

Choices. We like choices, don't we? Big Mac, Whopper; Five Guys, Culvers. Pizza, burgers, seafood. Mexican, Indian. Choices, more choices. We like our choices. Go to Aldi's and save a buck; go to Trader Joe's and try something different; go to Mariano's and they'll cook it for you. We like our choices. Sometimes we like to insist our choice is the best choice. Sometimes, we're happy to say: "Who cares? Doesn't matter. They all fill us up. You buy your way; I'll buy my way. You eat your way; I'll eat my way."

We like our choices. Lutheran, Methodist, Episcopalian, Presbyterian (and I hardly got started). St. John, St. Joe, St. Mary, St. Agnes. House church, warehouse church. Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist. So many choices. Some people insist their choice is the best choice. Some people are happy to say: "Who cares? Doesn't matter - they're all the same. Who cares? Doesn't matter - same god, different names. Who cares? Doesn't matter - they're all going the same place."

It's nice to have choices. Big Mac, Whopper; Five Guys, Culvers. And it's nice when the choices don't really matter. It makes life easier, less complicated, less demanding. We don't have to think too hard. We can do what we want. We don't have to go out of our way. We can do what we want. We don't have to fit in. We can do what we want. No right, no wrong, no pressure, no judgment. We can do what we want. So, more and more, what do people think? "Which church? Which god? Doesn't matter. You believe your way; I'll believe my way; and we'll all be happy."

Sounds comfortable and easy, doesn't it? "Just believe what you want; do what you want; it'll all be good." How many of you would use that approach buying your next used car? - "Who cares? Doesn't matter - they all work the same." Or you're in the big city, ready to put big money down on a Coach handbag. Do you go to the store or to the street vendor with the easy deal? "Who cares? Doesn't matter - they all wear a "C." If that's your approach, what are you likely to end up with? A clunker, a fake, a fraud.

How do you tell the difference between a fake or fraud, and the real deal? We don't just close our eyes and pick by feel; we go in with our eyes open. We don't just check the shine on the outside; we look inside, under the hood. We don't just listen to the quick pitch; we dig deep. And what do we find? Out on the streets, there's a lot of fakes and frauds and clunkers. And not all churches, not all religions, not all gods are the same.

Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims all teach that the way to be right with god is to act right, do right, be right. If you act right, do right, be right enough, sooner or later, you can get in good with god and live the good life. "Act right, do right, be right" - we hear a lot of that in Christianity, don't we? (So it shouldn't surprise us if people think we're all the same.) But in Christianity, we don't act right, do right, be right, to get in good with God. We don't work our way up and in with God. We don't work our way up and into the good life. No, here is where Christianity is different from all the religions of the world. Instead of us working our way into the good life right with God, our God gives. Our God gives us a place right with him. Our God gives us the good life of heaven. Our God gives us by giving us his Son Jesus. With Jesus and his death on the cross, we have our lives washed clean, our sin paid for, our guilt covered and gone. With Jesus and his perfect life, we have a life lived right by God. With Jesus, God sees you and calls you right by him; he sees you and calls you right for the good life of heaven. With Jesus, we don't have to live under the demands of the law, the threats of the law - "you better get it right or else." With Jesus, we don't have to settle for the law's impossible promise - "Do good and you'll be in good with God." No, with Jesus, we get to live in grace and peace - the peace of knowing "I'm forgiven," the peace of knowing "I'm loved," the peace that comes from hearing God say to you - "You are my child, whom I love, with you I am well-pleased."

Different from all the gods of the world, the God of the Bible stands out as One-of-a-Kind. Most religions have a creation story, a flood story, a hero story. But the God of the Bible is the only God of free grace and love - the only One! And he doesn't want you miss out; he doesn't want anyone to miss out. He doesn't want us taken in by fake gods with fake promises, so Jesus spells it out clearly - "**I am the way, the truth, and the life.**"

That can sound narrow, too narrow for some. It is. It is too narrow for some. Why? God doesn't say: "Who cares? Doesn't matter. You live your way; I'll live mine." Why not? God cares. Who he is and what he says matters to him. We matter to him. He created us; he loves us! Who we are and what we do and think - everything about us matters to him. The way we disrespect and hurt each other - it's a big deal to him. And the way we disrespect him and his love - that's a big deal to him. Not a big deal that he ignores, but a big deal that he rejects and condemns - **"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."** That can sound narrow, too narrow for some. And it is. But God is God and he gets to set his limits.

Do you sense a problem there? We don't like limits. We need limits. We like to impose limits on other people. But we don't like limits imposed on us. We don't like to be told "no." We don't like to feel guilt. So what do we do when God says "no," when God sets limits? Sometimes, we say "no" right back to God - "It's my life; I get to do what I want; I get to think what I want." And if saying "no" to God doesn't sound right, we just say "no" to the Bible, telling ourselves that saying "no" to the Bible really isn't the same as saying "no" to God. How does that work? Some live in denial. Some live in guilt, their consciences tell them they know better. Some live in anger, fighting against God.

But instead of getting stuck on God's "no," on God's "narrow," why not look at God's "yes," God's wide-open heart? God's "yes," God's love, isn't narrow - **"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son."** That's right, God's love isn't shallow or cheap - God gave his Son for us, Jesus gave his life for us so that we can have life with him in heaven. There's a part of my heart that is so desperate to hear this - God's love isn't just for the good, the respectable, the likeable; Jesus ate with sinners and tax collectors. God's love isn't just for those who have it together; Jesus invites: **"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened."** God's love isn't intended for just a few; God's love isn't just for our kind - in heaven we'll

see **“a great multitude that no one [can] count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.”** No, God’s love isn’t narrow.

Sometimes we make it seem narrow. Sometimes we’re better at demanding God’s “no” than sharing God’s “yes.” Sometimes we’re better at disapproving than forgiving. Sometimes we’re better at being narrow-minded than open-hearted. Don’t get me wrong. We don’t get to step away from the Ten Commandments. We don’t get to step away from calling sin a sin, from calling false teaching false. But we don’t have to be known for our “no” or even God’s “no.” With Jesus, we have a wonderful, world-wide, one-of-a-kind “yes” to share. With Jesus, we have a wonderful, world-wide, one-of-a-kind love to share. So let’s show the world - with Jesus, God loves you! Amen.