

The question stunned me. And for the longest time I agonized over it. Still do. A young woman in Junior High asked me this tough question: *"With all the rival religions in the world, how can I know for sure that...Christianity is the right religion?"* The question is baffling. There are 535 million Buddhists, 1.8 billion Muslims, 1.08 billion Hindus, 15 million Jews, with perhaps 2.2 billion Christians in the world. How can I know for sure, which way is the right way? My brother, Philip, has been caught up in a new age thinking for over 40 years. I remember visiting his home in my college days on Long Island, New York. There was over his couch a picture of a holy mountain, with a light at the peak, and 12 roads leading to the top. [Something like **this image**.] Is that the way it really is when it comes to religion? Any road you take will lead you up the mountain to God? Truth is relative. Any road will get you to the top. Dr. Philip G. Ryken, president of Wheaton College writes: *After all, our culture invented shopping malls and mail-order catalogs, where anything and everything is for sale. Religion is now called a "preference," which makes it sound like a soft drink or a shade of paint. If you can go to the college of your choice, root for the football team of your choice, watch the cable channel of your choice, and eat the yogurt of your choice, why can't you pray to the god of your -choice? [Is Jesus the Only Way?, p. 12]*

This postmodern mindset flies in the face of the clear message of John 14. It's Thursday night. The night Jesus celebrates the Last Supper and washes his disciples' feet. The night before Jesus is tortured on the cross for us. This traumatic departure is upsetting, and so Jesus comforts His disciples. *"Don't let your heart be troubled"* [14:1]. Don't lose your hope, Jesus is saying. My Father has a grand estate, a new civilization with plenty of townhouse units available. I'm returning there to prepare a place for you. And vs. 4 *"You know the way [i.e., the path, the road] to the place where I am going."* Thomas is baffled. *"Lord, we don't know where you are going [destination], so how can we know the way?"* [14:5]. We don't have the foggiest where you're going to end up or how to get there. And Jesus responds, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* [14:6]. Philip is confused too. He says to Jesus, *"show us the Father and that will be enough for us"* [vs. 8]. Jesus responds in vs. 9 *"Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."* You want to see God, Jesus said, look in my face. Jesus said in John 10:30, *"I and the Father are one."* Instantly the Jews pick up stones. They want to bust his skull. Why? Look at 10:33 *"We are not stoning you for any of these,"* replied the Jews, *"but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God."*

[4 options: Christ is God, All Religions same, Atheism/Agnosticism, Drift, which square do you find yourself in?] Is Guatama Buddha God? When a seeker would approach Guatama4 Buddha they'd often ask: *"Are you a god?"... "No." "An Angel?" No. A Saint? "No" "Then what are you?" "Buddha answered, "I am awake."* [Huston Smith, The World's Religions, p. 138]. Buddha is rooted in the Sanskrit term Budh and means to wake up and know [Ibid]. His moment of enlightenment happened under the Bo Tree. Buddha figured the issue of God was a distraction from the main matter: enlightenment, your epiphany. The Buddhist faith tends to be non-theistic. Was Mohammed, the prophet, Allah? C.S. Lewis wrote: *"If you had gone to Mohammed and asked, 'Are you Allah?' he would have rent his clothes and then cut your head off*

*"[God In the Dock, p. 158]. Hinduism embraces 33 million gods under the supreme being, Krishna. And when you practice TM you come to realize your personhood [creation too] is an illusion [maya]. When you enter into deep meditation you can merge with the ultimate oneness. You can experience your own omnipresence, cosmic consciousness. You can become God. Consider Shirley MacLaine. Is she God? In her documentary, Out on a Limb, by the ocean, she raised her hands with actor John Heard and over and over again said, "I Am God." [Utter blasphemy!] Oprah Winfrey doesn't mince words. She said, *"I keep telling Shirley MacLaine, 'You can't go around telling people you are God. It's a very difficult idea to accept'"* [New York Times Magazine, June 11, 1989]. Do you want to know who God Really is? Have you ever seriously considered Jesus of Nazareth? Today we're beginning a deep spiritual journey and over the next five weeks morning and evening in the light of this book, The Case for Christ. Jesus said, *"I Am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* Think with me deeply about those first two words in John 14:6, **I AM**.*

I. HIS CLAIMS. Let there be no illusions. Jesus claimed to be God Himself. There is no doubt. All Christians, All Muslims, All Jews; 4 billion plus people on this planet believe that Moses met the Great I Am, Yahweh at the burning bush. Exodus 3 is explicit. History and geography confirm this. The God who fashioned this universe, who called Abraham to be the father of a great people, Moses met the living and true God at Mt. Sinai. [Jebel Musa]. And Jehovah God in one sacred moment revealed His awe-filled name. Tell the Israelites, Moses, *"I AM has sent me to you."* Lest there be any confusion in the very next verse God clarifies His identity. *"God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM....[Exodus 3:14]. We read further in vs. 15 "Say to the Israelites, **Yahweh**, the God of your fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has sent me to you. This is my Name forever....to be remembered from generation to generation."* The Lord of the Universe is not a generic, loosey-goosey God, with loosey goeey ethic. Like we say with clothes, *"A No Label God."* The living God has a Name, Yahweh. [Take that in!] God gave Moses and us His Name, the Name He is to be remembered forever. It's not like you're at the ice cream shop and you get to choose from any of 31 flavors you want. And now what I need to establish is that in Christ, that God, Yahweh, the Great I AM has moved into the neighborhood. He has an address.

Read carefully the Gospel of John. And every time you see Jesus claiming boldly, I AM, underline it, circle it, highlight it. Jesus announced to blinded Jews ready to stone Him for his blasphemy: [John 8:58] *"Before Abraham was born [c. 2,166], I AM."* He says *"I AM the light of the world;" "I AM the resurrection and the life"* [8:12; 11:25]. The tempestuous Sea of Galilee was ready to swallow up the disciples. But suddenly, the disciples become terrified. They are seized with a gut clutching revelation of God. Jesus walks on the water, miraculously brings them to their destination and says, *"Don't be afraid. I AM"* [John 6:16-21]. Matthew's version of this event shakes me to the core. The story is made up of two acts. Act one, Matthew 14:22-27 (90 Greek words): The Power Walk of Jesus; and Act two, 14:28-33 the Walk of Peter (90 Greek words). And smack-dab in the middle are 6 English words: **Be Bold! I AM! Fear Not!** And in the middle of the middle, the Triune God's Name: I AM! And so Jews who consider it blasphemy to worship another human being are driven to their knees. They worship Jesus and say, *"Truly you are the Son of God"* [Matthew 14:33]. It's the Garden of Gethsemane. The commander of a thousand, a chiliarch [leader

of 1,000] came with a massive mob/detachment to arrest Jesus and take him to trial. And Jesus asks: "Who is it you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they reply. Christ thunders in reply: "I AM," and the staggering force of that revelation levels the entire force [400, 600, 1000 strong] [John 18:4-8]. Let there be no illusions, Jesus is the Great I Am. He claims to be Yahweh in the flesh. There are not many avatars, not many ascended masters, not many Saviors. Shirley MacLaine is wrong. The Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Buddha is wrong too. There is no other Name! [Acts 4:12].

II. HIS CREDENTIALS. How do we know that Jesus wasn't feeding the world a line, that His claims were not a bunch of hot air? "No one ever spoke the way Jesus did" [John 7:46]. The crowds were absolutely dumbfounded at the power and authority of His teaching [Matthew 7:28-29]. But what really backs up the reality of Jesus' claims are the witness of His wonders. You want proof that Jesus truly was the Messiah? Well, here are his credentials. **[Water into Wine.]** At the wedding of good friends, Jesus took 6 stone water pots filled with 150 gallons total of ordinary tap water. In an instant he turned H2O into the richest red wine the Master of Ceremonies had ever tasted [John 2:1-11]. Explain that. **[Mickey Mouse Lunch Bucket Becomes a Feast for 20,000-one long table on Washington ave].** Jesus took a young boy's "Mickey Mouse" lunch bucket of five small barley loaves and two tiny fish and miraculously multiplied a meal for close to 20,000 people [John 6:1-15]. Figure that out. **[A Lake Hurricane Becomes Lake Placid].** A sudden, violent storm erupted on the Sea of Galilee. The waves were crashing over the sides of the disciples' boat. It was absolutely terrifying. The boat was nearly swamped. Jesus stood and spoke to the winds and waves, "Quiet! Be still!" And instantaneously the typhoon turned into Lake Placid [Mark 4:35-41]. **[The Dead are Raised].** Jesus' good friend Lazarus had been dead four days [John 11:1-44]. He was wrapped in thick grave clothes like a mummy. The stench from his cadaver absolutely reeked. Jesus approached the tomb, told the crowd to take away the stone and then thundered: "Lazarus, come out!" Miraculously, the dead man Lazarus walked out of the tomb moving, breathing, alive! Jesus gave new sight to a man born blind. He liberated a man possessed with a Legion of demons. Quite a set of credentials wouldn't you say? What world class leader [Buddha, Dali Lama, Mohammed, Mahareshi Mahesh Yogi] could even hold a candle against the astonishing sunshine of Christ's mighty works. There's an 800 lb. gorilla in the living room. People, don't sweep the evidence under the rug. I say with the crowds in Jesus' day, "When the Messiah comes, will he do more miraculous signs than this man?" [John 7:31]. Jesus' miracles credential him as the one and only card-carrying Messiah. Buddha died (of dysentery H. Smith, p. 145) at the age of 80 in 483 BC in the town of Kushinagara. Socrates of Athens drank the hemlock and died in 399 BC. Mohammed died in 632 AD and was buried in Mecca. But Jesus, came out of the grave alive, April 5, AD 33. Take it in! Buddha is dead. Socrates is dead. Mohammed is dead. But Jesus, He's alive. Think about it! Would God raise from the dead a false prophet? People, knowing God is not a stab in the dark. It's not iffy, not a matter of human opinion, mystical guesses. It's a matter of historical record. It's revelation. Not speculation. You can nail his journeys on a map. You can nail his life on a calendar. It's in the book. He claims to be the single path to God. Jesus said: "I AM the way [the one path], the Truth (not an abstraction/a person), and the life (passionate, flourishing life), no one comes to the Father but by me" [John 14:6].

I realize that many in our culture consider such exclusive claims of Jesus Christ as criminal. Think! Let's say a great plague, an epidemic of catastrophic proportions, was sweeping across America. Millions were dying. And let's say I was the owner of a pharmaceutical company that had the monopoly on the only kind of medicine that would reverse the nightmare and bring staggering healing to a dying nation. And I made an executive decision to withhold that medicine. That indeed would be criminal. There is no other way out of the mess we're in as a nation; no other way to reverse the curse, no other way to beat sin, death and the devil. "There is no other name under heaven, given among men by which we must be saved." [Acts 4:12].

Let me close with this. It was nearly 13 years ago. Winnie and I with her brother Arlin and his wife Jo were traveling around the horn of South America. And even though I was living in the lap of incredible luxury, eating fabulous meals with 1st rate entertainment every night; I was spent inside; empty, my affect was flat. You know you can be a Christian and spiritually depressed at the same time. So our Celebrity cruise ship docked in Punta Arenas. And I slowly moved through the city streets. I went into a little Roman Catholic Church and I sat down on one of the not so fancy benches. I looked up front and I saw the craziest thing **[Image]**. Not stained glass, not a great sculpture, great painting but a cartoon of Jesus Christ at the tomb of Lazarus. I pondered the cartoon. Lazarus had died and put in a rock hewn tomb. Jesus cried: "Lazarus, come forth." And wrapped in the rags of a mummy, Lazarus walked out of the tomb. Jesus had pulled off a public resurrection that rocked the Jerusalem world. I knew the story. Then I saw the words in the traditional cartoon bubble, that rocked my world. The Spanish is so much more powerful than English: The Bubble read: YO SOY LA VIDA! **I AM...THE LIFE!** And the words upfront like lightning came off the wall and ripped into my heart. New strength surged in my mind and in my body. My heart was lifted. Because of Jesus I came alive again. So here's the application. Right here. Right now, the resurrected I AM Jesus Christ is ready to speak the Word into your heart. Weak and wounded, tired and weary sinner. Jesus the I AM says to you I love you. I want to spend eternity with you. Wake up, O sleeper. Rise from the dead! I Am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me.

John 14:1-6

The Case for Christ: Racine CRC
IS JESUS THE ONLY WAY?

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