

THE UNIQUENESS OF JESUS

Jesus called himself the Way, the Truth, and the Life for a reason.

In the 1977 movie *Oh, God!*, Jerry Landers, the assistant manager of a grocery store, asks God (played by George Burns) whether Jesus is his son. God/Burns says, “Yes”—then adds that Muhammad, Buddha, and others are also his children. In other words, Jesus is neither more nor less special than anyone else. While this approach wins plaudits in our pluralistic times, it runs counter to the witness of Scripture and the words of Jesus, who said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). So are we going to believe a comedian or Jesus? And if we are going to believe Jesus, what difference does his uniqueness make for our faith?



Scripture: John 13:36–14:7; 15:18–27; Acts 4:8–12; 1 John 4:7–12

Based on: “Still the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” by John R. Franke, *CHRISTIANITY TODAY*, December 2009



Christianity Today Bible Study

THE UNIQUENESS OF JESUS

Leader's Guide

Part 1 IDENTIFY THE CURRENT ISSUE

Note to leader: Provide each person with the "Still the Way, the Truth, and the Life" from CHRISTIANITY TODAY, included at the end of this study.

Christians, writes John R. Franke, "believe that Jesus is nothing less than the incarnate Son of God in whom the fullness of Deity dwells in human form; fully divine and fully human—and the Way, the Truth, and the Life." Yet that belief, which is at the heart of orthodox Christianity, is increasingly under fire in Western culture. Sadly, even the church itself seems to be succumbing to this temptation.

According to a Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life survey, over half of all American Christians hold that non-Christian faiths can lead to eternal life. Or, as Franke observes, "While many factors may account for these findings, it seems clear that more and more Christians, including evangelicals, are not convinced about Jesus' unique nature. Some Christians even argue that, in the midst of our pluralist and religiously diverse culture, it might be better to ease off of the talk of Jesus as exclusively unique. Aren't such assertions 'hegemonic' or 'triumphalistic' in a multicultural society?"

So we need to reflect on how Jesus is uniquely the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Discussion Starters:

- [Q] Do you believe that Jesus has a unique relationship to God the Father that other religious figures do not? Why or why not?
- [Q] Do you think there are other ways to get to heaven besides Jesus? What are your criteria?
- [Q] What are the differences between the three elements of Jesus' self-description (Way, Truth, and Life)? How else would you describe him?
- [Q] Are the exclusive claims of Christ a source of comfort or discomfort for you? Why?

Part 2 DISCOVER THE ETERNAL PRINCIPLES

Teaching Point One: We can trust Jesus because he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.



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Many people in our society, and even many Christians, take comfort in the idea that Jesus is just one way to God. “Yes,” they sometimes say, “Jesus is the way for Christians or for those who choose to embrace Christianity. But it is the height of arrogance to claim he is the *only* way. What about all those good Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, atheists, New Agers, Wiccans, tribal religion followers, and just plain ol’ agnostics? It wouldn’t be fair if they couldn’t get to heaven, too!” Scripture, however, throws a bucket of cold water on that thesis.

On the night Jesus was to be betrayed, his disciples felt his enemies closing in. They were scared and confused, and they said so. It is in this context that Jesus told them of his unique identity. It was a word of comfort in the face of a rapidly approaching storm.

Read John 13:36–14:7.

Jesus has told his disciples that he is going away and they cannot follow (13:33). Ever-impetuous Peter speaks for all of them when he blurts out, “Lord, where are you going?” (13:36a). Jesus doesn’t answer the question directly, but clarifies that while they will not be able to go with him immediately, they “will follow later” (13:36b). The relationship they have will be altered, but not sundered. This is not good enough for Peter, who pledges that he is ready to die for Jesus (13:37). Now Jesus, who has been holding back the details of what is to come, reveals that Peter not only will not die for him, he will deny his faith. It is a crushing blow.

[Q] Think of a time when you had great confidence in yourself as a Christ-follower, only to fail miserably. How did you cope?

[Q] Jesus further reassures the disciples, pointing out that if they have Jesus, they have the Father as well (14:7). It is a package deal. So if someone does not have Jesus, does he or she have the Father? Explain

Teaching Point Two: The Way: Jesus is the unique and only Savior.

Franke writes, “I was once with a group of Christian students who were happy to maintain that Jesus was unique, but also quick to affirm that so is every human being, since all are made in the image of God.” The apostle Peter could never fall into such a relativistic error. He had been in the Upper Room when Jesus made his famous declaration of uniqueness (John 14:6). We are all unique creations of God, of course, but Jesus’ uniqueness is a *necessary* uniqueness, because Jesus declares, “No one comes to the Father except through me.” Being related properly to God the Father and God the Son is the necessary starting point for salvation and all that follows, including, as Franke says, the way of love.



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Read Acts 4:8–12. In this section Peter lays the foundation by telling the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem that life is found only in Jesus.

[Q] Using irony, Peter tells the rulers and elders what they don't want to hear, that the healing was done not in their name or in anyone else's, but solely in the name (by the authority of) "Jesus of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead" (v. 10b). How did Peter name the leaders' sin but also point to salvation?

[Q] When others oppose you, what is harder for you—speaking convicting words or showing love and grace? Explain.

[Q] Peter refers the Jewish leaders to their own Scriptures, specifically Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 28:16; and Zechariah 10:4. Their rejection of Jesus, however awful, was a necessary part of God's saving plan (v. 11). How have you seen God bring good from evil?

- How does this passage suggest we might use Scripture to speak with our Jewish friends?

[Q] Peter, having marshaled his evidence, now closes his case (v. 12). What is his case?

[Q] Do you think God is fair in providing only one way to come to him? Why or why not?

Teaching Point Three: The Truth: The Holy Spirit will help us speak the truth about Jesus.

Many people do not accept that Jesus is the only way, of course. "Phrases such as 'you have your truth and I have mine' or 'that may be true for you but it's not true for me' also express [our] cultural mood," Franke says. "Such expressions imply that truth is determined by the particular culture or community one happens to be in. Cultural relativists deny that any particular set of ideas, beliefs, or practices can provide the basis for shared convictions about ultimate truth."

Franke rightly points out that part of our problem is that we are looking at truth as something that is strictly objective—a set of propositions—rather than as a Person. Propositions can be debated; people can be encountered. Jesus reveals *himself* as the Truth, and he has a strong supporting witness, the Holy Spirit. This Witness helps us in *our* witness, in a world where truth is up for grabs, to the One who is the Truth.

Read John 15:18–27.



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[Q] Jesus, about to depart, warns his disciples that they will face opposition (vv. 18–20). The world will hate them because it hates him. What has (or does) this hatred look like in your life?

[Q] Yet the disciples are not left defenseless and alone in such a world (vv. 26–27). Jesus promises to send them “the Counselor” or “the Spirit of truth.” So we have truth squared—truth testifying to Truth. Give an example of how the Holy Spirit’s presence has helped you testify to the Truth.

Optional Activity: *Ask the members of your group to name a local person or group that is opposed to Christ. It might be an atheist organization, a disgruntled and bitter neighbor, or even a Wicca group. Then discuss how your group might reach out to this person or group by demonstrating love and yet standing for truth. Be prepared for opposition—and for the Spirit’s help.*

Teaching Point Four: The Life: Our love is based on the self-giving love of God.

We have seen that Jesus is unique, and this uniqueness makes him the Way to God and the Truth whom we can speak up about. But how is he uniquely the Life, and how do we live in such a way that his life becomes ours? Franke reminds us that Christ’s life is connected to the loving community that is the essence of the Trinity. “The church, the community of Christ’s intentional followers, is called to be a foretaste of this life, this relational fellowship of love, a provisional demonstration of God’s will for all of creation,” Franke says. “We are a people who, because we share in the Holy Spirit, participate in the eternal love of God. As such, we represent God in the midst of a fallen world through lives that reflect God’s own loving character.” Read 1 John 4:7–12.

[Q] The apostle John, who was also in the Upper Room, instructs his “dear friends” to “love one another,” not because it is the right thing to do or because we will get something out of it, but because “love comes from God” (v. 7). How does knowing the ultimate Source of love help us to live it? What is the connection between our love and our identity?

[Q] Because “God is love,” John says we ought to fear if we do not love. The one who fails to love “does not know God.” Is it possible to love God and not love fellow human beings (v. 8)? Explain.

[Q] How does verse 9 confirm God’s love for us no matter what kind of difficulties we are going through?



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[Q] John indicates that we can make the invisible God visible to others by our love for one another (v. 12). Who might God be nudging you to show love to as a demonstration of his love?

Part 3 **APPLY YOUR FINDINGS**

Jesus is the Way. In a world in which there are many confusing paths, it is good news indeed that Jesus provides us with a clear path to the Father. The Way may bring troubles, but they will be overwhelmed by the joy that awaits us beyond them. *Jesus is the Truth.* He is not the answer to a math problem or a scientific formula. The Truth is a Person, attested by another Person, the “Spirit of truth,” who helps us share Jesus with others. *Jesus is the Life.* He not only, as the third Person of the Trinity, has life in himself; he shares that life with others. Jesus’ followers, because of our relationship with God and helped by the example of Christ’s sacrifice, are to demonstrate that Life to others.

In a world that sees the exclusive claims of Christ as bad news, his followers are to show why they are good news indeed. And with the help of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we can.

Action Point: *Take one of the four teaching points in this study and devise a simple way to show and tell it in your neighborhood or church. For example, write a letter to the editor at Christmas or Easter demonstrating why Jesus is the Way. Or take a concordance and list all the ways that the Spirit testifies to Jesus in the New Testament. Then commit to talk with a friend about Jesus, asking the Spirit to help you. Or visit a church member who is in a hospital or nursing home.*

— *Stan Guthrie is author of* *Missions in the Third Millennium: 21 Key Trends for the 21st Century*. *A CT editor at large, he writes a column for* BreakPoint.org *and blogs at* stanguthrie.com.



RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

☞ Check out the following Bible studies at: ChristianBibleStudies.com

☞ **Gospel of John: Knowing Jesus** This basic ten-session Bible study identifies the seven names and titles of Jesus that reveal him as the eternal God, who came to transform us.

☞ **Jesus As Your Mentor** We often want mentors to show us how to live. Who does that better than Christ himself? This four-session Bible study will show that Jesus lived the best life ever, and when we let him mentor us, he will show us how to be the best leader, friend, and lover, living the best way possible.

☞ **Matthew: Jesus the Messiah** This seven-session Bible study takes a close look at the first four chapters of the Gospel of Matthew and looks at the importance of obedience to God, the power of Jesus' name, living outside our comfort zone, gaining power over temptation, discovering what God expects of us, and staying on task with our mission.

☞ **The Universe Next Door**, fourth edition, by James W. Sire (IVP, 2004). Clear explanations of Christian theism, deism, naturalism, nihilism, existentialism, Eastern pantheistic monism, New Age philosophy, and postmodernism.

☞ **Manifold Witness: The Plurality of Truth**, by John R. Franke (Abingdon, 2008). Appreciating the many ways that Christian traditions have understood the faith, Franke argues, saves us from becoming a legalistic and rigidly dogmatic religion, rather than a faith that is expressed beautifully in many ways under the cross of Christ.

☞ **Is Jesus the Only Savior?**, by James R. Edwards (Eerdmans, 2005). Assembles extensive support to show that Jesus considered himself the unique and saving mission of God to the world.

☞ <http://www.ccci.org/wij/index.aspx>. How to begin a relationship with God.



STILL THE WAY,

By John R. Franke

Billions seem happy in their non-Christian faiths. More people than ever doubt that anyone has a corner on truth. So why do Christians keep insisting that Jesus is . . .

THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE

A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO, I participated in a conference in which two prominent postmodern philosophers addressed a group of Christians on a range of theological, philosophical, and practical issues. Those attending were largely committed to addressing some of the postmodern challenges in North America.

I was happy to hear some commonly held misconceptions of postmodern thought—like texts can mean anything that readers would like them to say—decisively critiqued and corrected. At another point, presenters demonstrated how deconstruction can be an ally of vibrant Christian faith.

On the last day, the discussion focused on Christian engagement with other religions. I resonated with much of what was said: the need for respectful dialogue, the willingness to listen and learn, and the intent to promote peace and understanding. But I also experienced a growing sense of unease. As my concern crystallized, I asked our distinguished guests: As those who self-identified with the Christian tradition, how did they understand the uniqueness of Jesus Christ?

Their response was that of course Jesus is unique. But, they continued, so are the leaders of the other world religions. While it was certainly true that Jesus is unique and different from other religious leaders, they said, it is also true that they are unique in relation to him. The uniqueness of Jesus was no different from that of any other important religious figure. Only in this way, they suggested, is equality among religions established as a basis for interreligious dialogue.

This view is not held merely by those in the lofty climes of the

academy. I was once with a group of Christian students who were happy to maintain that Jesus was unique, but also quick to affirm that so is every human being, since all are made in the image of God. This reminded me of a statement from George Burns, playing the title role in the 1977 movie *Oh, God!* When asked if Jesus was his son, he says, yes, Jesus was his son—and Buddha was his son, and Muhammad was his son, and in fact, all human beings are his sons and daughters since he created them all.

This is predictable Hollywood fare, but Christians have historically affirmed much more than this when we confess the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. We believe that Jesus is nothing less than the incarnate Son of God in whom the fullness of the Deity dwells in human form; fully divine and fully human—and the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

However, recent evidence suggests that what Christians have historically affirmed is now up for grabs. According to a 2008 national survey conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 52 percent of all American Christians believe that non-Christian faiths can lead to eternal life. Further, despite a recent countertrend, the number of evangelicals who believe this remains remarkably high (see “Do Evangelicals Believe in Exclusivity?” page 30). While many factors may account for these findings, it seems clear that a surprising number of Christians, including evangelicals, are not convinced of Jesus’ unique nature.

Some Christians even argue that, in the midst of our pluralist and religiously diverse culture, it might be better to ease off the talk about Jesus as exclusively unique. Aren’t such assertions “hegemonic” or “triumphalistic” in a multicultural society?

In fact, there is a great deal at stake in denying that Jesus is *the Way, the Truth, and the Life*.

THE WAY

In the midst of a world teeming with religious diversity, what does it mean to say that Jesus is the Way? Simply put, it means we should look to Jesus to discover how God acts in the world. As the divine incarnation of God's love and mission, Jesus exemplifies the Way of God in the world. He was with God "in the beginning" and was sent into the world not only to tell us about God but also to demonstrate how God wants us to live.

And how does God want us to live? The short answer is that God calls us to love: "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love" (1 John 4:7–8; all biblical quotations are from the TNIV). But the question is, What is love?

Many assume they know what love is. Love makes you feel good. Love doesn't judge. Love means never having to say you're sorry. From the perspective of the Christian faith, such answers are both inadequate and false. These common ideas about love are shaped by our culture—the music we listen to, the movies we watch, and the books we read. Instead, we learn about love by looking at Jesus.

Jesus Christ is the living embodiment of God's gracious character as the One who loves. This love is not an abstract notion or a set of feelings, but is rather characterized by the *action* of God in the person of Jesus Christ. Commitment to Jesus as the Way means we do not presume to know the nature of divine love ahead of time. We certainly do not let our culture tell us what love is. Rather, our understanding of true love, the love of God, is shaped by the particular way in which God loves in and through Jesus Christ.

The affirmation of Jesus as the Way means to acknowledge that he shows us who God is and how God acts in the world.

As the One sent by the Father, Jesus exemplifies the Way of love in his mission to the world. Three biblical texts help us to understand his mission and how we participate in it.

In the first, Jesus goes to the Nazareth synagogue on the Sabbath and takes onto himself the words of the prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18–19). In calling disciples and creating a community of the Way, Jesus calls us to join him in his struggle for the liberation of human beings from all the forces of oppression.

In the second, the tax collector Zacchaeus, in response to Jesus, promises to give half of his possessions to the poor and pay back fourfold anyone he has cheated. Jesus says to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and

to save what was lost" (Luke 19:9–10). The church, after the pattern of Jesus, is to seek the lost and to proclaim the good news of salvation in Christ. Hence, evangelism is central to the liberating and reconciling mission of God.

A third text stands at the heart of the gospel: "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human being, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Phil. 2:6–8). Faithfulness to the mission of Jesus means emulating his humility by valuing others above ourselves. This is the Way of Jesus.

The affirmation of Jesus as the Way, then, means to acknowledge that he shows us who God is and how God acts in the world, and the unique nature and character of the divine mission. All roads do not lead to God. The Way of Jesus is not simply about an inwardly focused or otherworldly spirituality, or a social activism that is often viewed as its alternative. Rather, it is the Way of humility and self-denial for the sake of others. Denial of the unique nature of Jesus compromises the redemption accomplished through his life and death as well as the Way of life he models for us and calls us to follow.

THE TRUTH

What does it mean to say that Jesus is the Truth in a world filled with competing truth claims, as well as people who doubt the very existence of truth? Convolution and inconclusive speculation about truth has led many to become, like Pilate, cynical about the very idea—"What is truth?" The Christian belief that Jesus Christ is the Truth suggests a hopeful answer.

Truth is not finally to be found in abstract notions or theories, but rather in the person of Jesus Christ, the unique Son of God and the living embodiment of truth. From this perspective, knowing truth depends on being in proper relationship to this one person who is divine truth. Jesus is categorically different from all other prophets, witnesses, and messengers from God. Jesus is all of these things, yet more. Along with the Father and the Spirit, Jesus himself is God.

In the Gospel of John, this affirmation is expressed by calling Jesus the *logos* of God, the living and active Word of God, the very basis of creation: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (1:1–5).

John explicitly says what he means when he says Jesus is the *logos* of God—and he certainly means more than abstract truth: "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known" (1:17–18).

Jesus, then, is presented as the all-encompassing Truth of



God, a truth that is personal, active, relational, and gracious.

John fills out this picture in terms of Jesus' relationship to the Spirit. "When the Advocate comes," says Jesus, "whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me" (15:26). The Spirit of truth bears witness to Jesus (not to some philosophy or theory) as the incarnate manifestation of truth—truth that has "moved into the neighborhood," as Eugene Peterson puts it in *The Message*. And clearly, an important aspect of the Spirit's truth-bearing work is found in the inspired Scripture, which is at its core a witness to Jesus Christ the Truth.

This too has many consequences, but let me note three. First, because Jesus is the Truth, the very Truth of God, we cannot limit our understanding of him as merely a good moral teacher and significant religious leader, one ethical genius among others. This is to pull the rug out from under the most basic Christian understanding of Jesus. When we claim Jesus is unique, we mean that he is in an altogether different category from Moses, Buddha, Muhammad, or whomever. Such religious geniuses have indeed spoken many truths, but those truths are truths only insofar as they finally point to the Truth of God, that is, the life and work of Jesus Christ, the Truth. As Christians enter into interfaith conversations, it is important that we maintain this fundamental understanding of Jesus.

A second consequence is illustrated by a discussion I was in recently. A pastor who wanted to demonstrate the strength of his conviction said that if Jesus himself were to appear and affirm the opposing view, he would look him straight in the eye and say, "No, Jesus, you are wrong, I know this based on

my experience, and nothing you can say will lead me to believe otherwise."

Phrases like "you have your truth and I have mine" or "that may be true for you but it's not true for me" also express this cultural mood. Such expressions imply that truth is determined by the particular community one happens to be in. Cultural relativists deny that a particular set of ideas, beliefs, or practices can provide the basis for shared convictions about ultimate truth. Thus, it is impossible for people to arrive at common conceptions of truth, except perhaps to affirm their commitment to the idea that there is no ultimate truth. Everything is interpretation: mine, yours; ours, theirs; each as good as another.

The Christian church has the audacity, in this climate, to insist that some things are true for everyone regardless of their social location, beliefs, or particular opinions. Not everything that is *claimed* to be true actually *is* true. Some beliefs and convictions, no matter how sincerely held, are false and untrue and must be opposed. We must assert this in humility—because the Christian message is not "our" truth, but is a divine gift to us, as it is a gift to the world. Nor do we claim to know truth fully and completely—that only God can do—but what we are given to know by God in Christ, we know truly and confidently. Christians cannot adopt moral relativism without compromising the conviction that God, the source of all truth, speaks in and through Jesus Christ, the Truth.

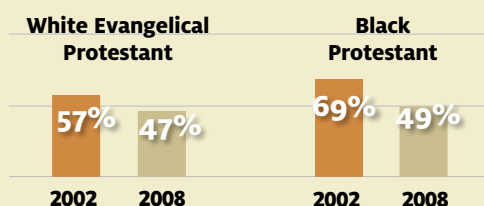
Finally, this affirmation that Jesus is the Truth is a stark challenge to abstract ideas of truth. As noted above, in Jesus we discover that truth is not merely intellectual or even moral, but personal and relational—truth for Christians is very much woven

DO EVANGELICALS BELIEVE IN EXCLUSIVITY?

Last year the Pew Forum surveyed American Christians, asking them to choose between the statements 'Many religions can lead to eternal life' and 'My religion is the one, true faith.'

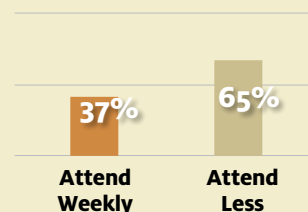
Becoming More Exclusive

Christians who chose 'Many religions can lead to eternal life.'

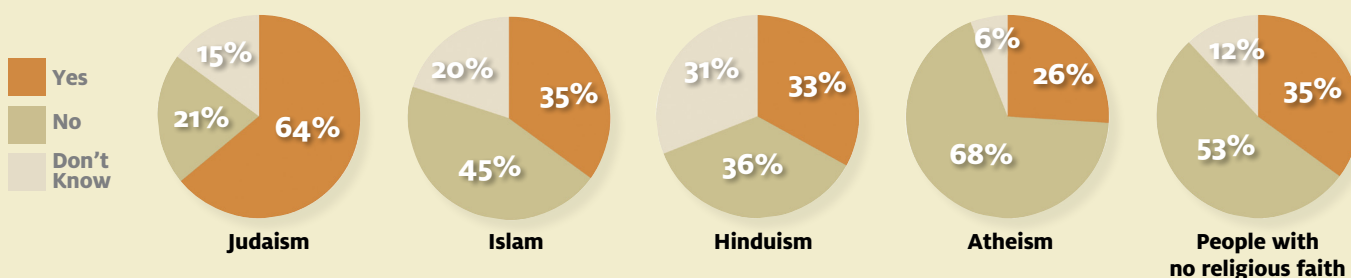


Church Attendance Matters

Evangelicals who chose 'Many religions can lead to eternal life.'



Which Other Religions? Among those evangelicals who chose 'Many religions can lead to eternal life,' those who believe that includes . . .



Source: Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. Evangelicals in the survey are Protestants who self-identified as "born-again or evangelical."

into the theme of love. Some of that was noted in the section about Jesus as the Way. Another dimension is outlined below.

THE LIFE

The fullness of Life in Jesus is found in proper relationship to the Father through the person of Jesus. This life is not simply an escape from the divine judgment of death and destruction, but also a quality of life, in particular, a life lived in fellowship with the triune God through Jesus.

In thinking about the divine life we should ask, What was God doing before the creation of the world? We might at first be tempted to reply, with some early Christian writers, that God was preparing a place for people who asked such questions! And some speculations about God in church history might make this seem the best answer. But answering this apparently abstract question can help us understand what we mean when we say that Jesus is the Life.

Admittedly, we do not know much about the activity of God before creation, but this much seems incontrovertible: Throughout all eternity, God lives a life of love between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When Scripture says that “God is love” (1 John 4:8), it points not simply to God’s feelings but to the life that God lives. Love is a verb. God is involved in giving, receiving, and sharing love from all eternity as three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Without denying the traditional teaching that the unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is found in a common essence or substance, thinking about God in such terms can become overly abstract. God’s unity can also be understood through the idea of relationality. The three persons of the Trinity, while wholly distinct from each other, are also bound together in such a way that they depend on each other for their very identities as Father, Son, and Spirit. In other words, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one by virtue of their interdependent relationality. From the beginning and throughout all eternity, the life of the triune God has been and continues to be characterized by love.

Indeed, there is no God other than Father, Son, and Spirit bound together in the actions of love throughout eternity. And the love lived out by the Trinitarian persons among themselves provides a description of the inner life of God apart from any reference to creation.

God does not create humans in order finally to have someone to love. Creation reflects the expansive love of God, whereby the triune God brings into being another reality, that which is not God, and establishes a covenantal relationship of love, grace, and blessing—to draw creation into the divine fellowship of love. To participate in this fellowship is the Life. Jesus, as the unique Son of God, lives his eternal life in this reality, and he invites all of humanity to participate in this life through him.

The church, the community of Christ’s intentional followers, is called to be a foretaste of this life, this relational fellowship of love, a provisional demonstration of God’s will for all of creation. We are a people who, because we share in the Holy Spirit, participate in the eternal love of God. As such, we represent God in the midst of a fallen world through lives that reflect

God’s own loving character. Only through relationships and in community can we truly show what God is like, for God is the community of love, the eternal relational dynamic enjoyed by the three persons of the Trinity.

Again, the consequences are immense. Take apologetics and evangelism. When we have conversations with people of other faiths or no faith, we must of course give a credible intellectual account of the faith. But recognizing that Jesus is not just the Truth but also the Life means that we’re not just calling them to change their worldview or to take up a new moral agenda. We’re inviting them into a relationship with God. Not an abstract, ethereal relationship, but rather a concrete fellowship of love with God through his people, a fellowship

Jesus is the all-encompassing Truth of God, a truth that is personal, active, relational, and gracious.

experienced here and now in the life of the church, a fellowship lived in anticipation of the climax of God’s work of new creation. To be a Christian means to participate in Life, that is, in Jesus Christ as he participated in the life of the triune God.

And once more we see that this approach to Life is so unique, we simply cannot abandon it—as if it were just another way of approaching God or living spiritually. Denial of the uniqueness of Jesus as the Life ends up compromising the distinctive Christian teaching that God is triune. Doing so cuts the heart out of Christian witness in the world.

BEARING WITNESS

As we try to witness to our relativistic world about the uniqueness of Christ, we have to abandon the idea that this is something we can demonstrate with definitive proof, particularly to those who are predisposed to deny this. It is beyond the scope of human ability to produce in others the faith to see Jesus as he is. But it is the church’s calling to continue to bear witness to Jesus and demonstrate the significance of his person for the whole fabric of Christian faith.

The belief that Jesus Christ is none other than God come in the flesh shapes our understanding of every point of distinctive Christian teaching. I’ve argued in a recent book that the diversity of the church is not a problem to be solved but is, in fact, the blessing of God. Indeed, the proper expression of orthodox, biblical faith can only be characterized by plurality. But in the midst of our diversity, we must remain unified on this point—Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. If we fail to stand fast here everything else will be in vain and the Christian church will lose its bearings. We will fail in our missional vocation to be the image of God and the body of Christ in the world. ☩

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Go to ChristianBibleStudies.com for “The Uniqueness of Jesus,” a Bible study based on this article.