

Religious Pluralism, Doctrinal Contradiction, and the Biblical Witness to Christ: A Sola Scriptura Comparative-Theological Analysis

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Abstract

Religious pluralism is often presented as a generous account of global religious diversity, yet its stronger theological forms frequently understate the depth of doctrinal contradiction among living traditions. This article offers a conservative Sola Scriptura comparative-theological analysis of religious disagreement by examining Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hindu traditions, Buddhism, Sikhism, traditional religions, and secular humanism as a religiously functioning worldview. Methodologically, the study is a doctrinal and theological-apologetic essay rather than an empirical survey. It draws on primary texts and representative scholarly sources to describe each tradition in its own terms before evaluating its central claims through the grammatical-historical and canonical interpretation of Scripture. The article argues that the disagreements among mainstream religions are not peripheral disputes over ritual, culture, or spiritual vocabulary, but concern ultimate reality, creation, anthropology, sin, revelation, salvation, Christology, death, judgment, and final destiny. In response to pluralist, inclusivist, relativist, and universalist accounts of religious truth, the article contends that Scripture presents an irreducibly particular witness: one living Creator, one fallen humanity, one incarnate Son, one sufficient atonement, one bodily resurrection, one mediator, one gospel of grace, and one final judgment. Particular exegetical attention is given to John 14:6, Acts 4:12, 1 Timothy 2:5, Hebrews 9:27–28, and 1 Corinthians 15 as texts that bear decisive theological weight for Christian exclusivity. The article further distinguishes doctrinal critique from contempt for persons, insisting that biblical faithfulness requires truthful representation, neighbor-love, non-coercive witness, and humility. It concludes that Jesus Christ's divine identity, cross, resurrection, mediatorship, and coming judgment constitute the decisive dividing line between biblical Christianity and rival accounts of salvation and ultimate reality.

Keywords: *Sola Scriptura; religious pluralism; comparative theology; biblical theology; Christian apologetics; religious disagreement; Jesus Christ and salvation*

Introduction

The contemporary world is religiously crowded, and that crowdedness is not merely local or anecdotal. Pew Research Center's latest global religious-demographic report estimates that, as of 2020, Christians represented 28.8% of the world's population, Muslims 25.6%, the religiously unaffiliated 24.2%, Hindus 14.9%, Buddhists 4.1%, Jews 0.2%, and other religions collectively 2.2% (Hackett et al., 2025). The same report describes religious switching, especially movement into the religiously unaffiliated category, as a major factor in recent religious change (Hackett et al., 2025). These figures do not settle theological questions, but they do show why religious disagreement cannot be treated as a marginal issue. Christians now bear witness in a world where religious multiplicity, secular unbelief, and hybrid spirituality are normal social conditions.

A common response to this multiplicity is the claim that all religions are basically saying the same thing. In popular discourse, this claim is often offered as a gesture of peace: religions are different roads to the same summit, different languages for the same divine reality, or different cultural forms of the same ethical aspiration. Yet this claim does not survive careful comparison. The religions themselves make strong and sometimes mutually exclusive assertions about ultimate reality, revelation, human nature, sin, salvation, death, judgment, and final destiny. Islam's confession of divine oneness excludes the Christian confession of the Son's deity and the Trinity. Classical Buddhism does not center salvation on reconciliation to a personal Creator. Many Hindu traditions presuppose karma, samsara, and moksha in ways that differ sharply from biblical creation, fall, judgment, and resurrection. Secular humanism often rejects supernatural revelation while supplying its own account of meaning, ethics, and hope. Mainstream Judaism shares the Hebrew Scriptures with Christianity but does not confess Jesus as the incarnate Messiah, crucified and risen for sins.

This article argues that religious disagreement matters because it concerns truth, worship, guilt, grace, salvation, and final destiny. From a conservative *Sola Scriptura* Christian standpoint, Scripture is not one religious witness among many, nor is it a denominational ornament added to a prior philosophical system. Scripture is the God-breathed and sufficient written Word by which doctrine must be tested (2 Timothy 3:16-17). *Sola Scriptura*, as used in this article, does not mean the rejection of history, teachers, scholarship, language study, or reason. It means that no church tradition, philosophical theory, mystical claim, private revelation, or interreligious consensus can function as a final norm above Scripture.

The article makes four contributions. First, it offers a comparative map of religious disagreement that is explicitly theological rather than merely sociological. Second, it clarifies the difference between pluralist rhetoric and the actual doctrinal claims of living religions. Third, it deepens a *Sola Scriptura* response by exegeting key biblical texts rather than merely accumulating proof-texts. Fourth, it frames Christian exclusivity ethically, distinguishing doctrinal evaluation from contempt for persons and insisting that biblical witness must be truthful, humble, non-coercive, and neighbor-loving.

2. Methodology and Hermeneutical Framework

This study is a theological-apologetic and comparative-doctrinal essay, not an empirical field study. It does not measure contemporary religious adherence by original survey, nor does it claim to describe every internal school within each tradition. Its aim is narrower and more doctrinal: to identify representative mainstream claims about God or ultimate reality, the human problem, salvation or liberation, Jesus Christ, religious authority, and final destiny, and then to evaluate these claims from Scripture alone.

The traditions were selected for four reasons. First, they are globally or historically significant.

Christianity, Islam, Hindu traditions, Buddhist traditions, Judaism, Sikhism, traditional religions, and secular humanism shape large populations and enduring civilizations. Second, they represent different kinds of religious claims: biblical theism, Islamic monotheism, Jewish covenantal monotheism, Hindu metaphysical and devotional diversity, Buddhist non-theistic soteriology, Sikh monotheistic devotion, traditional spirit-world cosmologies, and modern naturalistic humanism. Third, they are frequent participants in public claims about religious pluralism. Fourth, they create clear test cases for central biblical doctrines, especially Christology, atonement, resurrection, revelation, judgment, and salvation.

The source hierarchy is as follows. Where possible, the article uses primary or near-primary texts: the Christian Standard Bible, Qur'anic passages, the Bhagavad Gita, early Buddhist suttas, the Guru Granth Sahib, Sikh Rehat Maryada, and humanist declarations. Authoritative secondary sources, including Pew Research Center, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Oxford University Press, and standard theology-of-religions scholarship, are used to summarize demographic, historical, or conceptual matters. Because several traditions are internally diverse, the article avoids speaking as though one school exhausts the whole tradition. Phrases such as “many Hindu traditions,” “classical Buddhism,” “mainstream Judaism,” and “traditional religions” are used intentionally to prevent overgeneralization.

The biblical-theological method is conservative and canonical. It reads Scripture according to grammar, historical setting, literary context, and canonical coherence. It gives priority to clear texts over obscure texts and interprets doctrine by the whole counsel of God. It does not appeal to denominational tradition as final authority, nor does it make philosophical rationalism the judge over Scripture. Reason is used ministerially: to distinguish claims, identify contradictions, and clarify implications, while Scripture remains the norming norm.

3. Conceptual Framework: Pluralism, Inclusivism, Exclusivism, Universalism, and Relativism

The manuscript's argument must not attack a simplistic opponent while ignoring sophisticated accounts of religious diversity. Alan Race's widely cited typology distinguished exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism in Christian theology of religions (Race, 1983). Exclusivism, broadly stated, holds that saving knowledge of God is decisively bound to Christ and the gospel. Inclusivism holds that Christ is ontologically necessary for salvation, but that explicit faith in Christ may not be epistemologically necessary for every saved person. Karl Rahner's language of the “anonymous Christian” is the best-known Roman Catholic version of this tendency (Rahner, 1969). Pluralism, in a stronger theological sense, argues that no single religious tradition has final superiority and that the major religions may be valid responses to the same ultimate reality. John Hick's mature pluralistic hypothesis interprets the world religions as culturally conditioned human responses to “the Real” (Hick, 2004). Paul Knitter later proposed alternative models that move beyond the older threefold typology, including replacement, fulfillment, mutuality, and acceptance models (Knitter, 2002).

These approaches are not identical. Popular relativism often says that all religions are basically the same or equally true. Sophisticated pluralism usually says something subtler: religions are historically conditioned, symbolically mediated, and transformative in different ways. Universalism teaches that all will finally be saved. Relativism treats truth as dependent on perspective, culture, or community rather than finally grounded in God's revelation. Secular humanism is not always a religion, but it can function religiously when it supplies a comprehensive account of meaning, value, identity, and hope without God.

This article's position is neither philosophical rationalism nor denominational boundary-making.

It is confessional biblical exclusivism, with ethical humility. Scripture teaches that God has revealed Himself truly, that Christ is the only mediator between God and humanity, and that the apostolic gospel may not be revised by later religious claims (Galatians 1:6-9; 1 Timothy 2:5-6). At the same time, Scripture also teaches that Christians must speak with gentleness and respect, love neighbors, and refuse coercion (Matthew 22:37-40; 1 Peter 3:15-16). Thus the article rejects pluralism as a doctrine of salvation, but not careful comparative study or civil neighborly engagement.

4. Overview of Mainstream Religious Claims

4.1 Biblical Christianity

Biblical Christianity teaches that there is one living God, Creator of heaven and earth, eternally revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God creates by His word; humanity is made in His image; sin brings guilt, corruption, death, and alienation; and salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, whose atoning death and bodily resurrection are the center of the gospel (Genesis 1:1; Genesis 1:26-28; Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 3:21-26; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8; Ephesians 2:8-10). Christianity is therefore not merely ethical monotheism. It is christological, cruciform, resurrection-centered, and eschatological.

The biblical witness also prevents Christianity from being reduced to generic religion. The eternal Word was with God and was God, and the Word became flesh (John 1:1-18). The Son is not a created messenger but the radiance of God's glory and the exact expression of His nature (Hebrews 1:1-4). The gospel is not human ascent to God but God's gracious rescue of sinners through Christ (Romans 5:6-11; Titus 3:4-7).

4.2 Islam

Islam teaches submission to Allah, uncompromising divine oneness, Muhammad as the messenger of Allah, the Qur'an as revelation, and religious obligations classically summarized in the Five

Pillars: shahadah, salat, zakat, sawm, and hajj (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.-b). Qur'an 112:1-4 declares Allah to be one, self-sufficient, neither begetting nor begotten (Quran.com, n.d.-a). Islam honors Jesus as Messiah and messenger, but rejects Christian claims about His deity and saving crucifixion. Qur'an 4:157 denies that Jesus was killed or crucified in the way His opponents claimed, and Qur'an 5:72 rejects identifying Allah with the Messiah, son of Mary (Quran.com, n.d.-b, n.d.-c).

The disagreement between Islam and biblical Christianity is therefore not a small matter of vocabulary. It concerns the identity of God, the Sonship of Christ, the cross, and the gospel. The New Testament presents Christ's crucifixion and resurrection as the saving acts of God, not as peripheral historical details (Mark 10:45; Romans 5:6-11; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

4.3 Judaism

Judaism confesses the one Creator God, the divine origin of Torah, worship of God alone, divine providence, reward and punishment, the coming Messiah, and resurrection. Maimonides' Thirteen Principles remain a widely recognized summary of classical Jewish belief, including God's unity, non-corporeality, eternity, prophecy, Torah, Messiah, and resurrection (Chabad.org, n.d.; Maimonides, n.d.). Jewish discussions of *mashiach* commonly describe the Messiah as a human Davidic ruler who will restore Israel, rebuild the Temple, and usher in peace; mainstream Judaism does not confess Jesus as Messiah, divine Son, or atoning Savior (Rich, n.d.).

The Christian disagreement with Judaism must be stated carefully. Christianity does not deny the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It claims that the promises given through Israel are fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah. Luke presents Jesus as interpreting Moses and the Prophets as bearing witness to His suffering and glory (Luke 24:25-27). John's Gospel declares that the Scriptures testify about Jesus (John 5:39-47). The apostolic claim is therefore not

a rejection of Israel's Scriptures but a christological reading of their fulfillment.

4.4 Hindu Traditions

Hinduism should not be treated as one centralized creed. It is a family of traditions, texts, philosophies, ritual practices, devotional movements, and regional inheritances. Many Hindu traditions accept karma, samsara, and moksha: karma as morally consequential action, samsara as the cycle of rebirth, and moksha as liberation from that cycle (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.-a). The Bhagavad Gita depicts the embodied self moving from body to body as a person changes garments (Mukundananda, n.d.-a, 2.22), teaches divine manifestation when dharma declines (Mukundananda, n.d.-b, 4.7-8), and calls for surrender to Krishna (Mukundananda, n.d.-c, 18.66). Vedanta traditions themselves differ over the relation between atman and Brahman, and Hindu philosophy is too diverse to be compressed into simple pantheism or polytheism (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, n.d.).

The biblical disagreement is nevertheless substantial. Scripture teaches one Creator distinct from creation, one incarnation of the eternal Son, one earthly life followed by judgment, and one final resurrection. It does not teach an endless cycle of rebirth, an impersonal karmic mechanism, or recurring divine incarnations in multiple forms (John 1:14; Hebrews 2:14-18; Hebrews 9:26-28; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28).

4.5 Buddhist Traditions

Buddhism is also internally diverse, but its classical framework includes the Four Noble Truths: suffering, the origin of suffering in craving, the cessation of suffering, and the path leading to cessation. The Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta identifies the Noble Eightfold Path as right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration (Bodhi, n.d.). The Anattalakkhana Sutta teaches that form, feeling, perception,

volitional formations, and consciousness should not be regarded as self (Sujato, n.d.). Nirvana is the cessation of craving, suffering, and rebirth, not reconciliation with a personal Creator.

Biblical Christianity recognizes the reality of suffering, desire, impermanence, and moral disorder, but it explains them differently. The deepest human problem is sin against God, not merely craving or ignorance. Human beings are not impersonal aggregates without enduring moral accountability; they are embodied image-bearers who die, await judgment, and will be raised (Genesis 1:26-27; Romans 5:12-21; Hebrews 9:27; 1 Corinthians 15:42-49).

4.6 Sikhism

Sikhism teaches devotion to the one Creator God and reverence for the Guru Granth Sahib. The Mool Mantar at the opening of the Guru Granth Sahib speaks of one Creator, truth, fearlessness, freedom from hatred, timelessness, and grace (Sri Guru Granth Sahib, n.d.). The Sikh Rehat Maryada identifies Sikh belonging in relation to one immortal Being, the ten Gurus, the Guru Granth Sahib, and the teachings of the Gurus (Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, n.d.). Sikhism's monotheistic devotion may sound closer to biblical theism than some non-theistic or polytheistic systems, yet its doctrines of Guru, liberation, karma, rebirth, and revelation do not confess the triune God, the incarnation of the eternal Son, substitutionary atonement, or salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone.

The New Testament's claim is not merely that Jesus reveals helpful truth, but that the Father is known savingly through the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father (John 5:23; John 14:6-7; 1 John 2:22-23; 1 John 5:11-12).

4.7 Traditional and Folk Religions

Traditional religions are highly diverse and must not be flattened into one system. African traditional religions alone contain immense linguistic, ethnic,

cosmological, and ritual variety. Still, scholarly summaries often identify recurring themes: belief in a Supreme Being or creator in many communities, spirits, ancestors, ritual mediation, divination, rites of passage, healing, sacrifice, and a spiritually dynamic cosmos (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.-c; Olupona, 2014). These traditions often address practical questions of fertility, protection, misfortune, communal harmony, ancestral relation, and spiritual power. “A prior comparison of African traditional religion and Christianity similarly identifies God, the spirit world, sin and salvation, intercession, witchcraft, and healing as central points of doctrinal and pastoral comparison (Muhirwa & Sangwa, 2021).

Scripture does not deny the unseen realm. It affirms angels, demons, and spiritual powers. But it forbids ancestor veneration, necromancy, divination, idolatry, and the fear-driven manipulation or appeasement of spirits (Deuteronomy 18:9-14; Isaiah 8:19-20; 1 Corinthians 10:19-22; Ephesians 6:10-18). Biblical faith directs worship to God alone and rejects any mediation that competes with Christ.

4.8 Secular Humanism as a Religiously Functioning Worldview

Secular humanism does not always identify itself as a religion, and the article therefore calls it a religiously functioning worldview rather than simply a religion. The Amsterdam Declaration 2022 presents humanism as ethical, rational, democratic, and concerned with human flourishing, while looking to human reason and responsibility rather than divine intervention (Humanists International, 2022). The American Humanist Association similarly defines humanism in naturalistic terms that reject supernaturalism and ground meaning in human agency (American Humanist Association, n.d.).

Scripture agrees that human beings possess dignity, moral responsibility, and neighborly obligations, but it grounds those realities in creation, not autonomy. Human reason is real but fallen; human

compassion is valuable but insufficient for reconciliation with God (Genesis 1:26-27; Proverbs 3:5-7; Romans 1:18-25; Romans 3:10-18; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25).

Table 1. Representative Religious Claims and Their Central Doctrinal Tensions With Biblical Christianity

Worldview	God or ultimate reality	Human problem	Salvation, liberation, or final goal	Jesus and authority
Biblical Christianity	One living Creator, revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit	Sin, guilt, corruption, death, alienation from God	Grace through faith in Christ, grounded in His atoning death and bodily resurrection; final resurrection and judgment	Jesus is incarnate Son, Lord, Savior, Judge; Scripture is God-breathed final authority
Islam	One Allah, absolutely one, neither begetting nor begotten	Creatures accountable to Allah, needing guidance, repentance, and mercy	Submission, faith, deeds, and Allah's mercy; judgment, paradise, or fire	Jesus is Messiah and prophet, not divine Son; Qur'an and prophetic tradition function authoritatively
Judaism	One Creator God, covenant God of Israel	Covenant accountability, obedience and disobedience before God	Repentance, Torah faithfulness, mercy, Messiah, world to come; views vary	Jesus not confessed in mainstream Judaism as divine Messiah or atoning Savior; Torah and Jewish tradition central
Hindu traditions	Diverse: Brahman, personal deities, devotional theism, nondualism, dualism	Ignorance, karma, attachment, bondage to samsara	Moksha, liberation from rebirth; paths vary by school	Jesus may be respected by some but not confessed as unique incarnate Son; Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, gurus, and traditions vary in authority
Buddhist traditions	Often non-theistic regarding a Creator; ultimate concern centers on awakening and nirvana	Dukkha, craving, ignorance, impermanence, no-self	Nirvana, cessation of suffering and rebirth through the path	Jesus not central to salvation; Buddhist canons, monastic traditions, and schools vary
Sikhism	One Creator, timeless and known by Guru's grace	Ego, attachment, ignorance, karmic bondage	Devotion, remembrance, truthful living, grace, liberation from rebirth	Jesus not confessed as sole mediator; Guru Granth Sahib and Gurus central
Traditional religions	Often Supreme Being, spirits, ancestors, sacred cosmos, ritual powers	Broken harmony, spirit danger, misfortune, impurity, offense	Ritual restoration, protection, healing, ancestral harmony; views vary	Jesus often absent or syncretized; oral tradition, elders, ritual specialists, and communal memory guide practice
Secular humanism	No necessary deity; naturalistic, human-centered account of reality	Ignorance, injustice, suffering, oppression, irrationality	Human flourishing through reason, ethics, science, democracy, and compassion	Jesus at most a human religious figure; reason, experience, science, and human values function authoritatively

The table is not intended to settle every internal debate within these traditions. Its purpose is to show that the disputes are doctrinally substantive. The disagreements concern ultimate reality, the diagnosis of the human condition, the means of salvation or liberation, the authority by which truth is known, and the identity of Jesus Christ.

6. Major Theological Disagreements Among Religions

6.1 God and Ultimate Reality

The first disagreement concerns God Himself. Scripture begins not with human religious searching but with God's sovereign act of creation: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). God is one (Deuteronomy 6:4), living and true (Jeremiah 10:10-12), holy and merciful (Exodus 34:6-7), Creator and Judge (Isaiah 45:5-7). Yet the one God is revealed in the unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19; John 1:1-3; Acts 5:3-4; 2 Corinthians 13:13).

This differs from Islam's strict rejection of divine Sonship, from Judaism's refusal to confess Jesus as divine Messiah, from Hindu traditions that may speak of ultimate reality through Brahman, deities, or devotional forms, from Buddhist paths that do not require a Creator God, and from secular humanism's naturalism. The issue is not whether religions use elevated language for ultimate reality. The issue is whether the living God has revealed Himself as Scripture says He has, climactically in the Son (Hebrews 1:1-4).

6.2 Creation, Humanity, and the Human Problem

Scripture teaches that the universe is neither eternal in itself, divine, nor illusory. It is created by God and therefore dependent, meaningful, and accountable to its Maker (Psalm 33:6-9; John 1:3; Colossians 1:16-17). Human beings are not autonomous moral projects, reincarnating souls moving through karmic stages, or mere aggregates without enduring accountability. Man and woman are created in God's image, embodied and morally responsible (Genesis 1:26-28; Psalm 8:3-8; Acts 17:26-31).

The biblical diagnosis of evil is also distinctive. Sin is not merely ignorance, imbalance, craving, ritual impurity, social dysfunction, or evolutionary immaturity. Sin is rebellion against God, lawlessness, idolatry, guilt, and corruption (Genesis 3:1-19; Psalm

51:4; Romans 1:18-25; 1 John 3:4). Therefore biblical salvation cannot be reduced to education, meditation, ritual repair, social activism, or moral effort. The guilty need atonement. The dead need resurrection. The enslaved need redemption. The alienated need reconciliation.

6.3 Salvation, Liberation, and Final Destiny

The religions differ sharply in their accounts of salvation or liberation. Islam emphasizes submission to Allah, faith, deeds, and mercy. Judaism emphasizes covenant faithfulness, repentance, divine mercy, and messianic hope. Hindu traditions seek liberation from samsara through different paths. Buddhist traditions seek cessation of suffering and rebirth through awakening. Sikhism emphasizes devotion, remembrance, truthful living, and grace. Traditional religions often seek harmony, protection, healing, and ancestral or spiritual order. Secular humanism seeks flourishing without supernatural salvation.

Scripture teaches salvation by grace through faith in Christ, not as a wage earned by works but as a gift grounded in Christ's redemptive work (Romans 3:21-28; Romans 4:4-8; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:4-7). Good works are necessary as fruit, but they are not the ground of justification (James 2:14-26; Titus 2:11-14). Final destiny is not reincarnation, absorption into impersonal reality, ancestral continuity, or secular extinction. Scripture teaches death, judgment, resurrection, and eternal destiny (Daniel 12:2; Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:28-29; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:11-15; Revelation 21:1-8).

7. Jesus Christ as the Dividing Line

The central issue in religious disagreement is not first ritual, moral seriousness, sacred geography, or cultural identity. It is Christ. Scripture presents Jesus not as one prophet among many, one guru among many, one enlightened teacher among many, or one moral symbol among many. He is the eternal Word made flesh (John 1:1-14), the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15), the One in whom all the fullness of deity dwells bodily (Colossians 2:9), the forgiver of sins (Mark

2:5-12), the Judge of the world (John 5:22-23), and the only mediator between God and humanity (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

This is why Islam's denial of Christ's deity and crucifixion is not a minor disagreement. This is why mainstream Judaism's refusal to confess Jesus as Messiah and atoning Savior is not secondary. This is why Hindu appreciation of Jesus as a holy person is not the same as saving confession. This is why Buddhist admiration of Jesus as a moral teacher does not reach the New Testament claim. This is why secular humanist reduction of Jesus to ethical inspiration cannot stand as biblical Christianity. Scripture makes the Son decisive: "*No one who denies the Son has the Father*" (1 John 2:23).

The cross is equally non-negotiable. If Christ did not die for sins and rise bodily, the gospel collapses (1 Corinthians 15:12-19). But the apostolic witness is that He died, was buried, was raised, and appeared to witnesses (1 Corinthians 15:3-8). His death was substitutionary and redemptive: He gave His life as a ransom for many, bore sins, and reconciled sinners to God (Isaiah 53:4-6; Mark 10:45; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24; 1 Peter 3:18). The disagreement over Jesus is therefore not merely an internal Christian concern. It is the central fault line between biblical faith and rival accounts of salvation.

8. Sustained Exegesis of Five Decisive Texts

8.1 John 14:6 and the Way to the Father

John 14:6 is often cited in Christian apologetics, but its force depends on its literary context. Jesus speaks in the Farewell Discourse to troubled disciples who face His departure. Thomas asks how they can know the way. Jesus does not merely point to a teaching, method, institution, mystical ascent, or moral program. He identifies Himself as the way, the truth, and the life, and then adds that no one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:1-7).

The statement is relational, revelatory, and soteriological. It is relational because the goal is the Father. It is revelatory because Jesus reveals the Father so fully that to know Him is to know the Father. It is

soteriological because access to the Father is through the Son, not through generic spirituality. The text does not merely say that Christianity is one helpful religious system. It says that Jesus Himself is the exclusive way to the Father. This is not denominational arrogance. It is Christ's own self-disclosure.

8.2 Acts 4:12 and the Apostolic Name

Acts 4:12 occurs after the healing of the lame man and the apostles' appearance before the Jerusalem authorities. Peter proclaims that the healing occurred by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom they crucified and whom God raised from the dead (Acts 4:8-12). The statement that there is salvation in no one else is not a philosophical abstraction. It is anchored in the crucifixion, resurrection, and messianic identity of Jesus.

The logic is covenantal and public. The rejected stone has become the cornerstone. Salvation is not merely inner transformation, social repair, or religious devotion. It is God's deliverance through the crucified and risen Messiah. The phrase "no other name" does not deny that God has given partial witness through creation and conscience. It denies that there is another saving mediator by whom sinners may be reconciled to God.

8.3 1 Timothy 2:5-6 and the One Mediator

First Timothy 2:5-6 grounds the church's prayers for all people in a universal theological claim: there is one God and one mediator between God and humanity, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all (CSB, 2020). The text joins monotheism and mediation. Because there is one God, there is one true way of reconciliation. Because the mediator is the incarnate Christ, salvation is neither ethnic possession nor esoteric privilege. The scope is universal, but the mediator is singular.

This passage also guards against two errors. It rejects narrow ethnocentrism because the gospel concerns all people. It also rejects pluralism because mediation is not distributed among many religious founders or

systems. The universality of the gospel does not weaken Christ's exclusivity; it intensifies it.

8.4 Hebrews 9:27-28 and Once-for-All Judgment

Hebrews 9:27-28 states that people are appointed to die once and after this comes judgment, and then connects that appointment to Christ's once-for-all offering and future appearing for salvation. The passage matters for comparative theology because it directly contradicts religious systems that make repeated rebirth central to salvation. The author of Hebrews is not discussing reincarnation as a philosophical category, but the theological structure is incompatible with endless cycles of rebirth. Human life moves toward judgment, and Christ's sacrifice is once-for-all.

The contrast is important. If death is followed by repeated rebirth, then salvation is released from cyclical existence. If death is followed by judgment, then salvation requires atonement and divine acquittal. Hebrews presents Christ as the final priest and sacrifice, not one religious helper in an ongoing karmic process.

8.5 1 Corinthians 15 and Bodily Resurrection

First Corinthians 15 is the apostolic center of resurrection theology. Paul reminds the Corinthians of the gospel he preached: Christ died for sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and appeared to witnesses (1 Corinthians 15:1-8). He then argues that if Christ has not been raised, preaching is empty, faith is worthless, believers remain in sins, and the dead have perished (1 Corinthians 15:12-19).

The resurrection is not a metaphor for moral renewal or a symbol of religious optimism. It is bodily, historical, and eschatological. Christ is the firstfruits, meaning His resurrection inaugurates the resurrection harvest of those who belong to Him (1 Corinthians 15:20-28). This directly challenges systems in which final hope is absorption, extinction, cyclical rebirth, or merely moral legacy. The Christian hope is not escape from

embodied existence but the redemption of the body and renewal of creation.

9. Scripture, Idolatry, and False Religion

Scripture is realistic about religion. It does not treat all worship as acceptable because it is sincere. The first commandment forbids other gods, and the second forbids images as objects of worship (Exodus 20:3-6). Deuteronomy forbids divination, sorcery, necromancy, and forbidden mediation with the dead (Deuteronomy 18:9-14). Isaiah exposes idolatry as the tragic exchange of the living God for manufactured substitutes (Isaiah 44:9-20).

The New Testament does not soften this diagnosis. Romans 1 presents idolatry as the exchange of God's glory for created images and created realities (Romans 1:18-25). Paul warns that pagan sacrifices are not neutral, because demonic powers operate behind idolatrous worship (1 Corinthians 10:19-22). John commands believers to test the spirits by their confession of Christ (1 John 4:1-6). Paul warns against any gospel that departs from the apostolic message, even if presented by an angelic messenger (Galatians 1:6-9).

This language is offensive to modern pluralism, but it is biblical. The Christian is not free to replace it with softer categories. Yet Scripture's critique of false worship does not justify contempt for people. The biblical enemy is not the neighbor from another religion, but sin, deception, idolatry, and spiritual bondage. The Christian witness must therefore be truthful and compassionate, never coercive or cruel.

10. Can All Religions Be True?

All religions cannot be true in their central claims because their central claims contradict one another. This conclusion does not make human reason the final authority. It uses reason as a servant of truth under God. Scripture itself assumes that truth and falsehood are not the same (1 Kings 18:21; John 8:31-47; 1 John 2:21). Biblical revelation does not ask the reader to affirm mutually exclusive claims simultaneously.

Three distinctions are necessary. Logical contradiction occurs when two claims cannot both be true in the same sense. Jesus cannot both be God the Son incarnate and not be God the Son incarnate. Historical contradiction occurs when one tradition says Christ died on the cross and another denies that He was crucified in the Christian sense. Soteriological contradiction occurs when one message says salvation is by grace through faith in Christ apart from works as the ground of justification, while another makes karmic purification, ritual mediation, religious law, enlightenment, or human progress decisive.

A pluralist may respond that these contradictions exist only at the level of human symbols, while the deeper religious reality transcends them. But Scripture does not permit Christians to move the decisive truth about God behind and beyond the Son. God has spoken finally in the Son (Hebrews 1:1-4). The incarnate Christ is not a culturally conditioned symbol to be relativized by a higher metaphysical abstraction. He is the revelation of God, the mediator of salvation, and the Judge of all.

11. Direct Disagreements and the Biblical Witness

Table 2. Doctrinal Disagreements and the Sola Scriptura Evaluation

Disputed issue	Representative disagreement	Biblical witness
God	One, many, impersonal, non-theistic, or unnecessary	One living Creator, revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Deuteronomy 6:4; Matthew 28:19; John 1:1-3)
Creation	Created, cyclical, eternal, emanated, illusory, or naturally self-explained	God created all things by His word and for His glory (Genesis 1:1; Psalm 33:6-9; Colossians 1:16-17)
Humanity	Image-bearers, reincarnating souls, no-self aggregates, autonomous humans	Humans are embodied image-bearers accountable to God (Genesis 1:26-28; Acts 17:26-31)
Sin	Rebellion, ignorance, craving, imbalance, karma, social harm, irrationality	Sin is lawlessness, idolatry, guilt, and rebellion against God (Romans 1:18-25; Romans 3:23; 1 John 3:4)
Salvation	Grace, works, submission, enlightenment, liberation, ritual harmony, human progress	Salvation is by grace through faith in Christ, grounded in His atonement and resurrection (Romans 3:21-28; Ephesians 2:8-10)
Jesus	God the Son, prophet, non-Messiah, guru, teacher, moral example	Jesus is Lord, Christ, Son of God, Savior, mediator, and Judge (John 1:1-18; Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5-6)
Cross	Atonement, denial, misunderstanding, martyrdom, secondary event	Christ died once for sins as substitute and ransom (Mark 10:45; Romans 3:24-26; 1 Peter 3:18)
Resurrection	Bodily victory, denial, spiritualization, irrelevance	Christ rose bodily as firstfruits of the coming resurrection (Luke 24:36-43; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28)
Scripture	Final authority, one text among many, superseded text, human literature	Scripture is God-breathed, sufficient, and norming for doctrine (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21)
Afterlife	Resurrection, paradise/fire, rebirth, nirvana, ancestor realm, extinction	Death, judgment, resurrection, eternal life or condemnation (Hebrews 9:27-28; Revelation 20:11-15; Revelation 21:1-8)
Ethics	Divine command, dharma, compassion, social harmony, human flourishing	Holiness is grounded in God's character and fulfilled in love of God and neighbor (Leviticus 19:2; Matthew 22:37-40)
End of history	Kingdom, messianic age, cycles, liberation, no final telos	Christ returns, judges, reigns, raises the dead, and makes all things new (John 5:28-29; Revelation 21:1-5)

12. Ethical and Pastoral Responsibilities in Critiquing Living Religions

A biblical critique of religion must be ethically serious. The command to expose idolatry does not cancel the command to love one's neighbor. Every adherent of every religion is made in the image of God and must be treated with dignity (Genesis 1:26-27; James 3:9). Christian witnesses must therefore reject mockery, slander, racial superiority, coercion, and manipulative evangelism. The Christian may critique Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, traditional religions, or secular humanism as systems of belief without dishonoring Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, practitioners of traditional religions, or secular humanists as persons.

This distinction is not a concession to modern sensitivity. It is a biblical requirement. Jesus commands love of neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40). Peter commands believers to give a defense with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15-16). Paul reasons publicly with pagans in Athens while refusing to flatter idolatry (Acts 17:22-31). The apostles persuade, preach, pray, suffer, and bear witness; they do not coerce conversion. A conservative Sola Scriptura position must therefore defend religious liberty at the civil level while denying religious relativism at the doctrinal level. People should be free from coercion, but doctrines are not free from biblical evaluation.

13. A Conservative Sola Scriptura Response

A Sola Scriptura response begins by refusing two errors. The first is relativism, which treats doctrine as finally unimportant. The second is sectarian traditionalism, which allows denominational identity to become the final authority. Scripture corrects both. The Christian does not stand on private opinion, cultural conservatism, inherited custom, ecclesiastical machinery, mystical experience, or philosophical speculation. The Christian stands under the written Word of God.

This does not mean rejecting teachers, history, careful scholarship, or disciplined reasoning. It means that

teachers, traditions, arguments, experiences, and alleged revelations must be tested by Scripture (Acts 17:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:21; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Jude 3). A biblical response to religious disagreement should therefore be clear, humble, evangelistic, and uncompromising. It should speak truth without slander. It should distinguish people from systems. It should acknowledge partial truths and common grace without granting saving adequacy to false worship. It should expose deception without becoming harsh or self-righteous. Above all, it should proclaim Christ.

The gospel is not merely the announcement that other religions are wrong. It is the good news that the holy God has acted in Christ to save sinners who could not save themselves (Romans 5:6-11; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21; 1 Peter 3:18). The Christian message is therefore not religious superiority but divine mercy. Christians confess Christ because grace has found them, not because they possess superior ethnicity, culture, intelligence, or moral achievement.

14. Implications for Christians Today

First, Christians should recover confidence in Scripture. Many believers are confused not because other religions are intellectually unbeatable, but because Christians have become uncertain about their own authority. Scripture is sufficient to make the servant of God complete and equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17). A church that does not know Scripture will be easily impressed by religious mixture.

Second, Christians should learn enough about other religions to speak accurately. Misrepresentation is not faithfulness. If Muslims deny the Trinity, Christians should understand what Islam teaches before answering. If Buddhists speak of suffering and craving, Christians should not lazily flatten Buddhism into mere atheism. If Hindus speak of moksha, karma, samsara, atman, Brahman, bhakti, or avatar, Christians should understand those terms well enough to respond biblically. Truth does not need caricature.

Third, Christians should resist syncretism. Syncretism often appears more attractive than open unbelief

because it keeps biblical language while changing its meaning. It may retain Jesus while denying His exclusivity, retain prayer while adding spirit appeasement, retain grace while reintroducing merit, or retain Scripture while submitting it to later revelation. This pattern is especially visible in New Age spirituality, where Christian vocabulary may be retained while Jesus, sin, salvation, and spiritual authority are redefined through monism, inner divinity, karmic evolution, and therapeutic self-spirituality (Sangwa, 2026). The biblical pattern is clear: the people of God are repeatedly warned against mixture (Deuteronomy 12:29-32; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; Colossians 2:8). This concern also applies to contemporary religious and cultural blending when unity is pursued by dissolving the distinction between Christ and idols, truth and error, or biblical worship and syncretistic spirituality (Sangwa, 2025).

Fourth, Christians should pray for discernment. Scripture warns that deception can be religious, moral, mystical, intellectual, and even apparently miraculous (Matthew 24:24; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; Colossians 2:8; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 4:3-4). The test remains Christ and the apostolic gospel.

Fifth, Christians should love people of all religions as neighbors. Biblical exclusivity is not permission for contempt. Christ wept over Jerusalem, spoke with Samaritans, healed Gentiles, and sent His disciples to all nations (Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 19:41-44; John 4:1-26; Revelation 7:9-10). The Christian posture should be doctrinally firm and personally gentle.

15. Key Bible Passages for Further Study

The following passages are central for further biblical study: Genesis 1:1-28; Genesis 3:1-19; Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Deuteronomy 18:9-14; Isaiah 44:9-20; Isaiah 53:1-12; Matthew 28:18-20; John 1:1-18; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Acts 17:22-31; Romans 1:18-25; Romans 3:21-28; 1 Corinthians 15:1-28; Galatians 1:6-9; Ephesians 2:1-10; Colossians 1:15-20; 1 Timothy 2:5-6; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 9:27-28; 1 John 2:22-23; Revelation 20:11-15; and Revelation 21:1-8.

16. Biblical Summary

The Bible teaches that there is one living and true God, the Creator of heaven and earth, who alone deserves worship. He has revealed Himself in creation, covenant, prophecy, Scripture, and supremely in Jesus Christ.

The Bible teaches that humanity is made in God's image but fallen in sin. The deepest human problem is not ignorance, karma, imbalance, craving, or lack of self-fulfillment, but guilt and corruption before God.

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is not merely a prophet, sage, guru, enlightened teacher, moral example, or religious reformer. He is the eternal Son of God incarnate, fully divine and fully human, the only mediator between God and humanity.

The Bible teaches that Christ died once for sins, rose bodily from the dead, ascended to the Father, and will return to judge the living and the dead. His cross and resurrection are not optional doctrines; they are the heart of the gospel.

The Bible teaches that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ, not by works, ritual, ancestry, religious sincerity, philosophical insight, mystical experience, karmic progress, ancestral mediation, or moral achievement.

The Bible teaches that false worship is spiritually dangerous, even when culturally respected or sincerely practiced. Christians must reject idolatry and false gospels while loving their neighbors and bearing witness with humility.

The Bible teaches that all people will face judgment. There is no endless cycle of reincarnation and no final escape from accountability. The dead will be raised, and final destiny depends on one's relation to Christ.

The Bible teaches that the end of history is not absorption, extinction, or endless recurrence. Christ will return, judge evil, raise the dead, renew creation, and dwell with His redeemed people forever.

17. Conclusion

The religions of the world do not simply offer different paths up the same mountain. They disagree about the mountain, the path, the human condition, the nature of

God, the identity of Jesus, the meaning of death, and the hope beyond the grave. To pretend otherwise is not charity. It is confusing.

A conservative Sola Scriptura Christian response must be both humble and firm. It must be humble because Christians are saved by grace, not superior wisdom. It must be firm because God has spoken, Christ has come, the cross has happened, the tomb is empty, and the gospel is not negotiable.

The final answer to religious disagreement is not denominational pride, cultural Christianity, or philosophical speculation. It is the written Word of God bearing witness to the living Word, Jesus Christ. Scripture calls all people, religious and irreligious alike, away from idols and self-salvation and toward the crucified and risen Lord. In Him alone is the fullness of God revealed. In Him alone is sin atoned for. In Him alone is eternal life. As Scripture declares, "There is salvation in no one else" (Acts 4:12).

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