

What Makes Christianity Unique?

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Mister Carlson, tell me something: why are you Christians always sending missionaries around the world? Why don't you just leave people alone? Other countries have their own cultures, their own religions, and they're happy with what they've got. Why don't you just let them be?"

A young man at a large, non-Christian university asked me this question one time after I had finished giving a lecture on world religions. Have you ever thought about this question? It's a very interesting question for Christians to consider and probably one of the most important questions we could ask ourselves. What is so special about Jesus Christ and Christianity that we feel compelled to carry this message to the ends of the earth?

The answer is found in the nature of what Christianity truly is. Many people in our world today, even some Christians, have embraced the false idea that Christianity is just another religion in a world full of religious options. However, nothing could be further from the truth. Christianity is unique amongst all of the faiths of the world because Christianity is actually not a religion! I say this because religions are human attempts to make our lives right with God. This is attempted through our good works, sacrifices, rituals, and money. However, Christianity is not a religion. Christianity is about God entering human history to graciously save us through His Son Jesus Christ; and it is only by placing our faith in Him and His saving work on the cross that we can be saved. Christianity is not about what we do as human beings in order to please God, but rather, it's about what God has done for us so that we could have an eternal, peaceful relationship with Him.

In John 3:16, Jesus' disciple, John, records Jesus' promise: "For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life." Christianity, unlike the religions of the world, offers salvation not based on human merit, but on God's free offer of pardon. This is what makes Christianity unique. As the Apostle Paul explains in Ephesians 2:8-9, "For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift—not from works, so that no one can boast."

In His great love for us God offers the world a gift, a relationship with Him through His Son, Jesus Christ. We cannot earn it and we cannot buy it; it's a free gift (Gl 3:27-4:7).

So then, why do Christians send missionaries around the world? Why do we feel compelled to defend our faith against criticisms and encourage the world to trust Jesus? It's because God has offered the world a gift called the gospel. The word *gospel* literally means "good news." And for a world caught up in false, man-made religious systems of works and rituals, the gift of Jesus Christ is not only unique, it's *very good news*.

