



How Should We Respond to "Surely All Religions Lead to God"?

Insights from Paul's Approach in Athens and Contemporary Advice

Introduction

When faced with the question, "surely all religions lead to God," it's essential to respond thoughtfully and with sensitivity. This query often stems from a place of genuine curiosity, confusion, or an underlying belief in religious pluralism. To address this effectively, we can draw lessons from the Apostle Paul's experience in Athens, as well as integrating respectful and informed strategies.

Paul's Approach in Athens

Paul encountered a similar challenge when he visited Athens, a city inundated with idols and false gods. Acts 17:16 states, "While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols." Paul's reaction was not one of anger or a desire to win arguments, but rather a profound concern for the spiritual well-being of the Athenians. He was passionate about guiding those who were lost and confused.

Paul's method provides a valuable framework for how we might respond today:

- **Observation and Understanding:** Paul first observed the religious landscape of Athens. He took the time to understand their beliefs and practices, which allowed him to engage more effectively.
- **Finding Common Ground:** When speaking at the Areopagus, Paul acknowledged the Athenians' religiosity and used it as a starting point for his message. He referenced their altar to an "unknown god" and introduced them to the God he proclaimed (Acts 17:22-23).
- **Respectful Dialogue:** Paul did not dismiss their beliefs outright. Instead, he respectfully presented the truth about Jesus and the resurrection, making his case with reason and care (Acts 17:24-31).

Guidelines for Our Response

Drawing from Paul's example, here are four key principles for responding to the statement, "surely all religions lead to God":

1. We Need to Be Humble

Humility is crucial in these conversations. We must remember that we, too, were once in need of a saviour. There's no room for arrogance; we are like beggars who have found bread, sharing it

with those who are hungry. This mindset helps us approach others with genuine compassion and understanding.

2. We Need to Be Positive

Peter and Paul seized the opportunities God gave them to share the message of Jesus. They did not focus on tearing down the beliefs of others but instead highlighted the hope and truth found in Christ. Being positive in our approach means emphasizing the transformative power of the gospel without belittling others' faiths.

3. We Need to Be Respectful

Respect is fundamental. The individuals we engage with are made in the image of God, and He loves them deeply. Remembering this can help us communicate with kindness and respect. It's essential to acknowledge the sincerity of their beliefs and to approach the conversation with genuine curiosity and a desire for mutual understanding.

4. We Need to Be Courageous

The early Christians were unashamed in their proclamation of Jesus. Despite facing opposition and even persecution, they persisted in sharing their faith. Courage in our context means being willing to speak the truth in love, even when it's uncomfortable or unpopular. Michael Green aptly states, "Far from closing our options, pluralism allows us to proclaim an undiluted gospel in the public square and in the supermarket of faiths, allowing others the same right. Let the truth prevail and let craven silence be banished."

Practical Steps to Respond

To effectively respond to the assertion that all religions lead to God, consider the following practical steps:

- **Educate Yourself:** Gain a deeper understanding of both your faith and the beliefs of others. This knowledge will enable you to engage in meaningful and respectful dialogue.
- **Listen Actively:** Before responding, listen carefully to what the other person is saying. This demonstrates respect and helps you address their specific concerns and questions.
- **Ask Questions:** Use questions to explore their perspective further. For instance, you might ask, "What do you believe about God?" or "How do you understand the concept of salvation?"
- **Share Your Story:** Personal testimonies can be powerful. Share how your faith in Jesus has impacted your life, focusing on the hope and transformation you've experienced.
- **Present the Gospel Clearly:** Explain the core message of Christianity clearly and concisely. Emphasize the uniqueness of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection as the way to reconciliation with God.
- **Be Patient:** Understand that changing deeply held beliefs takes time. Be patient and willing to continue the conversation over multiple encounters.

Conclusion

Responding to the statement, "***surely all religions lead to God,***" requires a blend of humility, positivity, respect, and courage. By following Paul's example in Athens and applying these principles, we can engage in meaningful, respectful, and effective conversations about faith. As we grow in our understanding of Jesus and the gospel, our confidence and ability to share will naturally increase, allowing us to be faithful witnesses in a diverse and pluralistic world.