

How Do the Great Religions Differ?

Teaching should always be adapted to the learner. Christ spoke to simple people living in a simple world. Since His time the world has grown steadily more complex. What worked then may not work now.

Just as different individuals have different needs, so do the peoples of each age. "The minister was telling the congregation that God knows what is best for us. We are like flowers. 'You know roses grow best in sunlight, but fuchsias require shade to grow,' he said. A woman came up to him afterward bubbling over with praise. 'Pastor, that was just a wonderful sermon. I never could figure out just what was wrong with my fuchsias!'"

As a child needs new guidance at each stage of development, so does the human race. God has a plan and purpose for us, which He reveals progressively, through His Messengers, according to our needs and maturity. The Bahá'í Faith is the latest—but not the final—expression of that divine plan and purpose.

In Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, the spiritual knowledge brought by God's past Messengers has been expanded and

adapted to our maturity. This is the difference between the Bahá'í Faith and the other great faiths.

All created things have their degree or stage of maturity...Similarly there are periods and stages in the collective life of humanity. At one time it was passing through its stage of childhood, at another its period of youth, but now it has entered its long-predicted phase of maturity, the evidences of which are everywhere apparent...That which was applicable to human needs during the early history of the race can neither meet nor satisfy the demands of this day...The gifts and blessings of the period of youth, although timely and sufficient during the adolescence of mankind, are now incapable of meeting the requirements of its maturity.¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá

I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.

I Corinthians 3:2

What happens if we continue to give a growing child nothing but milk? Starvation, stress, and disease will set in. That is what is happening to the spiritual life of the world. God has once again prepared a beautiful banquet with the most nourishing foods. In His supreme love, He invites everyone to come and enjoy the blessings and bounties beyond anything they have ever seen:

No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him...
I Corinthians 2:9

But many are ignoring the invitation. They present all kinds of reasons to excuse themselves. Some of them don't like the name of the Host, others don't like the door to the banquet; some don't like the invitation card, others don't like the menu; some say they have their own special banquet, others are too busy, and still others are too attached to their bottles! They are quite patient; they have waited for 2,000 or 3,000 years; they can wait another 1,000.

God is the supreme teacher. He does not delay His help for even an instant. The evidence around us points to a dire need for a helping hand.

The face of the world hath altered. The way of God and the religion of God have ceased to be of any worth in the eyes of men.² Bahá'u'lláh

Who else except God and what else except religion can restore love, hope, and peace to the heart of the world?

Religion is, verily, the chief instrument for the establishment of order in the world, and of tranquillity amongst its peoples...The greater the decline of religion, the more grievous the waywardness of the ungodly. This cannot but lead in the end to chaos and confusion.³

Bahá'u'lláh

As the body of man needeth a garment to clothe it, so the body of mankind must needs be adorned with the mantle of justice and wisdom. Its robe is the Revelation vouchsafed unto it by God.⁴

Bahá'u'lláh

Each of the world's great religions represents a chapter in the book of divine knowledge entrusted to humanity. As we advance, God adds, once in about every thousand years, a new chapter to the book. The new chapter reiterates and expands some of the fundamentals found in the previous ones, such as loving God and being kind, honest, and charitable. These virtues never change. They stand as eternal and unchanging as God Himself.

Each new chapter also introduces some *new* instructions and information, such as those found in the Bahá'í Scriptures about unifying the human race and creating a new social order. Religions differ only in relation to social teachings, not in the fundamental spiritual truths. Forgiveness, faith, self-control, self-respect, self-sacrifice, sincerity, justice, detachment, and love—these virtues have been, and always will be, the very life and light of the world. Thus the only difference between the Bahá'í Faith and other faiths is in social, not spiritual, teachings. By studying each of the succeeding chapters of the book of divine knowledge, we gain a deeper understanding of previous ones. We also grow in faith, for we recognize the oneness, the infinite

wisdom, and the greatness of its supreme Author and Designer.

This progressive revelation of truth and knowledge will continue forever:

Indeed no religion shall We ever inaugurate unless it be renewed in the days to come. This is a promise We solemnly have made. Verily We are supreme over all things...⁵ The Báb

1. Shoghi Effendi. *The Promised Day Is Come*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1951, p. 123.
2. Shoghi Effendi. *The Promised Day Is Come*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1951, p. 117.
3. Shoghi Effendi. *The Promised Day Is Come*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1951, p. 117.
4. Shoghi Effendi. *The Promised Day Is Come*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1951, p. 117.
5. *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 159.



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