If Jesus is right – and that's a different question altogether – then there's only one way to get there and that's by asking Him to forgive you.

What about reincarnation?

Although I covered this when I described Hinduism, it's worth letting it stand on its own, too!

Okay, for those of you unfamiliar with the idea, reincarnation says that after we die, we are judged – the judgment is different in different religions – and we either move on to a “higher consciousness” or we are sent backward in punishment for doing bad things.

The hardest part to understanding reincarnation is we are from a Western culture, not an Eastern. Because of that, I'm going to try to comment on this in a very basic way. (If you want more, let me know!) The problems with reincarnation come down to one logical problem:

- Premise 1: The soul is eternal.
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- Conclusion: Because of that, the soul is not eternal.

Other issues with reincarnation include the fact that Hinduism began around 1,500 B.C. the population of the Earth was around 98 million people. (Yep! There are people who spend their time calculating stuff like that!) Now, the population of the Earth is around eight billion. Where did the extra souls come from? Were they just waiting somewhere for their chance to appear? Are there more out there who are waiting to be born, now, too?

When you look at it logically, there are some issues with reincarnation. One of the reasons that people want to believe in it, though, is because it offers people a sense of hope. “Yeah, this life sucks but maybe my next one will be better.” “Yeah, I screwed up, but I can fix it next time!”

The Bible says, though, that we only get one shot at this life:

*And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment... -
Hebrews 9:27 (NLT)*

On the bright side, God says we have a way to get rid of our mistakes: we ask Jesus to forgive us. All we have to do is believe in God and pray something like:

"God, I know that I have not lived my life for You up until now. I believe Your Son, Jesus Christ, died on the cross in my place. I ask You to forgive me for what I've done wrong. Come into my life now and be my king, my Lord, and my Savior. Help me to follow You all the days of my life. Those days are in Your hands. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen."

What does "religion in God" mean?

I'm not really sure... I can tell you that religion is a system of worship. One author described it this way: "Religion is man's attempt to reach God. Christianity is God's attempt to reach man."

Religion is about the rituals, the "good deeds", and the ceremonies that we've invented to try to show God how "good" we are, to get Him to love us, and to earn our way into heaven. This isn't what God wants... Take a look at this:

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. - Ephesians 2:8-9 (NLT)

God says that salvation – us having a right relationship with God – is based on what He has done for us. God doesn't care how often we show up to church, how much we give to missions, if we go through "religion" classes, or do any other thing. If you think you can do something to earn your way into Heaven, you've missed the point. Salvation and a relationship with God is a free gift, and all we have to do is ask.

What if atheism or other religions are true?

I could spend a LOT of time on this, but here's the short answer:

- Atheism* - If atheism is true, then you're an accident of the universe and anything you do – either for good or for bad – is meaningless. (In fact, there is no "good" or "bad" in a universe without purpose.) In the end, you die and that's it.
- Buddhism* - There is no "god" in true Buddhism. In Buddhism, you learn to think the right things and live the right way and, if you get it right, you will attain Nibbana (Nirvana). If you mess it up, you die, are reincarnated and get another chance to make it right.
- Hinduism* - Hinduism claims that all life lives in unity and that there's only one "soul" that is shared by everyone on earth. All of your bad deeds in life are punished in your next life; all of your good deeds are rewarded in the next life. Each reincarnation is just a continuation of your past existence as you work your way to being absorbed in the "divine essence".
- Islam* - There is one God (Allah) and Mohammad is His prophet. Mohammad claimed to have visions and, at the encouragement of his wife, he wrote them down. That was the beginning of Islam. Islamic views hold to following the Qur'an and believe they are saved because of faith and good deeds. When you die, you either get sent to Heaven or Hell; although being sent to Hell is (usually) for a short time.

Judaism - Judaism is the religion of the Old Testament. The Jews were the chosen people of God who served as His priests and became the nation of Israel. Many of the views of Judaism are similar to Christians, except Christians claim that the Messiah – Jesus – came and saved us, ending the sacrifices laid out in the Old Testament. Salvation for Jews comes from keeping the Torah (Law) and worshiping God through the Old Testament traditions. Those who do evil are sent to Gehinnom after they die for a period of up to 12 months of torture / purification before they go to “heaven”.

Bear in mind that these are HUGELY simplified definitions of each religion.

Christianity, like other religions, claims that we've done bad things; that there is evil in the world; and that most of it is directly based on the choices of humans. Where it's different is in two major areas:

First, after death comes judgment. The Bible says:

And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment... - Hebrews 9:27 (NLT)

In other words, unlike the other major religions mentioned above, there are NO second chances. If we choose not to follow God in this life, the consequences are eternal. This may seem really harsh, but it leads me to two questions:

- Why, if we suffer here on earth and still choose to reject God, do we think that suffering in Hell for a time will suddenly make us want to choose Him?
- Why would a loving God force us to spend eternity in Heaven with Him when we don't want to here on earth? (Another way to put it is, “Why would you choose Hell over a loving God?”)

The second major difference is in the second part of Hebrews 9:

...So also Christ died once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him. - Hebrews 9:28 (NLT)

In the Christian faith, it has NOTHING to do with your choices; it has everything to do with God's! It has nothing to do with your actions or how good you are; it has everything to do with God's actions and how good He is! God doesn't want people to suffer; He wants them to choose Him.

In conclusion, if the other religions are right, you have nothing to lose and not much to gain, either. (Either there is NO eternity; or you'll make it there eventually.) If the other religions are wrong, however, you lose everything and you miss out on the greatest relationship ever: the one where the God of the universe wants to spend time with you!

Why do Christians view atheists as self-centered?

This one hit me right away when I read it! First of all, if I have given you the impression that I think that atheists are self-centered and that Christians aren't, I have messed up! We Christians can be petty,

jealous, judgmental, and flawed; we are human after all. That doesn't excuse the behavior, by the way; I just want you to know that we all make mistakes.

Second, if you take away God, if you take away purpose and meaning and the ideas of good and evil, what do you have left? I was listening to a debate recently and Ronald Lindsey, an atheist from the Center for Skeptical Inquiry, said that atheists simply need to “do what makes them feel good about themselves”. He went on to say that if that meant volunteering, then volunteer; if that meant pleasure, seek pleasure; or if that meant loving another or starting a family, then love someone. Just do whatever you needed to do to feel good about yourself.

In the end, an atheist cannot do good because it's the “right thing to do”. Why? Because in an accidental universe, there's no objective (outside) standard of “right and wrong”. The best they can do is talk about what is “right or wrong” for them; they become the judge of what is – and is not – good based on their own beliefs. That does mean that the focus is on “self”.

If you think I'm wrong with this, I'd like to talk to you about it personally. Let me close by saying that I've known some atheists who had a better grasp on how to lead a “good” life than a lot of people who call themselves Christians.

Why do people try to push religion on others?

This question is kind of a loaded one. What do you mean by “push”?

Is it “pushing” religion to spend our time talking about God during Camp? I don't think so. The reason Camp exists is to tell people about our friend, Jesus; and we don't exactly hide that! Can we have fun? Sure! Do we play games? Yep! But, first of all, we want to talk about Jesus. We don't make people show up; people get to choose, and so I don't think it's “pushing”.

Is it “pushing” religion to spend our time talking about God on Sunday mornings? Nope. Again, that's what churches are there for!

Is it “pushing” religion to try to pass laws about what you believe? I don't think so. Why? Because those with different beliefs are trying to pass laws about what they believe! If it's pushing for one side, it's got to be pushing for all sides!

But let me answer this not with my personal opinions, not with some expert and – shock and surprise! – not with a Bible verse. Let me have an atheist tell you about why people should talk to others about God:

“I’ve always said that I don’t respect people who don’t proselytize. I don’t respect that at all.

“If you believe that there’s a heaven and a hell, and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life, and you think that it’s not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward—and atheists who think people shouldn’t proselytize and who say just leave me along and keep your religion to yourself—how much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize? How much do you have to hate somebody to

believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?

“I mean, if I believed, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that a truck was coming at you, and you didn’t believe that truck was bearing down on you, there is a certain point where I tackle you. And this is more important than that.” - Penn Jillette, Magician, Atheist

Here is where I'm in total agreement with the question: You cannot FORCE someone to believe anything! I don't want to “ram the Bible down your throat”. On the other hand, I believe that there's a Heaven and I think some people are going to miss out. How can I NOT tell you?

Why is Christianity “more right”?

Before we get started, I need to explain one concept to you: an objective standard. If I want to measure the distance of something, I can use the width of different butterfly wings or a ruler. Which one is going to be more accurate? The ruler, obviously. Why? Because it doesn't change.

More importantly, what if I just “guessed” at how far something was? Would that be correct every time? Obviously not, especially if you've ever heard me guesstimate something. (I'm usually off by miles!)

All religions – including atheism – try to come up with a standard for measuring our behavior; to tell us if something is “right” or “wrong”. If we claim that there's a God, it becomes really simple – God tells us what His standards are! If not, we have to try to find something else to base it on, but usually those just come down to what our preferences are; not something based on “truth”.

At the end of the day, you need to look at the different religions of the world and decide which one(s) make the most sense based on what we can see and observe.

If you noticed, when I answered the question, “Aren’t all religions basically the same?”, there was one religion we didn’t talk about: Christianity!

Christianity (32%)

Christianity says that there is a God and that God chose to show Himself to us:

Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. - Hebrews 1:1-2a (NLT)

God isn't, and never has been, trying to be a secret. He has spoken to some humans face-to-face, others through messengers (called “angels”), still others through visions; and, when he wanted to prove Himself, He even sent His own Son, Jesus, to teach us to make sure that we understood what He was saying!

So, if God's not hiding from us, then why don't we see Him? The answer to that is also found in the Bible. In Genesis 3:10, we're told that after Adam and Eve sinned, they hid from God. In Exodus 20:19, we're told that the people of Israel – who have just been dramatically rescued by God – actually

beg Moses to NOT let God talk to them. In fact, Isaiah tells us more of the story:

It's your sins that have cut you off from God. Because of your sins, he has turned away and will not listen anymore. - Isaiah 59:2 (NLT)

When we take our eyes off of God, He chooses not to listen to us anymore. We run away, we do our own thing, and ignore God. Then, in those moments when it doesn't go well, we cry out, "There can't be a God because of all of the pain in the world." Never realizing that humans bring a lot of their pain on themselves by the choices they make, the focus they take, and the voices they listen to.

But, here's where the real difference between Christianity and all other religions kicks in. The standard to reach Heaven is perfection, and even one mistake leads to death! God, knowing this, sent His Son to die in our place so that we could go to Heaven!

"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. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him." - John 3:16-17 (NLT)

This is called "grace" – God giving us something that we don't deserve. Why is Christianity "better"? It says we don't have to do all of the work; in fact, we don't have to do any of it! Jesus did it all for us, and all we have to do is believe! It's God's gift to us, because we can't do it on our own.

If you want more than that, here's some other quick facts:

- The Bible is firmly grounded in history.
- The Bible describes events that we have discovered actually happened.
- The Bible names people who actually lived and we can find evidence for in archaeology.
- The Bible makes predictions in the Old Testament that we see fulfilled in the New Testament.
- Christianity stresses eyewitnesses and evidence over blind faith. We take the words of the over 500 witnesses who said they saw the resurrected Jesus, rather than the words of one guy who was alone in a cave!
- We know the tomb was empty, we know the Disciples died telling everyone what they saw, and we know that lives are still changed to this day.

All religions make "truth claims", which means that they consider their beliefs to be true and others false. So, based on this, which world view make the most sense?

The Bible also says that we only get one shot at this life:

And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment... - Hebrews 9:27 (NLT)

On the bright side, God says we have a way to get rid of our mistakes: we ask Jesus to forgive us. All we have to do is believe in God and pray something like:

"Dear God, I know I've sinned; I've made mistakes. I am sorry for what I've done wrong. I believe You sent Your Son, Jesus, to die for me. Please forgive me of my sins.

Please be in charge of my life. With the faith I have, I choose You today. Thank You for hearing my prayer. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen."

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