

Why Christianity Over Other Religions? How Does Hinduism Resolve the Problem of Sin?

Introduction

In doing these comparative studies, I have found that these systems of belief have some things in common, though they vary greatly in the details. Common themes: 1) the view of a triune God becomes distorted (either by outright denial or polytheism/pantheism, etc.), thus, 2) man's view of himself becomes distorted (usually by elevating/deifying himself), leading to 3) a distorted view of salvation – the need for it, the role Jesus Christ plays in it, how to access it, 4) consequently, the need for God's grace gives way to meritorious efforts to regain one's standing before God (or to become God, or to become one a pantheistic consciousness).

1. Some Overview Points on Hinduism

- A. Hinduism is a labyrinth of divergent religious texts, differing philosophical views, a multitude of sectarian groups. It is difficult to translate the Christian concept of "sin" into Hindu doctrine, so I will make some general observations and then turn to Biblical teaching.
1. A legal definition of Hinduism quoted and affirmed by Indian Supreme Court: "Acceptance of the Vedas with reverence; recognition of the fact that the means or ways to salvation are diverse; and realization of the truth that the number of gods to be worshipped is large" (in *Wikipedia*, from *Gita Rahasya* [1915]).
 2. The Supreme Court added (1994): "Unlike other religions in the World, the Hindu religion does not claim any one Prophet, it does not worship any one God, it does not believe in any one philosophic concept, it does not follow any one act of religious rites or performances; in fact, it does not satisfy the traditional features of a religion or creed. It is a way of life and nothing more." Thus, there is acknowledged ambiguity in Hinduism.
 3. Hinduism "has moved back and forth through various phases of monotheism, henotheism (the worship of one god among many), polytheism and animism, with each stage retaining at least a vestigial presence in the ensuing one. There is no set of core beliefs that remain constant throughout. The name itself, actually a label devised by Westerners, simply means 'the religion of India'" (Winfried Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths: An Introduction to World Religions*, quoted in *Understanding the Times* 142).
 4. The ultimate aim of humanity is to become one with the god/consciousness/energy of all that is around us. In the Bhagavad Gita Krishna says, "He who has let go of hatred, who treats all beings with kindness and compassion, who is always serene, unmoved by pain or pleasure, free of the 'I' and 'mind,' self-controlled, firm and patient, his whole mind is focused on me – that man is the one I love best" (147).
 5. Brahman is the "soul" or "divine spirit" that permeates every aspect of creation; an individual person – "atman" – is a singular manifestation of brahman. "The ultimate spiritual goal of Hinduism is understanding and experiencing that there is no difference between atman and brahman, between one's self and the rest of the universe" (*New York Times Guide to Essential Knowledge* 715).

6. When achieved to the fullest the Hindu reaches “moksha,” a release from samsara or the constant recycling of life on earth. “This experience of escape, sometimes called Nirvana or Moksha, allows us to stop returning to earth. Instead, we are able to experience our true nature as divinity” (*Exoticindiaart.com*).
7. “Those who have realized the brahman and those who are performing yagna or propitiation and worship to the Supreme Lord to eventually realise the brahman are two different categories and have two different destinations. At whatever time period one who has realized the brahman departs their body; be it day or night, the moon waxing or waning in its monthly cycle, the sun waxing in its northern course or waning in its southern course in its yearly cycle; such a person goes directly to Brahmaloaka which is the highest material planet to finish perfection.

“Those performers of yagna and ritualistic activities who have not realized the brahman go to Svargaloka the heavenly planets to enjoy for millenniums the rewards of their ritualistic activities; but when these rewards have been used up such performers of yagna are immediately recycled back into samsara and reborn again in this world of mortals to work out and finish their karma” (*Bhagavad Gita*, Sridhara Swami’s Commentary, as confirmed in the Garga Samhita Canto 10, Chapter 61, Verses 23-26).

B. The issue of “sin”:

1. “Sin” in Hinduism is essentially losing sight of the connection with the divine/brahman. This can be overcome by meditation and the process of reincarnation.
2. “Samsara” refers to the cycle of repeated births into this world which takes on different forms from life to life. Reincarnation is the belief that souls continually recycle through human bodies; transmigration is the belief that the soul might return as animal/plant/inanimate objects. What form of life one takes on is determined by “karma,” “the moral consequence of every act done by an individual in life” (*NYTGEK* 715).
3. “One way to think about this is through cause and effect. When we act in the world, we cause certain things to happen. This creates effects that must be dealt with or at least experienced. Just as with mundane things, karma builds up like effects that we’ve caused in the world. As we create more karma, our souls (or Atman) become caught in the cycle of Samsara. They must continually return to this plane to burn off that karmic load” (*EIA*).
4. Dharma “refers to one’s duty as determined by life circumstances (such as caste status, wealth, and power), and the actions that proceed from that duty” (*NYTGEK*). “(To achieve Samsara) we have to live virtuously. And that means that while we are incarnated in this body, we must follow our dharma. In other words, we must act according to our roles, be they social, familial, societal, or spiritual. Over enough lifetimes, as we strive ever more to follow our dharma and stop generating karma, we attain a state at death where there is nothing more to work through. At long last, the work is done. Then, upon death, we experience liberation (or Moksha). There is no more karma to be dealt with or experienced... And if we take the rest of the teachings seriously, then we also discover a route of escape” (*EIA*).

- C. To go deeper than this short overview will only mire us in a multiplicity of differing beliefs that not only manifest in Indian Hinduism but the many modern spin-offs that have impacted Western beliefs – known under the heading of New Spirituality (made popular by movies such as *The Matrix*, books such as Rhonda Byrne’s *The Secret* and New Age gurus).

2. Three Areas of Difference Between Hinduism and Christianity

- A. Unlike Hinduism, the Bible posits that God is a personal Being who has communicated with mankind and objectively made known His will.
1. Sin, then, is overt violation of God’s stated will: “*sin is lawlessness*” (1 John 3:4). Sin results by giving in to temptation to violate God’s will (James 1:13-16).
 2. The consequence of committing sin is spiritual death, or separation from fellowship with God (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:1-3).
 3. Sadly, all rational/mentally responsible people violate God’s will – “*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23). “*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us... if we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us*” (1 John 1:8, 10).
- B. So what is the remedy for sin? Hinduism clearly teaches a meritorious, works-based system of striving for perfection. But a key doctrine of the gospel of Christ is that man cannot by his own works reach a state of spiritual perfection. Instead, we must rely on the willingness of God to forgive sins – and this willingness is known as grace.
1. Eph 2:6-10 – Note that God is a personal being who has “great love for us.” When we were “dead” in sin, God provided salvation in Christ by His grace, not our merit. We can access that grace by faith, not by meritoriously seeking to erase bad karma.
 2. Note also Romans 3:21-26. Sin is a violation of God’s law and justice demands punishment for it; this is God’s “wrath.” But Jesus’ death on our behalf enables God to justly deal with sin while saving sinners who express their faith and trust in Jesus’ sacrifice.
 3. Titus 3:4-8 – Note again that God’s kindness and love are cited which provides for our salvation, “*not by works of righteousness which we have done.*” Eternal life replaces the death and separation we brought upon ourselves by our sins.
- C. Rather than life being repeated cycles which (ideally) lead to perfection, the Bible teaches that we only have one earthly life to live (Hebrews 9:27).
1. When soul/body are separated by death, the body decays and returns to the dust from which it came (Genesis 2:7; 3:19; Psalms 30:9; Ecclesiastes 3:20; 1 Corinthians 15:47-49).
 2. The spirit, however, “*will return to the God who gave it*” (Ecclesiastes 12:7). God will relegate the spirit to one of two places to await final judgment: torment, for those who have not availed themselves of the salvation in Christ, or Paradise, for those who have come to know Christ and trusted in His sacrifice for salvation.
 3. The Bible holds out no hope of second chances or successive lives in which to work out our bad karma by attention to dharma and meditation.

3. Why Is Christianity's Teaching of Forgiveness More Advantageous?

- A. Observation, not an argument: There is a principle of logic called Occam's Razor, which "is a problem solving principle that recommends searching for explanations constructed with the smallest possible set of elements" (*Wiki*). Christianity, especially when limited to the NT revelation, is very concise and relatively uncluttered. Culturally-created religions, like Hinduism, on the other hand, are often a bewildering array of complex, inexact, even contradictory, beliefs and practices. By its own admission, it is difficult to encapsulate a mainstream form of Hinduism in clear words. Compared to many human-based religions, Christianity is straightforward and clear.
- B. Secondly, Christianity acknowledges the weakness and inability of man to reach a state of spiritual maturity by his own will. Paul laments this inability: "*For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do... For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice... I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*" (Romans 7:15, 18-19, 21-24a).
- C. Paul's own answer: "*I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord... There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit*" (Romans 7:25-8:1).
- D. The gospel of Christ emphasizes the love of a personal God for His creatures; His unearned favor to them by providing for the forgiveness of their sins; a way to be righteous in His sight apart from human perfection or meritorious works. This makes salvation attainable, but not automatic: we must seek fellowship with God through the sacrifice He has made available for us – that of His own Son, Jesus, on the cross. In Christianity, salvation and heavenly glory are outside of ourselves; we must accept from God what He has offered us on His own terms.