

## **Are There Many Paths To God?**

### **A Sermon by Marty Baker, Th. M.**

- THE BIG IDEA: My belief that only one path leads to God is based on the laws of logical reasoning coupled with biblical truths from the Old and New Testaments.
- THE PURPOSE: I desire to educate my Christian audience regarding how laws of logic coupled with biblical evidence logically demonstrates there is one access point to God, so that they will be equipped to answer this common cultural issue in witnessing situations.

### **THE INTRODUCTION**

An illustration I encountered from a so-called Christian theologian years ago attempts to put all religions in perspective with this analogy. The author asserted that world religions can be likened unto beautiful, colorful windows in a magnificent cathedral. Outside the building the sun, which represents God, shines with all of its power and glory through each window, illuminating them in different degrees of intensity. He then stated how all religions are, logically, based on the same spiritual and divine light source; however, they simply portray that light in different ways. The point cannot be missed: The author desired to get his readers to agree with his premise that all religions are really one in the final analysis, and that collectively and individually each one leads their worshippers to God.

This analogous story leads to a question I'm sure you have entertained countless times as you engage our relativistic, everything-is-true culture: Are there many paths to God? Behind the question is the assumption that surely all religious paths do, in fact, wind up in God's presence because He is shining His spiritual light through their respective window panes.

THE PREVIEW: Is this cultural position true? As Christians we would say unequivocally, "No." Why would we say "No," is something we need to probe a little further. Deeper study is warranted so we are properly prepared to answer this question so a misguided sinner might truly come to a faith relationship with the living God. If we truly believe there is only one divinely chosen path to God, what validates our thinking? THE BIG IDEA: Two major factors substantiate our position that there is only one way to approach God. The first line of evidence is wedded to pure logical reasoning, while the second line of evidence is founded upon clear divine revelation in pivotal Old and New Testament texts concerning how God revealed the correct way to approach Him.

As we prepare to dig into the rich soil of this dualistic apologetic reasoning, it would be appropriate to make sure you are aware of the cultural question before us.

### **ARE THERE MANY PATHS TO GOD?**

Our first line of evidence powerfully and logically demonstrates divine access is limited, not unlimited. I will introduce it to you with this succinct statement.

- THE BODY

## LAWS OF LOGIC ILLUSTRATE DIVINE ACCESS IS A ONE PATH REALITY.

*Introductory comments:* Before we analyze two helpful logical arguments favoring the one path option for obtaining an eternal audience with God, permit me to clear the path by making a few important observations.

1. Many wonderful, deeply spiritual, and highly moral people are committed to the various religions of the world. I personally know many of them, as I know you do, too.
2. World religions, which are distinct from Christianity, are not devoid of all truth. As Norman Geisler states, “For example, many religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Confucianism) believe in some form of the Golden Rule.”<sup>1</sup> Based on this reality we can safely say that world religions can, and do, communicate transcendent truths about proper moral behavior God has woven into the fabric of the world.
3. Despite what relativists teach and assert, we believe that absolute truth exists. As we have articulated before, to posit that truth is absolutely relative is self-defeating and logically weak. The mere statement illustrates truth can be absolute, and so it is in all academic disciplines from science to mathematics. What applies in these secondary areas should, in turn, be applied in the primary area of religion because of its intrinsic life importance. If God has spoken, if He is shining His spiritual light toward us, we would need to know if it is moving through one window pane or many window panes, to employ our opening analogy.
4. Absolute truth claims are, by nature, highly exclusive. For instance, I learned quickly in high school the geometry theorems are absolute and exclusive. Hence, the sum of the lengths of any two sides of a triangle must be greater than the third side, and if two lines are cut by a transversal and the alternate interior angles are congruent, the lines are parallel. Believe me, there is no mathematical leakage or wiggle room in these theorems. There are not multiple paths to securing the proper answer because there is only one absolute theorem per situation. They are absolutely true and absolutely exclusive, by design. What is true in the field of math is also true in theology.
5. Ardent, even emotional belief does not change absolute truth. You can passionately argue all day long that two right angles are not congruent; however, your zeal and convincing appeal does not, and will not, change the absolute truth that any two right angles are always congruent. Again, what applies to math, applies to all disciplines, including theology. Truth, be what it may, is always true.

*Transition:* Armed with this foundational information, we are now positioned to study the laws of logic which limit divine access to one path.

- A. “*The Law of the Excluded Middle,*” according to Geisler, “tells us that something

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<sup>1</sup>Norman L. Geisler, *Twelve Points That Show Christianity Is True* (Indian Trail, NC: Norm Geisler International Ministries, 2016), 14.

*either is or is not.*<sup>2</sup> For instance, my podium is either silver and black or it is not. There is not another color option to choose from in this instance. Applied to divine access, this law of logic would say there is either one way to God or there are multiple ways, thus not leaving any room for a third way or alternate position. Simply put, we are left with an *either/or* choice, not a *both/and* one.

This particular law, in and of itself, cannot definitively tell us whether there is one path to God or not. It merely informs us that we must make a decision. Either there is one way to gain entrance into His presence, or there are multiple ways. This is an important observation because those of the relative truth camp should realize their position, by nature, rejects the Christian position. They should embrace the Christian notion based on their philosophical base; however, this is impossible because of the presence of this particular law. For Christian's, who believe God has revealed only one path in glory, this law informs them it is logical and right to assume an exclusive position. In fact, it is impossible for anyone not to do so.

Ostensibly, this law of logic, as I said, cannot unequivocally substantiate the argument that there is either one path to God or multiple ones. However, by looking at the effects in our world and analyzing them inductively we can posit that it is logical to believe divine access must be limited to one access point and not many. For instance, several weeks ago Senator Sessions stated he wanted to speak with me. In order to get an audience with him, I had to establish a time with his secretary, and then I had to go through her in order to have that phone conversation. Believe me, there were not multiple ways for me to get into his senatorial presence, even though he requested the meeting. Logically, therefore, we can conclude, what is true of connecting with an earthly senator must be infinitely truer of a meeting with the Creator of the senator.

A second law of logic to help guide our thinking regarding the question before us is most enlightening.

*B. The Law of Non-Contradiction , according to Geisler, “says that opposite statements cannot both be true at the same time in the same sense.”<sup>3</sup>* Therefore, to assume that “A” is true along with its opposite “non-A,” is to destroy the ability to know the difference between truth and error. Pragmatically, to posit there is gravity (A) is to recognize the possible presence of the opposite position that there is no gravity (non-A). Logically, based on this particular logic law, only one of these premises can be true at the same time. They both cannot and could not be true. And just in case you are wondering which view might be true, then all we have to do is head up to the roof and illustrate the two opposing positions. I’ll be the guy who believes in gravity, and you can be the person who passionately embraces the no gravity mantra.

Applied to the question before us, I think the conclusion is clear. If there is one path into God’s presence then, by definition, there cannot be two, ten, or fifty paths. Likewise, if there are multiple paths to approach God, then it is impossible for there to be only one. Again, we face and either/or decision, not a both/and/one. And, again, whichever position you take you will, by default, be exclusive. It comes with the logical turf; despite how relative and open minded you are in your interpretation of truth.

As we encountered in the previous logical law, this law cannot definitively demonstrate the validity and tenability of either position on how many paths might lead to God’s presence. To

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<sup>2</sup>Norman L. Geisler, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 62.

<sup>3</sup>Norman L. Geisler, *When Skeptics Ask* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 282.

gain insight regarding some logical semblance of an answer we must, once more, consider the effects of our world.

Along these lines, another question is in order: “When you attempt to gain entrance into the presence of an important person, do you typically have multiple access points of your liking or are you limited by the person in question?” When I first arrived in D.C. eight years ago, General Kevin Bergner (now retired) invited the staff to have lunch with him in the general’s dining room at the Pentagon. Believe me, I learned quickly you cannot just waltz into a general’s presence, even if you are from California and are cool, easy, and laid back. I gave the Pentagon everything but blood to get approved for passage. Once in the building, even then our movement was highly controlled by the Navy officer assigned to us. We had to walk down certain hallways, we had to have certain identification badges, and we had to stay with the sharply dressed seaman. Wandering around in a personal attempt to find your own way over to the general’s office was not permitted, and I’m sure it would not have been tolerated by some armed guard.

This *a fortiori* argument sounds logical, doesn’t it? The truth for the path into an Army general’s presence would logically apply to God, who is far superior and who is a general of an altogether more powerful angelic army. Hence, if this position is more logically plausible, then the A side of our equation negates the non-A side. Put differently, if it is more logical to believe that there is one path to God, then the opposite view cannot be true which holds there are multiple paths.

*Restatement:* From this reasoning of just two laws of logic, I think you can begin to see why I believe there is only one path to the glorious presence of God, not many. Sure, these laws are not airtight and perfect, nor do they unequivocally demonstrate the truth of either position. They do, however, help us use our reasoning abilities to determine which view appears to be more logically consistent and believable. And from what we have analyzed, it appears there is more credence to believe there is one path into God’s presence based on the law of the excluded middle and the law of non-contradiction.

*Transition:* The laws of logic can, as we have learned, guide our thinking toward embracing the notion that God only permits one way for people to enter His presence. It is a helpful argument, but it is not the only one. Special revelation broadens and deepens our understanding of how sinner creatures can possibly approach the absolutely holy Creator.

## BIBLICAL REVELATION FROM BOTH TESTAMENTS ILLUSTRATES DIVINE ACCESS IS A ONE PATH REALITY.

We will naturally begin our analysis with what the Old Testament says about divine access.

A. *Old Testament Revelation Underscores A One Path Approach To God.* From Genesis to Malachi, God progressively reveals how His fallen creatures must approach Him how He describes, not how they desire. A cursory glance at three key passages in Old Testament revelatory history will easily and readily substantiate this observation.

1. *Divine approach mattered in relation to Adam and Eve.* Prior to their fall in the

Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve enjoyed open access to God in a state of innocent nakedness (Gen. 2:25). After the fall in Genesis 3, God judged them and the Devil who had tempted them, and then God killed two animals and clothed them with skins to cover their nakedness (Gen. 3:21). While we do not know what kind of animals were killed for the first time in human history, it is clear, especially from what we know of future biblical revelation regarding how sinners gain access to God (Leviticus 1-7), that God showed Adam and Eve that sin had to be covered and atoned for by the sacrifice of a God-selected animal. He did not let them decide how to rectify their situation, but He painfully showed them. One substitutionary sacrifice apiece paved the only way for their sin to be properly handled so they could have divine communion.

A second narrowing of the path to God is illustrated in a familiar story.

2. *Divine approach mattered in relation to Cain and Abel.* In Genesis chapter 4, we encounter a narration about how the two sons of Adam and Eve attempted to approach and worship God.

<sup>1</sup> Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, “I have gotten a manchild with *the help of the LORD.*” <sup>2</sup> Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. <sup>3</sup> So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. <sup>4</sup> Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; <sup>5</sup> but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. <sup>6</sup> Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? <sup>7</sup> “If you do well, will not *your countenance* be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.” <sup>8</sup> Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

From verse two, we have a hint trouble is brewing because Cain lines up with an occupation that resulted from the fall of his parents, while Abel’s occupation coincided with his parents occupation pre-fall. The trouble turns out to be the first murder over religion and the religious approach to God.

Both brothers approached God, at a select time, for worship. The Hebrew text of verse three quickly states that Cain brought a gift from his work as a farmer, while, according to Dr. Allen Ross, “the Hebrew describing Abel’s offering is elaborate, the writer stressing that Abel went out of his way to please God.”<sup>4</sup> One brother’s attitude, therefore, was sub-par, while the other brother’s attitude was deeply committed to the worship opportunity. The fact that God accepted Abel’s offering of an animal he had personally sacrificed, while rejecting the fruit offering of Cain suggests that God had given them prior instruction on how to properly approach Him. Had God not provided some clear instruction one would, then, wonder why He rejected Cain’s offering in the first place. From this, I think we can safely surmise both brothers were divinely instructed on the proper path for sinful people to approach God in worship. That path clearly called for a sacrificial substitute. Cain came with the wrong sacrifice, while Abel came

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<sup>4</sup>Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 157.

with the correct one, and from this narrative we learn how approach to God matters greatly. Any old path will not do, only the one He prescribes.

*Transition:* Another Old Testament passage which guides our thinking in relation to this question is embedded in Leviticus chapter one. Here we learn.

3. *Divine approach mattered in relation to the sacrificial system.* In Exodus, God showed His people where to worship Him by giving them the building plans for a portable worship structure called the Tabernacle (Exodus 25-31). In passing we should note that access to God's presence was limited to one door, not many doors. No creativity was allowed, and no progressive thought would be tolerated. There was one door and one door only. Not two, not ten, just one.

When we arrive in Leviticus chapter one, God moves from showing sinful people *where* to worship Him, which is quite specific, to *how* to enter His presence. Interestingly enough, the first of five offerings in chapters one through seven, is the burnt offering. According to Dr. Allen Ross, "This sacrifice formed the essential offering of the Temple. It formed the regular morning and evening offerings, as well as the basic sacrifices of the feasts. The essential features were the careful selection of the right animal, the shedding of the blood, and the burning at the altar. It clearly taught that no one approaches God at any time without a substitutionary animal to make atonement."<sup>5</sup> You might want to underscore that phrase "no one." If a sinful worshipper wanted to walk on a path to God's presence in Old Testament times, then he had to come based on God's prescribed way. No deviation was permitted, ever. No alternate methods were tolerated, ever. God's holiness and His grace called for three things: a proper priest, a proper altar, and a proper sacrifice. When a worshipper tapped into these divinely ordained criteria, he could rest in the fact he was on the right path to having his sin dealt with so he could gain entrance to God's presence.

You might say this is highly exclusive, and it is, but it was the way God devised for sinners to have the opportunity to step onto the right path to have a relationship with Him. Any other path would not do, nor would it take you to him, no matter how passionately you were committed to that particular path. Only God's prescribed path calling for the blood sacrifice of a sin-substitute would do.

*Transition:* From the beginning of the Old Testament to the end in the book of Malachi, God is clear that the path to access Him is quite narrow and is not open to expansion or modification. That same message and motif is developed as we turn to the New Testament.

B. *New Testament Revelation Underscores A One Path Approach To God.* *Transition:* Two concepts inexorably validate this assertion. The first one deals with the title of Jesus Christ as the Savior, while the second concerns His name as the Pathfinder. There are, indeed, numerous points we could cover from this portion of God's Word in order to learn how limited the path to Paradise is; however, for our purposes the ones before us will provide us with sufficient insight. With this comment in mind, let us dig into the first divinely ordered fact.

1. *Jesus' Title As The Savior Reveals A Limited Access To God.* The author of Hebrews tells us this

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<sup>5</sup>Allen P. Ross, *Leviticus*, unpublished class notes (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1985), 86.

much when he says,

“... but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.<sup>27</sup> And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment,<sup>28</sup> so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him” (Hebrews 9:26b-28).

Isaiah 53 prophetically detailed the sacrificial work of the coming Messiah, Jesus. He, and He alone, would be the sacrifice for the sin of all mankind. It is no wonder, then, the inspired author of Hebrews likens Him here in verse 26 as the sacrifice. Grammatically, we could say this is the monadic use of the article, meaning He is the one and only and that there is not any other. God, the Father, was not looking for a sacrifice or just any sacrifice, but THE perfect sacrifice which could only be His sinless Son. Regarding the import of these instructive, insightful verses, Kent Hughes helpfully comments, “This designation of Christ’s death uses *sunteleiai* (consummation) to emphasize the focal nature of Calvary. It was the event which was the focus of redemptive history, that in which the various facets of God’s plan of salvation came together. One has expressed it: ‘All previous ages led up to this; all succeeding ages are governed by this!’”<sup>6</sup>

In light of this, a question is in order. Who, in light of the historical, archaeological and prophetic nature substantiating the Bible as God’s only word to mankind, could ever think that their path, regardless of what their religion or feelings tells them, is a possible path into Paradise? Applying the laws of logic leaves us with a question: Either Jesus was/is THE perfect divinely ordained sacrifice for our sin so we could have the prospects of getting on the one path to Paradise, or He is not and there are multiple paths that God will gladly embrace because He is so loving, understanding, and welcoming. I think the evidence points to the former, not the latter.

One more title of Jesus leaves no room for assuming God, the Father, accepts all proposed paths to His presence.

2. *Jesus’ Title As Pathfinder Reveals A Limited Access To God.* Once again, we turn to the book of Hebrews for guidance on this all-important spiritual matter. In chapter twelve, the unknown inspired writer makes an astonishing and equally definitive claim:

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,<sup>2</sup> fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12).

Permit me to direct your attention to verse 2.

By way of observation, we must underscore the presence of the article again with reference to the redemptive work of Jesus. He is not one possible author of many authors of salvation, but THE author. Again, this is exclusive, but it is the truth and it does not leave the door open for us to smugly believe there are other religious authors who can possibly help us, as sinners, to get on the path to God’s presence.

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<sup>6</sup>Homer Kent, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981),

In addition, we must focus our attention on the two names of Jesus here. He is called “the author and perfecter of faith.” The former word, *archegon*, denotes a leader or a trailblazer, a pathfinder, as it were. He, and He alone, was completely qualified to blaze a trail to the cross and an empty tomb so He could open a pathway for sinners to the Father. And blaze a trail, really, the trail, He did. Note the inspired author does not say Jesus was one of many supposed trailblazers to secure salvation for sinners. He was, and is, the only One.

The second facet of his name in this context labels Him THE perfector. The Greek term is *teleiōten*, and it speaks of the end or completion of something. Here that completion is the work of redemption. What God promised in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3, verse 15; namely, a seed who would come and deal a death blow to Satan and sin, what every Old Testament sacrifice typologically pointed to, they all found their fulfillment in the complete work of Christ on the cross. He, and He alone, was the only one qualified to pay the penalty for man’s sin by dying as our prophesied lamb (Isaiah 53). By so doing, He has secured the only path into Paradise and that path runs straight through Him (John 14:6).

*Transition:* Obviously, there is much more that we could say; however, the evidence seems clear and powerful regarding whether there is one path or many paths into God’s presence. The laws of logic strongly support the notion there is but one path, and these laws are buttressed by the Old and New Testament revelation of God’s desire to show us how to properly approach Him. The next time someone smiles and tells you are too exclusive and judgmental regarding your view that all religions do not lead to God, lovingly and kindly introduce them to these evidences in hopes of guiding them to the right spiritual path.

- THE CONCLUSION

You might also introduce them to this story.

Over the years Liz and I have enjoyed going to the West Wing privately with people from our church who happen to work for the President. I fondly remember the first time we ventured in those hallowed, unique halls.

One of our parishioners headed up the FBI detail for the White House. He invited us to come down one evening for a several hour tour, but first we had to go through the typical and stringent protocol. Yes, we had to follow procedures to a tee. We had to give the White House Security personnel all of our private personal information, including our Social Security numbers, and we had to inform them of the date of our expected private tour.

Once we were cleared (whew, we made it), we had to meet the FBI agent at the western guard booth. While standing there they checked us on the computer monitors to make sure we were who we said we were. Then we proceeded to another interior guard booth where they scanned us to make sure we were not carrying anything dangerous. As we approached the western door to the West Wing, we were informed that we had to turn our cell phones off and that no pictures would be allowed from this point forward.

Entering into the door, we stepped onto the lushest carpet my shoes have ever connected with, and there facing us was another guard with a weapon behind a desk. In fact, just about every hall we walked down there were armed guards. As we climbed up the staircase to head toward the Oval Office, we encountered another armed guard, and when we walked up to the door of the President’s office, we met yet another guard. There were guards everywhere.

Now, what is most instructive is this, especially in light of our topic at hand. The only way we got into that coveted, special building after hours was because we were with the right man. We could have tried coming in some other way, but I'm sure that wouldn't have worked. Jumping the fence, now, would be out of the question since it has been raised and turned into multiple impaling rods. No, we enjoyed being in the West Wing because we came in the only way open to us and because we walked in and around with the right man, Tim.

*BIG IDEA:* Some may believe you can get into heaven on just any old path, but that logically and theologically just will not fly. Why? The laws of logic embedded in this story I've just relayed to you tell you there could not be many paths to God since there are not many paths into the President's domain. Further, the theology of the Old and New Testaments clearly shows not only that how one approaches God matters greatly, but the fact the Jesus' titles clearly reveal He is the only one qualified to enable you to get on the one Path to Paradise in the first place.