

“Christianity Today” magazine, published on their web site, a list of 10 objections that people have, to Christianity. And number 4 on their list, was “*It's **narrow-minded** to think Jesus is the only way to God.*”<sup>i</sup>

Now, I don't know if that list was supposed to be in order of the most common objections to the least common, or not, but I reckon, particularly in a multi-cultural society (such as Australia), it would be pretty high on the list of objections that people have against Christianity – probably #2, or maybe #3.

As our society gets more and more (what we call) “post-Christian” – as it struggles to free itself of its Christian heritage – the one (so-called) ‘virtue’ that politically correct Australia seems to hold most dear, is the so-called virtue of “tolerance”.

And true Christianity does not fit the mould of ‘tolerance’ – in fact it cannot. It never has, and it never will. “Tolerance” is not a fruit of the Spirit, because “tolerance” will accept a lie, as being just as valid as the truth. And Christianity, is too honest for that.

The Gospel, is a gospel of hope, and love, and truth... And for this reason, preachers of the Gospel cannot tolerate the alternative lie – the lie that deceives so many people, and tears away the hope from so many – that lie, which says, “It doesn't matter which god you worship.” And so, to a ‘tolerant’ society, Christians are indeed seen as being **extremely intolerant** – to believe that Jesus is the **only** way to God. “How arrogant is that???” , they would say...

And I'll be the first to admit, "Yep, that's a very exclusivist view... And it might **sound** arrogant, but that doesn't prevent it, from being 100% true..."

John 14:6 Jesus [Himself] said .... "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Righteousness is available to **everyone** who believes – not just some people. **Anyone** who believes in Jesus can be saved, and so in that respect Christianity **isn't** exclusivist, in fact, it's far from it – it's open to everyone:

- It doesn't matter where you were born
- it doesn't matter what you **used** to believe
- it doesn't matter what colour your skin is
- or what nationality you are
- It doesn't matter what faith your parents were
- And it doesn't matter what you've done in the past
- Whether you were a philanthropist
- or a sex offender
- or if you've been convicted of murder or armed robbery.
- It doesn't matter if you've been depressed
- or if you're same-sex-attracted
- or if you're divorced
- or if you're an alcoholic
- or addicted to drugs
- Or if you've even tried to take a life – maybe even your own...
  
- It doesn't matter where you've been,
- or what you've done,
- or how you feel about yourself .

- It doesn't matter what guilt you currently carry,,,,, If you repent and turn to Jesus, you **will be** forgiven, and you will be saved. Now, that's not exclusivist is it????

Well, to those who **don't** believe,,,,, ... it is. Jesus is a stumbling-block, you see.

Here's the thing – it's only those, who **submit** to **God's** righteousness, who **are** saved. And what is God's righteousness? It's His plan of salvation through Christ, and through Christ alone.

And that's the barrier, that many will never, ever get over.

Twice in today's reading, it tells us that everyone who believes will be saved. Now, that doesn't mean we can believe whatever we like. For example, the Jews were zealous for God, but they were zealously wrong. The Torah; the book of the Law – the Law of Moses, **and** the books of the prophets, was all a path which was (supposed) to lead them to Jesus.

And they religiously followed these, but when Jesus turned up, their religion couldn't handle Him... And they found that they were enemies of Jesus... They claimed that they were the people of God, but they killed Him.

You know, I've heard it said (so many times), "It doesn't matter what you believe. As long as if you're sincere, and as long as if you do good – it doesn't matter what you believe..."

But let me tell you, it doesn't matter how sincere I am, if I'm sincerely wrong... *A traveller might sincerely believe that the road to Cunnamulla will get them to Roma, but they would be sincerely wrong...* And it doesn't matter how much good I manage to do, if I'm depending on my righteousness, I'm sincerely wrong, and I'm never going to attain the righteousness of God...

When it comes to belief, we have to believe in Jesus.... So, what does that entail?

There are many people who are happy to believe in Jesus. *A Hindu will believe in Jesus, and put Him alongside all their other gods.*

And most people in our society believe in Jesus – they believe that He lived... There's also a lot of people who believe that He died and that He rose again... But **that's** not even what it means – to be a believer. Even Satan and his demons believe that Jesus died and rose again. They even know that He died to save us. They believe and they shudder...

No... Believing **about** Jesus isn't the barrier... Believing **about** what Jesus did, **isn't** the rock that makes men stumble...

To believe, means we have to submit to God's way.... And **that's** the stumbling block.

Today, I'm going to share with you, 2 barriers to belief – two barriers to submitting to God's way. And they're almost exact opposites to each other.

The first barrier to belief, is what I'm going to call "easy believism".

There is a very 'popularist gospel' being preached today, and it's being taught by some of the fastest growing churches in the west... It's the gospel that says, "All you have to do is believe in Jesus, and you are saved."

And it isn't any wonder, why these are the fastest growing churches: They have removed the offence of the gospel. There's nothing offensive about it. It makes no demands on the 'would-be' believer. They preach "You have received the righteousness of God", but they divorce the righteousness of God, from "acts of righteousness". And that's something we cannot do.

Over the last couple of months, as we've studied Paul's letter to the Romans, he's been explaining to us, about how "in Christ" we no longer live according to the flesh – we now live according to the Spirit... We submit to Jesus as "Lord", and the Holy Spirit, who lives in us, produces works of the Spirit...

But now in today's reading, we're told that "**Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.**" And this is one of the key verses that preachers of

“easybelievism” rely on... But they misunderstand it completely.

When Paul wrote that **Christ is the end of the law for righteousness**, he wasn't saying we don't have to try to do the right thing any more... It doesn't mean that God's righteous standards have somehow become irrelevant...

- It doesn't mean we can look at a hungry man and say: Oh God bless you, I'm feeding you in my heart, but keeping my money for myself
- or that we can ignore the lonely, because there's fun to be had just now.
- or that we can sleep around, and at the same time praise Jesus for the grace that has given us such freedom
- and it doesn't mean I can get drunk, and swear, and lie and cheat.....

That's not what it means (that **Christ is the end of the law**). Jesus tells us what it does mean: He said:

Matthew 5:17 **“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. <sup>18</sup> For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. <sup>19</sup> Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven,**

but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>20</sup> For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus didn't come to take away the Law – He came to fulfil it. That's what it means – He didn't come to **end** righteousness – He came to make it possible for us to live by the Spirit – To **live** a life **filled** with righteousness.

He was the means, of making us into a people, who are not only righteous in status, because we've been forgiven in Christ, but a people who are righteous in what we do, because Christ lives in us...

So, that's one barrier to belief – merely believing about Jesus and what Jesus has done for us, but failing to submit to Jesus. In other words, seeing Jesus as “the **end** of righteous living”, rather than understanding that He is “the **means** of righteous living”...

The second barrier to belief, can be seen, in the Jews of Jesus' day, and we've already touched on this...

They were zealous for God. They did their absolute best, to keep God's Law... God had given them His law as a path to righteousness... But they seemed to think that the Law, was the end in itself... What they **didn't** understand, was that the

Law was a path to Jesus Christ – Who is the fulfilment of the Law ...

And so they believed, that they had it in their own power, to do enough good, that they could satisfy God, and be rewarded that they'd done... We can get a bit of an idea of how they thought, from a story that Jesus told, about a Pharisee who prayed: <sup>Luke 18:11</sup> ..... 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.'

Alright, they believed, that they had it in their own power, to do enough good, that they could satisfy God, and be rewarded...

But if we've learned one thing in Romans so far, I hope we've learned this: We are **not** saved by doing good. We are saved by faith. ... The offence of the Gospel is, "You are unable to save yourself." I'm **not** good enough, and I can never be good enough.

That was the problem with the Jews of Jesus' day – they did not submit to **God's** righteousness. They tried to establish their own position of righteousness.

And isn't that exactly what we see in our society today???

*"I don't need Jesus, because I'm not a bad person."*



*“Oh, we remember Uncle Fred. He was such a good bloke. He was so nice. Wouldn't ever hurt anyone (unless they deserved it)... Wouldn't ever say a bad word about anybody... Even though he wasn't religious, and he didn't have much time for God, or much use for praying, I'm confident Uncle Fred will be up there, looking down on us...”*

Isn't that what people in our society believe? “We establish our own position of righteousness”.

<sup>3</sup> ... being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

Chapter 9:32 says: ..... they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone....

*In Isaiah 8:13–15 the prophet [Isaiah] foretells how the Assyrian invasion will sweep over the land of Israel like the waters of a great flood. But there will be one place of refuge from the overwhelming water: God himself will [be] a 'sanctuary' to all who put their trust in him, a rock on which they will stand secure.*

But unfortunately, most people **didn't** entrust themselves to God. They *put their confidence in other powers or resources*, and instead of standing on the rock of God for safety, they were crushed against it... <sup>ii</sup>

And just like that, Jesus is the stumbling block. The offence of the gospel, is “Unless we stand on the rock of Jesus Christ, we’re going to trip over Him.” He is either our refuge, or our undoing

- no other god can save you
- no other creed
- no amount of good works
- no acts of penance.

It is Christ and Christ alone, who saves us.

Luke 18:<sup>9</sup> [Jesus]... told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: <sup>10</sup> “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’

<sup>13</sup> But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ <sup>14</sup> I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

To be saved, we submit to God's righteousness. We submit to Jesus Christ, and believe in Him – the end – the fulfilment of the Law.

If we are filled with pride, and so reject our need of the Saviour, one day that same rock, on whom we should be standing, will crush us on the day of judgment...

And we understand that Jesus, is not the end of righteous living – He is the means of righteous living. And so we trust in Him, and we live in Him.

Now, what is Jesus to you? Is He the rock on which you stand? Or is your self-righteousness or lack of submission, something that makes you stumble???

Let's Pray.

Lord Jesus, how challenging it is,  
that the rock of salvation,  
is also the rock by which many will stumble.

Lord,  
please forgive me of all of my pride and self-righteousness.  
Forgive me, for when I have failed to bend my knee to You as  
"Lord".

Lord Jesus,  
I forsake my own righteousness.  
I am a sinner in need of a saviour.  
I am helpless, and in need of Your strength.

Lord, thank You that You died,  
to take away my sin.

I repent in my head and in my heart,  
of all of my sin and all of my wrongdoing.  
And Lord I ask, that by your Holy Spirit,  
you will show me what repentance looks like  
in my actions.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
I thank You for your grace and your forgiveness.  
And I ask that You would fill me with Your Holy Spirit,  
and my means of righteous living.  
in Christ Jesus.. Amen

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/articles/evangelism/tcw-2000-002-7.62.html>

<sup>ii</sup> Bruce, F.F., 1985. *Romans: an introduction and commentary*, Downers Grove, IL:  
InterVarsity Press.