

TOUGH QUESTIONS

How can you say there is only one true faith? *Ephesians 4:1-6*

Is it wrong to try and persuade someone to change their beliefs?

A variety of influences have converged in our nation over the past century, fundamentally altering how people perceive truth. We live in a culture that now believes individuals must be allowed to interpret truth against the shifting and unique circumstances of their lives. Today, truth often comes prefixed with possessive pronouns – “my truth,” “your truth,” “their truth,” etc. Against that backdrop, Christianity’s claim that “Jesus rightly demands the allegiance of every human being - regardless of their cultural background or current beliefs - seems offensive and absurd.”¹ Today, many would say, “Yes, it is wrong to try and persuade someone to change their beliefs.”

However, consider some of the claims Jesus made about himself:

“Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die”² (John 11:25-26)

“Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)

Jesus fully believed everyone should share his convictions and even commissioned his closest followers to teach/convince people to accept his beliefs.

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

So, how do we properly persuade people when our culture considers such efforts immoral?

Beginning Considerations

- We live in a culture whose beliefs increasingly differ from our convictions. Consider:
 - A 2017 Barna report found that 93% of Americans believed Jesus was a real person.³

¹ Rebecca McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity: 12 hard questions for the world’s largest religion*, p.48.

² All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.

³ <https://www.barna.com/research/jesus-man-myth-god/>



- The same study also noted that only 43% of those who believed his historical reality also thought Jesus “was God living among humans.”
- In a different study, the Barna Group reported that 52% of Americans believe “Jesus was human and committed sins like other people.”⁴
- The growing differences between our culture’s beliefs and our convictions create points of potential conversation and conflict. To help ensure they result in fruitful interactions rather than fights, we must prepare ourselves to take advantage of them (1 Peter 3:15). Preparing oneself requires a few things:
 - We must be wise yet innocent (Matthew 10:16).
 - We must live in positive ways that distinguish us from the people around us, motivating them to ask about our differences (1 Peter 2:11-12).
 - We must prepare ourselves to answer questions by developing a conversational understanding of what we believe and increasing our awareness of our culture’s beliefs (1 Peter 3:15).
 - We must treat people with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:16).

One faith?

This lesson considers a few ideas that will hopefully expose flaws in the thinking that one should not try to convince someone to change their beliefs. It does not attempt to prove the reality of Jesus nor the truth of his teachings; it only seeks to create an opportunity for dialogue by exposing mistaken cultural beliefs.

Our society believes that truth exists and should be taught to everyone.

Our society embraces ethical standards and believes everyone should live by them.

Our society believes people should be persuaded to change their beliefs when those beliefs carry serious consequences.

Applications

- Truth revolves around the person of Jesus rather than abstract propositions.
- Character carries more weight than cogent arguments (Titus 2:9-10).
- Do not reduce every encounter to a zero-sum situation; learn patience and think long-term.
- Remember - no one is a universalist; everyone believes in some standard of truth.
- Expose the conviction everyone carries – knowable truth exists and has ethical standards – but do it with “gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:16).
- Respect people rather than ideas.
- Learn to ask good questions rather than simply offering defenses of your beliefs.

⁴ <https://www.barna.com/research/what-do-americans-believe-about-jesus-5-popular-beliefs/>



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Evening discussion

Whether or not you find yourself pressured to give answers to tough questions about your Christian beliefs (accusing questions like, “How can you say there is only one faith?”), we all live in a culture that gives the impression everyone embraces its post-Christian values. That marketed perspective fosters a growing tension between Christians and our culture, a pressure that has resulted in the so-called “culture wars” often referenced in the news and media. Given that context, this group discussion has specific goals. First, it seeks to reassure our convictions by reminding us that good reasons exist for our beliefs. Second, it will offer a few ways of responding to some of the more common challenges against Christianity.

Beginning considerations

- Even though it might feel like our culture faces uniquely challenging circumstances, those challenges are only re clothed ideas that have existed throughout history (*cf. Numbers 16:1-3; John 18:38*).
- Do not let those who challenge you set the stage for conversation. Gently push back against the assumptions on which they base the discussion. For example, the question “How can you say there is only one faith?” assumes some ways are wrong (Jesus’ exclusive way); it does not embrace all ways as it claims.
- Rather than trying to ‘win’ an argument, focus on creating a seed of discontent in someone’s mind by asking questions that reveal inconsistencies in their assumptions.
- Above all, humbly treat people with genuine love and respect; allow your character to “adorn the doctrine of God” (*Titus 2:10*).

Discussion questions

- What variations of the question “How can you say there is only one faith?” have you encountered?
- In what ways have you responded that you think led to positive outcomes? In what ways have you answered that you believe led to negative results?
- What outcomes should we look for when confronted with tough questions about Christianity?
- What can we do as a church family to prepare ourselves to respond to tough questions?
- What are you doing as an individual to prepare yourself to answer tough questions?

