

QUESTIONING CHRISTIANITY

G. Michael Cocoris

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INTRODUCTION

Someone has said, “5% of the people think. 30% of the people think they think. 65% look for a slogan. Most people don’t think and don’t want to think, but some do. Those who do sometimes ask Christianity several tough questions. They want to know, for example, how we can be so sure God exists and how we know the Bible is reliable. They ask questions, such as, “Are miracles possible?” “Isn’t Christianity just a psychological experience?”

The questions can get tougher in that they can have emotional overtones, such as, “How can a just God condemn those who have never heard?” “How can God allow suffering?”, “How can a loving God judge people?” “Is Christ the only way to heaven?”

What are we, who believe in Jesus Christ and in the Scriptures as God’s Word, to do with such probing and penetrating questions? One extreme tends to ignore them. The other extreme is to think that answering them alone will bring people to Jesus Christ. John R. Stott struck the balance when he said, “We cannot pamper to man’s intellectual arrogance, but we must cater to his intellectual integrity” (Paul Little, *How to Give Away Your Faith*, p. 65). In other words, we must attempt to show the reasonableness of Christianity by giving reasonable answers to the questions people ask. At the same time, we must recognize that it is only the gospel that is the power of God unto salvation, so along the way, we must tell them that Jesus Christ died for their sins and rose from the dead and that that gospel is their only hope of heaven.

Unbelievers are not the only ones who ask intellectual questions about Christianity. Doubts have a way of crowding into the minds of believers as well. They, too, need reasonable and biblical answers to their questions.

This material is an attempt to give practical, reasonable, biblical answers to the intellectual questions that challenge Christianity. Answers alone will not win people to Jesus Christ, nor bring a believer to spiritual maturity, but reasonable answers can eliminate the barriers so that individuals can make progress to those ends.

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CAN YOU PROVE THERE IS A GOD?

How can we know there is a God? Can we prove His existence? People ask these questions with different motivations. Some ask, wanting the answer to be yes. They believe in God and they want someone to demonstrate that His existence can be proven. Others, sometimes well-read and well-educated, ask and they don't care what the answer is; they just want to know the truth. Then, of course, there are the skeptics who don't just ask; they challenge and charge. They don't particularly want believers to be able to prove their case; they primarily want to argue.

Regardless of the motive, the question is, "Can we as Christians prove that there is a God?" The Bible does not try to prove God's existence; it assumes it (Gen. 1:1). Even so, can the existence of God be proven?

It depends on what is meant by the term "proof." No one can prove there is a God in the scientific sense of the term. The reason is simple. Scientific proof demands that something be repeatable. Suppose that someone claimed that when two certain chemicals were poured together, there would be an explosion. If anyone challenged that claim, it could be "proven" by simply repeating the process. Each time someone challenged the claim, "scientific proof" could be used to convince him that the claim was true.

That means that there are things beyond scientific proof simply because they are not repeatable. For example, no one can scientifically prove that George Washington lived. He is not repeatable.

How can something that is not repeatable be proven as a fact? There is another approach, which could be called legal proof in which a theory is presented, the evidence is offered and a verdict is reached. The conclusion may not be "demonstrable," but it can be logical and sensible. Using that approach, the proposition becomes: There is a God. Now, what is the evidence and what is a reasonable verdict? The Bible does offer evidence for the existence of God.

Reason

The first evidence for the existence of God is from reason. One of the basic assumptions of all science is that every effect requires a cause. That's the essence of reason; things do not just happen; they have a cause. Theologians have used three cause/effect arguments for the existence of God. In other words, these three effects demand a cause.

Cosmological Argument The natural universe is an effect that must have had a cause. If there is a painting, there must be a painter. If there is a building, there must be a builder. There is a universe and, thus, there must be a God. Creation reveals a Creator.

Paul used this argument in Romans 1:20 when he said, "For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes are clearly seen being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead so that they are without excuse." Notice Paul says the invisible things are seen. How can that be? Paul answers, "by the things that are made." Look at the world and see the sun, stars, sea, moon, mountain, and man. That indicates a sun-maker, a star-maker, a sea-maker, a moon-maker, a mountain-maker, and a man-maker (cf. also Ps. 19:1; Isa. 40:26; Acts 14:17).

Aristotle used this argument. He said that a given motion must be caused by another motion, which was caused by still another motion, ad infinitum, but infinite regression is impossible. There must be a first cause. There must be a motion that was caused by something that did not move—an unmoved mover, or an unmoved first mover. That is God!

If God is the cause of creation, the massiveness of creation indicates just how powerful He is (Rom. 1:20). If it were possible to bore a hole in the sun and pour in something to fill it up, it would take 1,200,000 piles of earth and 4,300,000 moons to fill the cavity, and our sun is small! Some are five times larger than ours. Furthermore, there are untold millions of suns in the Milky Way. Alpha Centauri, our closest neighbor, is so distant that if we could increase the speed of our rockets four times their present breath-taking rate, it would take us nearly 30,000 years to complete the journey. The universe is a big effect that demands a big cause.

Teleological Argument Design is another effect that requires a cause. Order and design do not just happen. Actually, things go from order to disorder. Order and design indicate some mind or intelligence at work. Does your house or office get more or less orderly if you leave it alone? Design indicates a designer.

There is design in the universe. The earth was “designed” for a creature like humans to inhabit it. That is obvious from the combination of exceptional features contained in it. Its size is perfect for holding a sufficient atmosphere without being too great to exert too strong a gravitational effect upon life. Scientists have estimated that were the diameter of the earth any smaller, the density of the atmospheric blanket would make the air so thin that in the absence of direct sunlight, sufficient heat would not be retained and intense cold would result. Under such conditions, all forms of animal, as well as human life, would perish. The water of the earth would freeze to such depths and even the lowest forms of life would be extinguished.

On the other hand, if the diameter of the earth were even the smallest bit greater (a matter of inches), the air would become correspondingly dense. Under these conditions, more solar heat would be absorbed and be retained, which would be insufferable. The atmosphere contains enough oxygen to support life, yet not enough to permit excessive oxidation. The distance from the sun is unbelievably perfect for the exacting requirements of life. If the earth were any closer or further from the sun, the temperature on its surface would not allow life.

Life must have water in liquid form, a condition possible within extremely narrow temperature ranges. Those temperature ranges are present in only the minutest fraction of universal space. Yet, they are present on the earth because of our distance from the sun. This delicate balance is maintained so perfectly in the earth’s orbit that the most trivial deviation would destroy all life on the earth’s surface. There is an effect that requires an intelligent cause.

That is only the beginning. The earth turns over at more than 1,000 miles per hour. The moon, meanwhile, is circling the earth at 365 miles per hour, making one complete circle every 27 1/3 days. On top of that, the earth, with the moon revolving around it, is revolving around the sun at the rate of 68,400 miles per hour (19 miles per second). It makes one complete revolution every 24 hours and covers approximately 6,000,000 miles a year. The sun is rotating, in the meantime, around another sun (a star called Halcyone) at the speed of 422,000 miles per day. The circumference of these circles is so great that it takes

thousands of years to complete one cycle. Why doesn't something get off track and crash into something? What a "fender-bender" that would be! Sir James Jeans, the great astronomer, declared, after scanning the heavens, "The universe seems to have been designed by a pure mathematician."

The conditions of the earth and, for that matter, our solar system are an effect that requires an intelligent cause.

Anthropological Argument There is another effect that demands a cause, namely, human beings. The presence of people on this planet not only requires a cause but requires a personal cause.

An atheist might argue that nature produced the universe, including man. Couldn't the universe be its own cause? In the first place, the universe has never been observed doing that. It has never made something out of nothing. Furthermore, something impersonal has never been observed producing anything personal. Impersonal marble never carved a statue, much less a living creature.

If the cause was not a person, it could never have produced a person. In other words, in the case of man, the cause was someone, not something. This complex creature, called man, can love, trust and hope. That effect necessitates a personal cause.

The universe, design and man are effects, which require a powerful, intelligent and personal cause. The existence of a personal God is the only reasonable cause for what exists in the universe.

Revelation

The second line of evidence to support the thesis that there is a God is revelation. The Bible claims to be a record of God's revelation of Himself to mankind. This line of argument has an inherent problem because claiming something does not necessarily make it so. Granted, a claim per se does not prove validity, but in this case, there is objective data to demonstrate that the Bible is supernatural.

The Fulfillment of Prophecy The Old Testament contained predictions of the coming of a Messiah and gave details about Him hundreds and hundreds of years before He arrived. Those predictions were fulfilled in the coming of Christ. Thus, fulfilled prophecy is part of the evidence for the divine, rather than the human, origin of the Bible and for the existence of God.

In 925 BC, the Old Testament predicted that the Messiah would be a descendant of David: Second Samuel 7:12 says, "When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish His kingdom."

About 725 BC, the Old Testament prophesied that He would be born in Bethlehem: Micah 5:2-5 states, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. Therefore He shall give them up, until the time that she who is in labor has given birth; then the remnant of His brethren shall return to the children of Israel. And He shall stand and feed His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God; and they shall abide, for now, He shall be great to the ends of the earth; and this One shall be peace."

Around 680 BC, the Old Testament foresaw that He would be born of a virgin. Isaiah 7:14 says, “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.”

About 530 BC, the Old Testament foretold the time of His arrival: Daniel 9:25, 26 states, “Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times. And after sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined.”

The 70 weeks (490 years) will begin (Dan. 9:25) from “the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem” (Dan. 9:25). Furthermore, from the beginning, “until Messiah the Prince,” will be sixty-nine week (483 years. See Dan 9:25). After that, “Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself” (Dan. 9:26). In other words, *this Old Testament passage is giving a date for the coming of the Messiah* after which time He will be “cut off, but not for Himself,” a reference to His death (The Hebrew word translated “cut off” was used of the death penalty. See Lev. 7:20, etc.). The only question is, when do the 483 years begin? There are four possibilities for dating the beginning of this time frame.

The Decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1)	539 BC
The Decree of Darius (Ezra 6)	519 BC
The Decree of Artaxerxes (Ezra 7)	458 BC
The Decree of Artaxerxes (Neh. 2)	445 BC

Each of these has been suggested as the beginning of the seventy weeks. Without going into detail, the Decree of Artaxerxes (Ezra 7) in 458 BC is the one that fits all the perimeters. At first glance, it seems that the Decree of Artaxerxes concerned the temple (Ezra 7:19-20), but it clearly included much more than that. Artaxerxes said they could do “whatever seems good to you,” “according to the will of God” (Ezra 7:18). Later Ezra thanked God that He “did not forsake us in our bondage; but He extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us, to repair the house of our God, to rebuild its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem” (Ezra 9:9). Moreover, it fits the coming of Christ perfectly. Calling this the traditional view, Boutflower dates the decree in 457 AD and concludes that 483 years later is 26 AD, the year the Messiah was made manifest to Israel (Boutflower, *In and Around The Book of Daniel*, Charles, pp. 186-191). Archer also dates the decree in 457 BC, but he arrives at 25 AD as the time of Christ ministry. (Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of the Old Testament Introduction*, Jr. p. 387). Wood says the Decree was in 458 BC and the 483 years ends in 26 AD because only one year elapsed between 1 BC and 1 AD (Leon Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel*, pp. 252-54).

All of these predictions and more were fulfilled perfectly in the coming of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament pinpointed the time and place of the birth of Jesus Christ hundreds of years before it occurred! There is nothing like this in the history of the world.

The Resurrection of Christ Many have argued that the resurrection of Christ is also evidence for the existence of God. The case for the resurrection has been rehearsed and rewritten many times. It consists of three basic arguments: 1) the tomb was empty; 2) the

grave clothes were undisturbed; 3) Christ was seen. All of this is objective proof for the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Years ago, Sir Edward Clark said, "As a lawyer, I have made a prolonged study of the evidence for the events of the first Easter day. To me, the evidence is conclusive, and over and over again in the high court, I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling. Inference follows on evidence and a truthful witness is always artless and disdains effect. The gospel evidence for the resurrection is of this class and, as a lawyer, I accept it unreservedly as the testimony of truthful men to facts they were able to substantiate.

Regenerates

The Claim The third evidence for the existence of God is the presence of people who claim they know God. Jesus said, "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (Jn. 17:3). Millions claim that they have met God through Jesus Christ and He has changed their lives.

The Value Frankly, this is not the most conclusive type of argument. After all, anybody can claim anything. I met a man once who claimed that he had been to other planets. At the same time, this line of argument ought to be considered. For one thing, if there is a God, and He has revealed Himself, we would expect that there would be people saying that, and that is just exactly what has happened.

Since the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in every century, from every country, from every class and caste in society, individuals have testified that they have met God through Jesus Christ. How does one explain that unless there is a God who has revealed Himself through Jesus Christ?

Playwright, William Alford, is reported to have said, "People who tell me there is no God are like a six-year-old boy saying, 'There is no such thing as a passionate love.' They just haven't experienced it yet." Philip Hughes wrote, "He who experiences it cannot knock it, and he who knocks it has not experienced it and should search his heart why."

Summary: While no one can conclusively prove the existence of God, there is evidence for His existence from reason, the Bible, and the experiences of people.

Having stated the case for the existence of God, several things need to be pointed out.

Atheists cannot conclusively prove that there is no God. They have no evidence. In fact, atheism is illogical. One of the laws of logic is that one cannot prove a universal negative, and atheism is a universal negative. All an atheist really has is questions, theories, and a great deal of faith, faith, which is not supported by evidence.

Bertrand Russell, the famous atheist, admitted he could not prove his position. He said, "As a philosopher, if I were speaking to a purely philosophic audience, I would say I ought to describe myself as an agnostic because I do not think there is a conclusive argument by which one can prove that there is not a God" (*American Atheist*, August 1978).

On the other hand, it is reasonable to believe that there is a personal God. While it is readily admitted that there is no conclusive proof that there is a God, at the same time, it can be argued that it is *reasonable* to believe that there is. There is evidence, good evidence. There is logic, excellent logic. There is experience, believable experience.

In the final analysis, one must exercise faith. God designed it that way. Hebrews 11:6 says, "Without faith, it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." It is one thing to know that there is a God; it is another thing to know the God who is. To know the God who is, one must believe that He is and trust in His Son Jesus Christ. If you believe that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh who died in your place to pay for your sins and who rose from the dead, you can not only know there is a God, you can know Him personally by trusting His Son for the gift of eternal life. The question is, "Will you trust Jesus Christ?"

Andrew Fuller, a preacher of a bygone day, was once riding his horse to a church where he was to speak. The rivers were flooded because of recent heavy rains. At one crossing, Fuller hesitated. A farmer nearby, who was watching, shouted, "Go on, sir, it is safe!" Fuller urged his horse into the water, but when it rose to the saddle, he stopped. "Go on, sir, it's all right," came the voice from the shore. Fuller nudged his horse, who, a few paces later, found the water shallow. When he arrived at the church, Fuller used that experience as an illustration. He said, "I couldn't see that there was solid ground under the water, but I trusted the farmer and discovered that what he said was true."

The facts cry out, go ahead, trust. Believe there is a God and trust His Son. You'll find solid ground beyond what you can see.

IS THE BIBLE RELIABLE?

Christianity is built on a book called the Bible. It is not surprising, then, that thinking people often ask questions about the reliability of the foundation of the faith. These questions, or objections, come in different forms.

For example, some ask, “How do you know the right books are included in the Bible? Maybe some of the books were left out, or perhaps one or two wrong books were included.”

Or, “How do you know that we have an accurate copy of what was originally written? We do not have the autographs; we only have copies of copies of copies. So, how can you be sure we have an accurate copy?”

What about the trustworthiness of our translations? As one fellow said, “Since the Bible was translated from Hebrew to Greek to Latin to German to whatever, and finally into English, don’t you think we’ve lost something somewhere? It has been translated so many times, how do you know it is still the same?”

Then there are those who ask, “How do you reconcile your faith with the fact that the Bible is so full of errors? How do you handle the contradictions?”

Many want to know, “How do you know what interpretation is right? Every denomination has a different interpretation; how do you know which one to believe?”

All these questions deal with five areas of the Bible: its formation, transmission, translation, accuracy and interpretation. Consider the questions and the answers in these five areas.

Formation

The first question deals with the formation of the Scripture. Did the church councils include the right books in the Bible?

What Christianity is claiming is that God the Holy Spirit superintended men as they wrote. If that is true, it is logical to assume that God superintended the formation of those books into the book we call the Bible. Ultimately, this is a question of “Is there a God and has He revealed Himself through the Scriptures?” Church councils did not determine what books should be in the Bible; God did. Rather than the councils superintending the Bible, God superintended the councils.

The Old Testament Be that as it may, what can be said about the formation of the Old Testament, which is called “canonicity,” is this: 1) God spoke to Moses (Ex. 6:2, 20:1, Lev. 1:1, Num. 1:1, Deut. 2:2, etc.). 2) God told Moses to write (Ex. 17:14, 34:27, Deut. 17:18, 27:3). 3) Moses’ writings were collected and preserved: “So it was, when Moses had completed writing the words of this law in a book, when they were finished, that Moses commanded the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, ‘Take this Book of the Law, and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there as a witness against you’” (Deut. 31:24-26).

Throughout Israel’s history, other men claimed God spoke to them and their writings were recognized as the Word of God. For example, God spoke to Jeremiah. He wrote and Daniel recognized what Jeremiah wrote as the word of God. Here is what Jeremiah wrote. “Now it came to pass in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, that

this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying: “Take a scroll of a book and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel, against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah even to this day” (Jer. 36:1-2). Here is what Daniel wrote, “In the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the Lord, given through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem” (Dan. 9:2).

The problem is that in the case of the Old Testament, there is no record of any “formal recognition,” just reference to use (2 Kings 23:1, 2; Neh. 8:1-5; Dan. 9:2; Zech. 7:12; etc.). There is, however, a confirmation of the correct formation of the Old Testament by none other than Jesus Christ Himself. He recognized the same collection of Old Testament books that exist today. In referring to the Old Testament, Jesus used a division that, we know from Josephus, included the same books as our Old Testament (Lk. 11:51; 24:44).

Furthermore, there were books written before Christ’s time that the Roman Catholic Church claims ought to be in the Bible, that is, the Apocrypha, but it can be demonstrated that those books should not be in the Old Testament. The Apocrypha was never quoted by Jesus, never quoted by any New Testament authors, never recognized as Scripture by the early Christians, and not recognized as Scripture by the Roman Catholic Church until the Council of Trent in 1546.

The New Testament Something similar can be said about the canonicity of the New Testament, as was said about the Old Testament: 1) The authors were claiming authority (that is, that their writings should be read in public and obeyed) as spokesmen for God: “I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren” (1 Thess. 5:27). “Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea” (Col. 4:16). “For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book” (Rev. 22:18). 2) There was immediate recognition. Paul called Luke’s Gospel Scripture. First Timothy 5:18 says, “For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer is worthy of his wages.’” In this verse, he quotes what he calls Scripture and gives one reference from the Old Testament and another, which is only found in the Gospel of Luke. Peter called Paul’s writings Scripture: “that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation--as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which those who are untaught and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures” (2 Pet. 3:15,16). Jude virtually recognized 2 Peter 2 (Jude 5-19).

Beyond that, there was early recognition in church history. Clement of Rome, in 95 AD, refers to Matthew, Romans, 1 Corinthians, and Hebrews. Ignatius, in 116 AD, knew the New Testament in general, especially the epistles of Paul, Matthew and the Gospel of John. I have personally read the writings that were produced immediately after the close of the New Testament and every book of the New Testament is quoted or allude to by 116 AD (assuming that 2 and 3 John are included with 1 John).

Formal Recognition Was not the formal formation of the complete canon much later? Yes. For the first several centuries, the church was persecuted and driven underground. When the church was given public recognition, it held church councils and the New

Testament was formally recognized. In 367 AD, Athanasius (293?-373 AD) listed the twenty-seven books of the New Testament as the ones God was obviously using. Jerome (340?-420) and Augustine (354-430 AD) did the same. The Councils of Carthage in 397 AD and Chalcedon in 451 AD formally recognized the same New Testament as Christians use today. These men and councils did not formulate the canon; they merely formally recognized what God had already done. They were simply stating publicly what had been widely accepted for some time.

Transmission

Assuming we have the right books, how do we know that we have copies of what was originally written? After all, we do not have the originals. Jesus said, “For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled” (Mt. 5:18). Does it not make sense that if God inspired the Scripture, He would preserve them?

Old Testament In the case of the Old Testament, we can be very sure that we have accurate copies of the originals. The professional scribes meticulously copied the manuscripts, even counting the letters on each page to make sure they had an exact copy. Until a few years ago, the oldest copy of the Old Testament that we had was dated at 900 AD. Then, the Dead Sea Scrolls, containing manuscripts of the Old Testament and dated as far back as 200 BC, were discovered. In other words, with that one discovery knowledge of the Old Testament text jumped back 1100 years. The only differences in the two copies of Isaiah, one dated 900 AD and the other dated 200 BC, are very slight and minor. It amounts to the difference between a singular and a plural and an article here or there.

New Testament The situation with the New Testament is a little different, but we can still be sure we have an accurate copy of what was originally written, even if it is not perfect. Depending on what is counted, there are about 6000 manuscripts in existence today. Not all of those are complete; some are fragments, nor do they all agree with each other. However, The vast majority of Greek manuscripts, which did not have early formal recognition, have a better agreement in the details than does the Vulgate, which was the official Latin version of the Catholic Church. Also, all authorities are agreed that no major doctrine of Christianity is affected by any of this.

Translation

The next issue is translation. How trustworthy are the translations we have in English today? I have had this issue come up repeatedly in presenting the gospel to others.

The Original Languages In the first place, you need to know that except for a small portion that was written in Aramaic, the Old Testament was written in Hebrew. The New Testament was written in Greek.

The English Translations From Hebrew and Greek, the Roman Catholic Bible was translated into Latin and from Latin into English, but the Protestant Bible was translated directly from Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek into English. The Protestant English translations were not the result of a long succession of translations.

How trustworthy are our Protestant English translations? Obviously, some are better than others are. The major reason there are differences is that different translation theories were used. At one end of the translation theory spectrum is a literal word-for-word translation. At the other end is a loose paraphrase. Nevertheless, all scholars agree that translations do not affect any major doctrines of Christianity. All standard English translations (the exceptions are one or two translations produced by cults, which have been deliberately altered) contain the deity, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the final analysis, that is the issue.

Accuracy

How accurate is the Bible when it comes to historical facts? Non-Christians who ask about the errors or contradictions in the Bible assume that if it is wrong about history, it is wrong about doctrine.

When I have been challenged by an unbeliever on this question, my standard response is, “What error are you talking about?” The vast majority cannot think of any! It is not that they have read the Bible and found one, it is that they have heard someone say that the Bible is full of errors.

By the way, if non-Christian come up with a problem in the Bible that you cannot answer, simply tell them that you do not know the answer and that you will find out. Then, ask those who do know until you get a satisfactory answer.

Reasonable Explanations The fact is that there are some problems and a few apparent contradictions. For example, Matthew says Jesus healed a man as they went out of Jericho (Mt. 20:29). Luke says Jesus healed a blind man as He “coming near” to Jericho (Lk. 18:35). Several solutions have been suggested to this apparent contradiction. There were two different healings (G. Campbell Morgan). If that is the case, they both followed a similar pattern. There were two Jerichos: the old Jericho and the new city, which Herod the Great had built. When this miracle took place, Jesus was between the two (A. T. Roberson, Walvoord). The blind man approached Jesus as He was entering Jericho and traveled with Him through the city, pleading for His mercy, but it was not until they were departing from the city the Jesus responded to their request (Bengel, Pentecost). They began to cry before Jesus reached the city, but Jesus did not reach them until He was leaving the city (Zane C. Hodges, “The Blind Men at Jericho,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 122, October-December, 1965, pp. 319-30).

Archeology Archeological discoveries have explained some so-called “problems.” Paul Little has written, “Time and time again, an apparent contradiction has been vindicated by the discoveries of modern archeology. Dr. Nelson Glueck, an outstanding Jewish archeologist, made the remarkable statement, “No archeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference,” and this phenomenal statement comes from one of the world’s leading archeologists. For those still unreconciled conflicts between the Bible and history, our logical attitude should be to wait and see what further evidence will disclose. We don’t have all the answers to all the problems, but all the vindicating data thus far certainly suggests that we can trust the biblical record about those details that still appear questionable (*How to Give Away Your Faith*, p. 76).

Little has made a valid point. For example, two Italian scientists unearthed a large number of manuscripts at Ebla in northern Syria. Reporting on this event, *TIME* magazine

said, “Their discovery does more than provide documentary evidence of a little-known kingdom that existed between 2400 and 2250 B.C.; it also provides the best evidence to date that some of the people described in the Old Testament actually existed.” This kind of new evidence has turned up repeatedly in the last several hundred years. As archeologists dig deeper, there is no doubt that more verifying evidence, substantiating the historicity of the Scriptures will be found.

Interpretation

In the area of the Bible, the question I have heard the most from non-Christians is, “How do you know what interpretation is correct?” The answer, of course, is that there are rules of interpretation called “hermeneutics.” The ultimate rule of interpretation is context. Both secular and sacred scholars agree that all literature is to be interpreted according to its context.

Historical Context If there is a reference or allusion to a historical event or social custom, the written statement must be interpreted against the historical backdrop. A simple illustration is Christ’s statement in Matthew 5:41, “And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.” In Christ’s time, the Romans ruled Palestine. Roman law provided that any Roman soldier, on the spot, could constrict any Jewish citizen and force him to carry his pack for one mile. The Jews, of course, hated this but nevertheless did it because they were forced to do so. Jesus, of course, is saying that if you had real righteousness and love in your heart, you would gladly carry the pack for two miles instead of the required one. Righteousness is an attitude as well as an external action.

Literary Context One rule of interpretation of any written material is that the type of literature is to be considered in interpreting what is said. The Bible contains prose, poetry, parable, and prophecy. Each of these types has its own rules. The historical narrative records factual description. Didactic material and poetry contain figures of speech, such as metaphors, similes, personifications, hyperboles, etc. Obviously, the historical events are to be taken at face value and not as fiction or fancy. The record of Adam and Eve, Noah and the flood, Moses and the Red Sea, and Jonah and the big fish are recorded in the Bible as historical events, not hyperboles. Likewise, figures of speech and picturesque language are not to be understood in some literal sense. The Bible speaks of the four corners of the earth, but that is obviously a figure of speech. These differences and distinctions sometimes demand thought and study, but their meaning soon becomes apparent upon reflection.

Thesis Context Words do not have a meaning apart from a context. For example, suppose someone says, “My heart bleeds.” What does he mean? To answer that question, one must know the context. If the statement, “My heart bleeds,” was found in a letter written by a college student who, in the context, says that he flunked his final exams, his girlfriend left him and he lost his job, I would assume that the statement, “My heart bleeds,” is not to be taken literally, but that he is describing an emotional problem. On the other hand, if that statement was written by someone describing open-heart surgery who had fallen out of bed, rolled down the stairs and was coughing up blood, he is describing a physical problem and the statement is to be taken literally.

Linguist Context A word may have several different meanings. The word “trunk” can refer to part of a car, a tree, or an elephant. Context determines which meaning is correct.

When the issue of interpretation comes up in the course of an evangelistic conversation, I personally tell the individuals about the rules of interpretation and to get back to the gospel and demonstrate that interpretation may not be as much as a problem as they think, I show them John 3:16 and ask, “How would you interpret this? It seems to me the message is clear: God loves you. God gave His Son. If you believe in Him, you will have eternal life. The question is, will you trust Jesus Christ?”

Summary: God’s book has faithfully formulated, accurately transmitted and translated, proven historically correct with a clear message of eternal life for those who trust Christ. The questions asked about this book have good and reasonable answers. Now that same book asks a question of you. What will you do with Jesus Christ?

We trust books that not only have not stood the test of time, we know that they will be change in the next few years. You accept medical treatment written in medical books that your doctor trust as reliable information to treat you and possibly save your life. Yet, he knows and we know that what he is prescribing now will more than likely be change in the next five years. Unlike, any other book on planet earth, the Bible has stood the test of time. The more that is discovered, the more it is vindicated. Is it reliable? It is more reliable than this year’s edition of the medical books you trust for your physical well-being. Why not trust the Scripture for your spiritual well-being?

In short, the questions asked about the Bible have sensible answers. The question is, “Do you have sense enough to take God at His Word?”

EARLY REFERENCES TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

Shortly after the completion of the New Testament (95 AD), authors quote or allude to it. These references indicated not only that these books existed but also, in many cases, they show that the New Testament books were considered authoritative and even inspired. Clement (95 AD) reminds the Corinthians that “the blessed apostle Paul” wrote to them “under the inspiration of the spirit” (1 Clement, Chapter 47). So, after the New Testament was written, it was considered inspired (1 Tim. 5:18, 2 Pet. 15-16, Clement)

NT Book	NT Reference	Ancient Author	Reference
Matthew	6:25	Diognetus (100 AD)	Chapter 9
	7:1	Polycarp (110 AD)	Chapter 2
Mark	9:42, 14:21	Clement (95 AD)	Chapter 46
Luke	10:7	Paul (63 AD)	I Timothy 5:18
John	17:11, 14, 16	Diognetus (100 AD)	Chapter 6
Acts	20:35	Clement (95 AD)	Chapter 2
Romans	9:5/1:32	Clement (95 AD)	Chapter 31/35
	14:10-12	Polycarp (110 AD)	Chapter 6
I Corinthians	Paul wrote under inspiration	Clement (95 AD)	Chapter 47
II Corinthians	10:3, 6:10	Diognetus (100 AD)	Chapter 5
Galatians	2:9	Clement (95 AD)	Chapter 5
	4:10	Diognetus (100 AD)	Chapter 4
Ephesians	4:4-6	Clement (95 AD)	Chapter 46
Philippians	3:20	Diognetus (100 AD)	Chapter 5
	Study Paul’s letter to you	Polycarp (110 AD)	Chapter 3
Colossians	1:18	Clement (95 AD)	Chapter 24
I Thessalonians	5:17/5:22	Polycarp (110 AD)	Chapter 4/11
II Thessalonians	3:15	Polycarp (110 AD)	Chapter 11
I Timothy	3:16	Diognetus (100 AD)	Chapter 11
	6;7, 10	Polycarp (110 AD)	Chapter 4
II Timothy	1:3	Clement (95 AD)	Chapter 45
	2:12	Polycarp (110 AD)	Chapter 5
Titus	3:1/2:10	Clement (95 AD)	Chapter 2/26
Philemon	20	Ignatius (116 AD)	Ephesians II
Hebrews	1:2, 3, 4, 6, 13/3:5/11:37	Clement (95 AD)	Chapter 36/43/17
James	3:13	Clement (95 AD)	Chapter 38
I Peter	1:19/4:8	Clement (95 AD)	Chapter 7/49
II Peter	3:15	Polycarp (110 AD)	Chapter 3
I John	4:2-3	Polycarp (110 AD)	Chapter 7
II John	Maybe included with I John	Irenaeus	
III John	Maybe included with I John	Irenaeus	
Jude	3/20	Polycarp (110 AD)	Chapter 3
Revelation	22:12	Clement (95 AD)	Chapter 34

ARE MIRACLES POSSIBLE?

A common objection to Christianity centers on the miraculous in the Bible. The most popular prey of all the miracles in the Bible is probably the story of Jonah: “Do you mean to tell me that a man was actually swallowed by a whale, stayed inside for three days, and lived to tell about it?” That’s a lot for some (pardon the pun) to swallow.

That’s not the only story that gets shot at in the Bible. Others include the crossing of the Red Sea, the flood of the whole earth, and even creation itself. There are also stories in the New Testament that draw fire, like Christ walking on water, feeding the 5000 from five loaves and two fish, and the ultimate miracle, the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Those finding it impossible to accept anything supernatural either explain away the miraculous by postulating a natural means or claim it was all myth and legend, just a quaint way of explaining spiritual truth. For example, they say Jesus really did not walk on water; He was stepping on stones. He did not multiply five loaves to feed 5000, He inspired the boy with the fish and the bread to share, and the idea caught on so that everyone shared their lunch. Or, the story of the flood took place before recorded history and, therefore, it has to be a legend.

Now, are these types of stories made up, or are they examples of the miraculous? Is there such a thing as the supernatural, or does everything have a natural explanation? In short, are miracles possible?

Some do not expect miracles at all. To them, belief in miracles is ignorance. One author has said, “How many things do we name ‘miraculous’ and against nature? Each man and every nation doth it according to the nature of his ignorance” (Montaigne, *Essays* II, XII.). Others see the miraculous everywhere. No less than Walter Whitman has said, “Every cubic inch of space is a miracle” (*Leaves of Grass*, “Miracles”).

The Definition of a Miracle

The place to begin is with a definition of a miracle. The subject gets clouded and confused because of the many ways the word “miracle” is used. In the popular sense of the term, the word “miracle” is used rather loosely to describe a wide variety of things from anything unexpected to something unusual. For example, we say things like, “It was a miracle! He asked me for a date.” “We had an accident; it was a miracle no one was seriously hurt.” “My boss gave me a compliment; I believe in miracles.” “A miracle happened yesterday ... my son cleaned his room without being asked.” Eric Hodgins said, “A miracle drug is any drug that will do what the label says it will do.”

What Are Miracles? Granted, a miracle may be unusual and, thus, unexpected, but that is not the definition of a miracle. A miracle is that which is supernatural. Webster defines a miracle as 1) an event or effect in the physical world deviating from the known laws of nature or transcending our knowledge of those laws; an extraordinary, anomalous, or abnormal event brought about by superhuman agency, 2) a wonder or wonderful thing; a marvel, etc. Theologians concur. Berkhof states, “Every miracle is above the established order of nature” (L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 176). Chafer defines a miracle as “that in the physical world which surpasses all known human or moral power and is

therefore ascribed to supernatural agencies is called a miracle. It is a sufficient power acting outside the range of natural causes and effects” (Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, p. 256). C. S. Lewis puts it like this: “I use the word miracle to mean an interference with nature by supernatural power. Unless there exists in addition to nature something else, which we may call the supernatural, there can be no miracles. Some people believe that nothing exists except nature; I call these people naturalists. Others think that besides Nature, there exists nothing else; I call them supernaturalists” (C. S. Lewis, *Miracles*, p. 10).

Who does Miracles? From a Biblical point of view, God does supernatural things and so does Satan. Consider these statements from Scripture.

“Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, “When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, ‘Show a miracle for yourselves,’ then you shall say to Aaron, ‘Take your rod and cast it before Pharaoh, and let it become a serpent.’” So Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh, and they did so, just as the Lord commanded. And Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a serpent. But Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers; so the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. For every man threw down his rod, and they became serpents. But Aaron’s rod swallowed up their rods. And Pharaoh’s heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the Lord had said (Ex. 7:8-13).

“Now Moses called all Israel and said to them: “You have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land—the great trials which your eyes have seen, the signs, and those great wonders” (Deut. 29:2, 3).

“And Gideon said to Him, “O my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, ‘Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?’” But; now the Lord has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites” (Judges. 6:13).

“The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders” (2 Thess. 2:9).

“Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority” (Rev. 13:2).

A miracle, then, is a supernatural act by a supernatural person. It may involve the use of natural laws or it may introduce another law. God may have used a natural phenomenon to perform some of the miracles of the plagues of Egypt. The healing miracles of Christ definitely supernatural acts, maybe using some “law” not known to us.

Let me illustrate. Suppose an ant wandered away from his anthill. In the process of searching for food, suppose he fell into a cup of water. Imagine him fighting for his life in the cup of water when a human plunged his finger into the water, came underneath the ant, and lifted him gently to the table. Back at the anthill, the ant would swear to his family and friends that he had experienced a miracle. From his point of view, he did. What happened to him was not natural; it was supernatural. Yet, it did not break a natural law. What happened was simply the intervention of a higher law.

The Defense of Miracles

Witnesses The miracles in the Bible are attested by reliable testimony. All courts operate on the assumption that trustworthy testimony can establish what happened. If that is the case, the occurrence of miracles would stand up in court.

Granted, some of the miracles in the Bible were done in secret and announced to the world, for example, Jonah being swallowed by a big fish and the conception of the virgin Mary, but many were performed in public for hundreds, thousands and even millions to see. For example, the crossing of the Red Sea, the crossing of the Jordan and most of the healings of Christ. There was every opportunity for Moses, Joshua, Matthew and John to investigate these miracles on the spot.

It might be objected that these witnesses were all believers and, therefore, they were predisposed to say it was a miracle. While that might be true of those miracles, it was definitely not true of all the miracles in the Bible. Thomas, one of the Lord's disciples, did not believe in the resurrection of Christ until he personally examined the evidence. Even more impressive is that the opponents of Christ never denied the fact that He actually performed the supernatural. They either attributed the power to Satan (Mt. 12) or tried to suppress the evidence (Jn. 12).

The Possibility Frankly, having witnesses is not the issue. The issue is not whether we can verify or find people to testify to every particular miracle. The question is whether miracles are possible. Paul Little has said, "With many questions, it is more important to discern the root problem than become involved in discussing a twig or a branch. This is especially true of questions about miracles. The problem is generally not with a particular miracle, but with the whole principle. To establish the miracle in question would not answer the question. The controversy is with the whole principle of the possibility of miracles.... The question really is, does an all-powerful God who created the universe exist? If so, we shall have little difficulty with miracles in which He transcends the natural laws of which He is the author. It is important to keep this fundamental question in mind in discussing miracles" (Paul Little, *Know Why You Believe*, p. 59-60).

That is the issue. Is there a supernatural God? If there is a God, the possibility of miracles, that is, of supernatural events, is not really a problem. If you can accept a statement in Genesis 1:1 that in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, you should have no problem accepting any other miracle in the Bible. Look at the universe. If there is a God powerful enough and intelligent enough to do that, surely He could hold back the waters of a river and heal a leper. The miracle of creation blows such a hole in the wall of resistance to miracles that one could drive any other miracle through it.

Years ago, I was speaking in an evangelistic meeting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. After the service, an engineer approached me and said, "My wife is a Christian and I would like to become one, but I have a problem." When I asked him what it was, he told me that he could not, as a scientist, accept the biblical account of the virgin birth.

I do not normally respond this way when dealing with someone questioning Christianity, but in this case, before I could catch myself, I laughed. When he asked what was so funny, I then said to him, "Do you believe that there is a God?" He assured me that he did. I asked if he believed that God created the universe. Again, he responded in the affirmative. I simply replied, "If you believe that there is a God who is powerful enough to create the universe, then making a virgin pregnant is no problem for Him."

I was not able to lead him to Christ that night, but several years later, I was speaking in Florida when he and his wife unexpectedly showed up at the meeting. They took me to dinner to tell us what had happened to them. Sometime after the conversation I'd had with him in Philadelphia, he had trusted Christ. They had been moved to Florida. He came all the way across the state to tell me that the reason he had trusted Christ was because he could never get away from the answer I had given him that night. Realizing that there is a God who created the universe satisfied all of his problems with miracles.

The Design of Miracles

That brings up another question. What is the purpose of miracles? Why did God do them, anyway?

In the Bible In the case of Christ, it would be expected that a supernatural person would manifest supernatural power, but beyond that, the Bible itself indicates that Jesus worked miracles to certify His person and preaching. When questioned by none other than John the Baptist as to whether or not Christ was really the Messiah, He pointed to His miracles. Matthew records, "And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Mt. 11:2-5).

The apostles, likewise, worked miracles to confirm their message. Mark says, "These signs will follow those who believe: In My name, they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs" (Mk. 16:17-20).

Christ did not just perform miracles for miracles' sake. He did not turn a man into a toad or make a river run uphill, or overturn a bowl of water from a distance. Rather, He came with a message of a great, good and gracious God and worked miracles to document His message. He fed the hungry, healed the sick, and raised the dead.

Today All of which brings up an interesting question: is God working miracles today as He did long ago? Apart from conversion, which is a miracle in the strictest sense of the term, and healing, which God does today, usually through means, there is no need for miracles. If the purpose were to certify and confirm the message, that has now been done. As Chafer points out, "Since the Word of God has been written in its perfection and preserved, there is no further need of signs" (Lewis Sherry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, p. 257). According to Jesus, if people will not believe the Word of God, they would not believe a miracle if they saw one (Lk. 16:31).

Summary: the miracles in the Bible are supernatural acts by a supernatural God to certify His messengers and message.

Frankly, it does not matter whether a non-Christians believe in the universal flood, the crossing of the Red Sea, or the swallowing of Jonah by a big fish, but there is one miracle, no two, that are imperative for every non-Christians to believe before they can have a

relationship with God. These are the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. On those two miracles hang a person's eternal destiny because the good news by which we are saved is that Jesus died for our sins and rose from their dead (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

Arnold Toynbee said that believing in miracles is a basic necessity of mankind: "The fundamental need of our world today is a rebirth of belief in the supernatural. If this rebirth is not forthcoming from the more progressive creators of our mechanical culture, it may come from the 'people like the natives of Africa,' to those who have not yet been victims of the proud materialism of the great powers."

If Toynbee can say that the need of society, yea, the fundamental need in society today is for a rebirth of belief in the supernatural, God can say that the essential need for the new birth is belief in the resurrection. C. S. Lewis has said, "All the essentials of Hinduism would, I think, remain unimpaired if you subtracted the miraculous, and the same is almost true of Mohammedism, but you cannot do that with Christianity. It is precisely the story of a great miracle, a naturalistic Christianity leaves out all that is specifically Christian" (C. S. Lewis, *Miracles*, p. 69).

ISN'T CHRISTIANITY JUST A PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE?

Critics of Christianity claim that conversion is nothing more than a psychological experience. They sometimes charge, "Isn't it possible to explain Christian experience in purely psychological terms?"

The attack takes various approaches. Some suggest that people are Christians because of preconditioning, like Pavlov's dog. Individuals who grow up in a Christian family are taught Christian beliefs and naturally accept them. So, it is not surprising that Moslems are raised by Moslem families in a Moslem culture. Likewise, Catholics are taught and trained in Catholicism, and Lutherans in Lutheranism, etc.

Another approach contends that conversion is only psychological in the sense that it is wish-fulfillment. According to this view, all religious experiences can be traced to man's need for God, creating such a creature and then worshipping his creation. So, it is not that God created man in His image; it is that man created God in his. Thus, it's all in a person's head. Christians have hypnotized themselves into believing what they inwardly wish to believe.

Or, there is the psychological explanation that says religion is a crutch for the weak. A religious person is one who is emotionally weak, who can't face reality or the future without a crutch, so these types cling to religion. Now that man is less superstitious and more sophisticated, there is little need for God.

Let's examine each of these objections one by one.

Psychological Preconditioning

Preconditioning The argument is you were a Baptist because your parents were Baptist. You're a Buddhist because you grew up in a Buddhist family.

The Truth One of the classic conversions in all of church history is the conversion of Paul. His conversion is recounted in Acts 9.

"Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed, he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened, he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank" (Acts 9:1-9).

In the modern psychological sense of the term, Paul had no precondition. He was reared Jewish (Phil. 3:3-6). Just prior to his conversion, he was trying to destroy Christianity! Yet he believed. Many, like Paul, are preconditioned not to believe, but they believe.

On the other hand, many are conditioned as children *to believe* in Christianity, but they arrive in adult life *not believing* in it. In fact, there are many cases of families with multiple children who all had the same Christian training, but not all became Christians.

Moreover, millions have been converted to Christianity without any preconditioning either way. People have been converted from every conceivable kind of background.

In the final analysis, preconditioning does not explain Christianity. Preconditioning simply cannot explain many, if any, conversions.

Furthermore, preconditioning does not prove a position to be true or false. The question is, “Was the precondition based on objective reality?” People are preconditioned when they are young to believe that fire is hot and harmful. As adults, they still believe that. Why? Because of their preconditioning? No. Because that is reality.

On the other hand, many in America are preconditioned to believe in Santa Claus, but not many adults believe that a fat man slides down millions of chimneys all during one night in December! Preconditioning does not validate or invalidate a position. The question is, was the preconditioning true to reality?

Psychological Wish-Fulfillment

Wish-fulfillment What about wish-fulfillment? Did man create God in his image because of some need within him? Sigmund Freud said religious beliefs “are illusions, fulfillments of the oldest, strongest, and most urgent wishes of mankind... As we already know; the terrifying impression of helplessness in childhood aroused the need for protection—for protection through love—which was provided by the father.... Thus the benevolent rule of divine providence allays our fear of the dangers of life” (Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*). Voltaire, the atheist, said, “If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him.” Again, Paul’s conversion was not wish fulfillment. He did not think, nor did he want Christianity to be true. His wish was that Christianity be destroyed!

Truth It has been pointed out that some of the most renowned Atheists, including Nietzsche, H.G. Wells, and Freud himself, had terrible relationships with their earthly fathers (P. Vitz, *Faith of the Fatherless*). Perhaps they projected their anger toward their earthly father against the heavenly Father God. This is obviously not the case with every atheist. The point is such an argument cuts both ways.

Besides, desire does not determine truth, validity, or reality. For example, suppose someone decided to believe that every time he threw a ball up, it would come down. Does the ball come down because that individual believed it would? The obvious answer is, “No.” It comes down because of an objective reality called gravity, not because of any individual’s belief. Suppose another person no longer believed that if he threw a ball up, it would come down. Would that be the case? Of course not. The law of gravity is valid. It is an objective reality. It is not based on one’s belief or lack of belief.

Just because someone wants Christianity to be true does not make it true, and just because someone wants Christianity to be false does not make it false. It is either true or false, based on what is really true or false. Wish-fulfillment does not explain Christianity. To say that wish-fulfillment explains Christianity is wishful thinking!

Psychological Crutch

A Crutch For centuries, religion in general and Christianity, in particular, have been labeled a crutch. Freud, for example, portrayed religion as something for the emotionally weak. In movies and in the media, Christianity is caricatured as an escape mechanism for emotionally needy people. According to this view, people are weak and fearful and, accordingly, have invented a God as an aid and assistance to help them through life.

One more time, consider Paul's conversion. Before his conversion, did he look like someone who was in need of a crutch? Absolutely not!

Truth Let's examine this idea carefully. A crutch assumes two things: 1) a problem, 2) help, but aid, which leaves something to be desired.

Frankly, the first part of the crutch concept is true. People do have a problem; they are weak. Psychology teaches that and so does the Bible. Psychology would prefer to call it insecurity, inferiority, or inadequacy, but it readily admits that people have a problem.

The Bible says that people are not just weak; they are wicked. Paul writes, "What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one. Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues, they have practiced deceit; The poison of asps is under their lips; Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; Destruction and misery are in their ways; And the way of peace they have not known. "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom. 3:9-18).

Moreover, the Bible teaches that unaided people do not have the ability to overcome their wickedness.

A crutch conjures up the notion of a clumsy device to help a person limp along without coming to grips with his basic problem. It is a help, but not a solution. There are crutches that men use in life, like alcohol, pills and drugs. People lean on them but remain crippled. In fact, it is worse. They become weaker, not stronger.

Christianity is a cure, not a crutch. It deals with people's most basic problems—their weakness and wickedness, and it solves those problems. If done according to the Scriptures, it makes a person mature and strong.

Someone has said, "If Christians were just looking for a God who would simply function as a crutch to make life easier to bear, why come up with a God who is holy and just, a God who finds many of our desires and thoughts to be immoral? Shouldn't that be the last sort of God we would want to make up if we just wanted a crutch to get through life? Wouldn't we want a God who just nods at all our behavior and desires?" (source unknown).

Jesus did offer a crutch: He offered a cross; G. K. Chesterton said, "The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried" (G. K. Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World*).

The real issue, then, is whether or not Christianity is the truth. Is Christianity auto-hypnosis, or is it objective fact?

Summary: Christianity is not just a subjective psychological experience of preconditioning, wish-fulfillment, or auto-hypnosis; it is objective reality.

To put the same thing another way, Christians are not claiming that Christianity is true because of their experience. Rather, they contend that Christianity is true and their experience confirms it. Experience substantiates the validity of Christianity, but that reality existed first so that it could be experienced.

Let me illustrate. Suppose a man awoke and rose before sunrise every day. He got dressed and stood on his back porch with a compass in his hand, as the sun came over the horizon. Every morning his experience was the same. According to the compass, the sun always rose in the east. Now, his getting up every morning with a compass did not cause the sun to come up in the east. The reality is that the sun comes up in the east every morning, whether he is asleep or awake, whether he is with or without a compass, but his experience verified that truth.

A college professor once challenged a Christian using the concept that what a person believes may be true for him but not necessarily true for other people. He used the illustration of a man being tied to a railroad track in a fraternity hazing. When the train whizzed by on the other track, he did not know that it was not on his track. As far as he was concerned, the train might as well have been on his track. He believed it was so and thus, for him, it became true. The professor smugly concluded with, "What's true for you may not be true for me."

The Christian responded by contending that Christianity is different than all other religions because of the *fact* of the resurrection. At first, the professor did not see the point of the argument, but the more the Christian pressed it home, the professor began to understand. Suddenly he said, "Yes, that would make a difference, wouldn't it?"

If Jesus Christ came back from the dead, if that is reality, the experience of Christianity is not just a psychological experience. If, on the other hand, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a myth, then the experience of Christians is just psychological.

HOW CAN GOD ALLOW SUFFERING?

The most difficult question I've been asked by non-Christians has to do with suffering. The basic objection is how can a good God make and maintain a world full of suffering? The specifics vary.

The innocent suffer in war. Millions who have had no choice and who would not have chosen war if they had had a choice have suffered because of war. Why did God allow that, and why doesn't He stop it?

Innocent people also suffer because of natural disasters. Floods and famines, tornados and typhoons, earthquakes, and epidemics inflict injury and death on many millions each year. If God is powerful, why doesn't He stop it?

Babies are born blind, deaf, deformed, or defective. If God is good, why doesn't He prevent death, disaster, disease, and deformity? The problem is sometimes formulated in a proposition that goes like this:

If God is all good, He would destroy evil.
If God is all powerful, He can destroy evil.
But evil is not destroyed.
Therefore, there is no all-good, all-powerful God.
Or, Either God is all good, but not all powerful,
Or God is all powerful, but not all good.

C. S. Lewis expressed the dilemma like this. "If God were good, He would wish to make His creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty, He would be able to do what He wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore, God lacks either goodness, or power, or both."

How can an all-good, all-powerful God allow the suffering of innocent people? What is the Christian's answer to the problem of pain?

Frankly, the dilemma between the conflict of good and evil has baffled men for centuries. There are no easy answers, and maybe no final answer, but there are several things that need to be pointed out.

This subject can be divided into two major issues: 1) Why did an all-good, all-powerful God allow suffering? 2) Why doesn't He stop it? The first question is one of causation and the second of cessation.

The Cause of Suffering: Why has God Allowed Evil?

The Human Choice To begin with, God did not create evil. The biblical account of the beginning is that God created the world without evil and suffering. Originally, there was no sin in the Garden of Eden. The problem is that man chose to disobey God, and when he did, sin entered the world, and with it suffering. Here is the biblical account of what happened.

"So the Lord God said to the serpent: "Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; on your belly you shall go, and

you shall eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.” To the woman, He said: “I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain, you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” Then to Adam, He said, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’: Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face, you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust, you shall return” (Gen. 3:14-19).

Most of the suffering in the world is man’s inhumanity to man. Man’s hatred causes war. Man’s overindulgence in drink and drugs causes people to be killed and injured in automobile accidents. Man’s greed causes the hoarding of surpluses while others starve.

C. S. Lewis was willing to go so far as to say that the wickedness of men accounted for most of the suffering in the world. He said, “When souls become wicked, they will certainly use this possibility to hurt one another; and this, perhaps, accounts for four-fifths of the sufferings of men. It is men, not God, who have produced racks, whips, prisons, slavery, guns, bayonets, and bombs; it is by human avarice, or human stupidity, not by the churlishness of nature that we have poverty and overwork” (*The Problem of Pain*, p. 77).

Mankind has it within his power to solve a lot of the suffering in the world, but for one reason or another, he doesn’t. Take, for example, the problem of hunger. According to projections, the population of the world will be eight billion by the year 2010. Can the earth feed that kind of a population? Many experts are confident that our earth could feed up to forty billion, all on the level of the present U.S. diets. The problem of hunger is a problem man could solve if he would.

Candidly, that does not explain all the evil and suffering in the world. Granted, that man’s inhumanity to man causes suffering in the world, but there is also suffering caused by nature. Storms and birth defects produce a great deal of suffering every year. How does Christianity explain that kind of suffering?

The answer is that man’s fall not only put a curse on him but also on the world. Paul says, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. And not only they, but we also who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:18-23).

God did not originally create this sin, disease/death environment that we live in today. There was no disease, deformity, disaster or death in the Garden of Eden until man sinned. After the fall, the world changed. What we live in today is a result of sin. So, the problem is man’s, not God’s.

The Divine Plan Someone will object that God did choose to give man a choice. That’s true, so let’s ask, “Why did He do that?”

God could have chosen any number of plans. Let's say that there are five hundred possibilities and that this one is plan number 233. The question is why God chose plan number 233 and not plan number 234.

The answer is that God wanted to create a creature that He could have fellowship with and who would voluntarily choose to love Him. To do that, He had to create a being with choice, but if He did that, then there would exist the possibility of that creature making the wrong choice. Nevertheless, to get the desired end of a person who would voluntarily choose to love God, there had to be a creature who had a choice.

Let me put it another way. To eliminate the possibility of evil, the possibility of choice would have had to be eliminated. That would have made us robots or computers. Then our complaint would have been that God didn't give us a choice; He just made us machines He could manipulate.

On a few occasions, when talking to individuals who were challenging Christianity with the problem of pain, I have said, "God created man with a choice. You are objecting. If God had created man without a choice, you would object to that, too. Let's face it. God can't win with you no matter what He does!" C. S. Lewis has said, "It seems that we are hard to please. We treat God as the policeman treats a man when he is arrested; whatever he does will be used in evidence against him" (*Miracles*, p. 51).

Suppose a company purchased a large, expensive computer. When the manufacturer of the computer installed it, he provided an operator's manual to the company that purchased the computer, but suppose the new owner threw the operator's manual away, ignoring the instructions. Instead, he began to randomly push buttons until the machine malfunctioned and ultimately shut down. The potential of the misuse of the equipment was always there, but the manufacturer had given instructions on its proper use, and even warned of the consequences of misuse. Who's fault is it if the machine breaks down? Likewise, God's creation had the potential for evil and suffering, but God provided ample instructions. The evil and suffering came about when man chose to ignore God's instructions and warnings.

Someone will object, "The consequences are so great. Why must there be such devastating consequences as heaven and hell?" The answer to that is bound up in the nature of choices. Small choices have small consequences. Big choices have big consequences. Choosing between a Coke and a Pepsi is not a major choice in life, but choosing between apples and arsenic is. The biggest choice in life is whether or not a person chooses to believe God and trust His Son, Jesus Christ. That choice is so big, the consequences are heaven or hell.

David A. DeWitt explained it like this. "Without results, choices are insignificant. Suppose I offer you one of two milk chocolate candy bars--a Hersheys bar or a Nestles bar. If the result of eating one is the same as the result of eating the other, then the result of choosing one is the same as the result of choosing the other. In that case, the choice would be insignificant. But let's imagine a situation in which the result of your eating one would be very different. Suppose one item offered was a milk chocolate bar and the other a chocolate-flavored Exlax. Then the choice would be significant because the result of eating the two would be very different. If God is going to give man the real choice of following Him or not, then the results of the choice must also be real" (*Answering the Tough Ones*, David A. DeWitt, p. 82).

The Cessation of Suffering: Why doesn't God Stop Suffering?

The second major question dealing with suffering is why God does not stop it. In answering this part of the question, it must be kept in mind that no one has all the answers. Perhaps the cessation of evil and suffering is the most difficult problem of all. Several things can be said.

The Elimination of People For one thing, if God eliminated all the suffering and evil in the world, He would, of necessity, eliminate all of us. As we have seen, people cause most of the suffering, so if the cause of suffering were eliminated, people would be eliminated. The story of Noah in the Bible demonstrates that if God removed actual evil, but left potential evil behind, actual evil would eventually return. As many have dramatically pointed out, if God eliminated all evil at midnight, how many people would be left at 12:01?

It should also be pointed out that God does not judge now because He is waiting for people to turn to Him. Peter explains why God is so patient, even in the light of suffering. He is waiting for people to turn to Him. Peter said, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). By delaying Christ's return, when there will be an end to suffering and evil, God is extending the opportunity for people to turn to Him and escape eternal suffering.

By the way, have you used your opportunity?

The Elimination of Evil One other observation. It needs to be remembered, from a biblical point of view, that God will one day eliminate all evil and suffering. That is the ultimate Christian answer to the problem of pain. God will one day eliminate it all! Peter says, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Pet. 3:10-13. cf. Rev. 20:1-4).

Christians view temporal suffering from God's perspective, for they are not in the land of the living going to the land of the dying; they are in the land of the dying going to the land of the living.

Summary: God did not cause suffering, but He did allow it in His design to give us a free choice and will, one day, eliminate it once and for all. The issue is a human choice. Human choice brought suffering to the human race; human choice perpetuates it, and choice can, for you, eliminate it in eternity.

A pastor and a barber, who claimed to be an atheist, were once together in the same car in the poor section of town. Seizing the opportunity to poke at the pastor, the barber said, "This is why I can't believe in a God of love. If He is as kind as you say, why does He permit all of this poverty, disease and squalor? How can He allow all of this drug dealing and vandalism?" The pastor said nothing until they came upon an unkempt, filthy man with matted hair down his back. Turning to the atheist the pastor said, "You can't be a very good barber or you wouldn't let people like this live around here without a haircut and a shave."

Indignantly, the barber responded, “Why blame me for that man’s condition? I can’t help it if he’s like that. He’s never given me a chance. If he came to my shop, I would fix him up and make him look like a gentleman,” to which the minister replied, “Then don’t blame God for allowing these people to continue in their evil ways. He constantly invites them to come to Him and be changed. The reason they are slaves to sin and evil habits is that they refuse to accept the One who died to save and deliver them.”

This is one of the best explanations of why God allows pain and suffering that I have seen: A man went to a barbershop to have his hair cut and his beard trimmed. As the barber began to work, they began to have a good conversation.

They talked about so many things and various subjects. When they eventually touched on the subject of God, the barber said: “I don’t believe that God exists.”

“Why do you say that?” asked the customer. “Well, you just have to go out in the street to realize that God doesn’t exist. Tell me, if God existed, would there be so many sick people? Would there be abandoned children? If God existed, there would be neither suffering nor pain. I can’t imagine a loving God who would allow all of these things. “The customer thought for a moment but didn’t respond because he didn’t want to start an argument. The barber finished his job and the customer left the shop. Just after he left the barbershop, he saw a man in the street with long, stringy, dirty hair and an untrimmed beard. He looked dirty and unkempt.

The customer turned back and entered the barbershop again and he said to the barber: “You know what? Barbers do not exist.” “How can you say that?” asked the surprised barber. “I am here, and I am a barber. And I just worked on you!” “No!” the customer exclaimed. “Barbers don’t exist because if they did, there would be no people with dirty long hair and untrimmed beards, like that man outside.”

“Ah, but barbers DO exist! That’s what happens when people do not come to me.”

“Exactly!” affirmed the customer. “That’s the point! God, too, DOES exist! That’s what happens when people do not go to Him and don’t look to Him for help. That’s why there is so much pain and suffering in the world.”

HOW CAN A JUST GOD CONDEMN THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER HEARD?

As a young evangelist, I had been invited to speak for a week in a small church in New England. One night during that week, I spoke about how to get to heaven, explaining that Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead so that all one had to do in order to get to heaven was trust in Jesus Christ.

After the service, the pastor and I went to the back to greet people as they departed. I was shaking hands when an elderly gentleman approached me and, with obvious anger in his voice, blurted out, “Young man, if what you said tonight is true, God is unfair because those who have never heard the name of Christ have no chance to get to heaven!” Before I could respond, he darted out the door.

For fifty years, I have spoken with non-Christians about the Christian faith. Of all the questions that I have been asked by them, clearly one of the most common is, “What about the heathen who have never heard?” It is the most-asked question that questions Christianity.

What about those who have never heard? Are they condemned? If they are, how can God be just and do that? Many have been perplexed by this question. If Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven, as the Bible claims, then how can a just God condemn those who have never heard the name or news of Jesus Christ?

There is a passage and, in it, a principle, that if understood, will answer this objection to Biblical Christianity. Paul says, “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:20).

Revelation: All Men Have Some Revelation of God

The impression one receives when hearing the perplexing question about the heathen is that people who have never heard the name of Christ have no information whatsoever and are, therefore, ignorant and, consequently, innocent or unaccountable. Paul begins by insisting that every man has some revelation of God. Though some have never heard the name of Jesus Christ, their spiritual ignorance is only relative, not absolute.

Creation. All have seen some information. As Paul says in Romans 1:20, God’s invisible attributes are clearly seen, “being understood by the things that are made.” In short, creation reveals a Creator.

Let me illustrate. Suppose you and I were speaking face to face, and I took off my watch and held it in my hand. Suppose I asked you to tell me everything you know about my watch, which is lying in the palm of my hand. You might tell me the time of day or the brand of the watch. You might tell me the color, type and length of the band. Beyond all of those obvious observations, there is one thing you can know that you can’t see, and that is that somewhere in the world there is a watchmaker. Furthermore, you know this watchmaker, whoever he is, has the power to make a watch. In a similar fashion, by the very virtue of the fact that the world is here, we know that somewhere there is a world maker.

Or, to use another illustration, because I am in the world, it is safe to assume that there is, or has been, a woman in the world called my mother. Though you have never met her or seen her, you could surmise several things about her, not the least of which is that she is, or has been able to bear children. Clearly, my presence demands the existence of a mother. Likewise, the existence of the world argues for the existence of a Creator.

Conscience. In Romans 2:14-15, Paul argues that the law is written on the hearts of the Gentiles and that the conscience is a second witness to the existence of the moral law. This internal moral law is evidence that there is a moral oughtness in the world. Paul says, “For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things contained in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them” (Rom. 2:14,-15).

Every human has a conscience. Every conscience testifies to a moral oughtness in the world. The moral oughtness in the world points its finger toward a God. Remember your first encounter with your conscience? Perhaps it was when you stole your first cookie. Your heart beat faster. Your breathing increased. You looked over your shoulder, grabbed the cookie and ran out of the kitchen, terrified lest you get caught in the act. That’s conscience.

The point is that all men have some revelation of God. All men have the external witness of creation and the internal witness of conscience. Concerning these truths, several things need to be noted.

Commandment Paul says the Jews were given the commandments, the Word of God. “What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God” (Rom. 3:1-2).

Creation reveals that God has power and deity. Conscience indicates that He is moral, but the Bible alone reveals that He is love. God has more fully revealed Himself and the way to heaven in the Scriptures. The Scriptures record that He demonstrated His love and provided forgiveness by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for the sins of the world (Rom. 5:8, Jn. 3:16). All men have the revelation of God in creation and conscience. Not all men have the revelation of God in Scripture.

If a person will accept the revelation he has and seek more, God will see to it that he receives enough to know how to get to heaven. A number of verses indicate that those who seek God will find Him. “You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart (Jer. 29:13), “The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him” (Lam. 3:25), “If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority” (Jn. 7:17).

The fact that those who seek God will find Him is illustrated in the incident of the Ethiopian eunuch who wanted to know more about the suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 and God sent him Philip, the evangelist, to tell him about Jesus Christ (Acts 8:26-40). Another illustration in the Scripture is Cornelius, the centurion (Acts 10). When Peter came and preached the gospel to Cornelius’ household (cf. esp. Acts 10:34-43), all who heard believed and were later baptized (Acts 10:44-48).

Missionaries have told stories of being providentially led to someone who had never heard the name of Christ, but who had been seeking knowledge of the true God. I recall when I was in college, hearing a missionary at a missions conference tell such a story. He said that years ago, a missionary was traveling across the jungle and got lost. In attempting to find his way back to civilization, he stumbled onto a tribe that apparently no one knew

existed. Though he could not communicate with the members of that tribe because he didn't know their language, nor did they know his, they were able to show him how to get back to civilization. Later, he returned with linguists who reduced the tribal language to paper. The tribal witch doctor helped them in the process. When they were finally able to communicate with the witch doctor in his language, they gave him the gospel and he immediately responded and trusted Christ.

The missionaries were surprised at the quick response of the witch doctor and asked him why he so readily responded to their message. His answer was, "A number of moons ago (they figured out it was better than nine years), I decided that there was no power in idols. I knew how I fooled people. Depressed, I wandered into the woods to think. I looked at the trees and the stars and asked, 'Who made these?' I cried, 'Who are You? Show Yourself to me!'" So, God sent that man missionaries. It took time, but He did it.

Several years ago, I was speaking in an evangelistic meeting in New England. One night, a high school girl brought a friend of hers to hear me speak. After the service, the visitor approached me, saying she wanted to know more about what I was teaching. As I explained the gospel to her, she expressed a desire to trust Christ, which she did on the spot. Afterward, she told me that she had not grown up in a Christian home. As a matter of fact, she had not grown up in even a religious home. Her parents had nothing to do with any religion of any kind. Several weeks prior to our conversation, while lying in bed one night, she began to wonder if there was a God. She prayed something like this: "God, if you are there, reveal Yourself to me." When she heard me speak, she was certain God had answered her prayer.

Rejection: Men Have Rejected God's Revelation

Well, if it is that simple, why have not more people become Christians?

Creation The answer is in Romans. Paul says, "Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man--and birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things" (Rom. 1:21-23).

Revelation requires a response. The human response to God's revelation of Himself in creation is to change the glory of God into an image. In other words, the human response is to reject God. A primitive man in the jungle sees the moon, the stars and the trees. He cuts down a tree, carves it into an idol and worships it. Educated Americans are no better. They look at the heavens and the earth and reject it as the testimony of the existence of God, declaring that it all just happened: there was a big bang and it all evolved from there.

Conscience Paul says, "their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves, *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing *them*" (Rom. 2:15). All men have also done the same thing with the internal witness of conscience. Rather than hear and heed the conscience and follow its finger toward moral oughtness and the existence of God, they step on their conscience to the point that it becomes cold and callous. All of us have done something similar to some degree.

Remember the second time you stole a cookie? You were afraid, but not as afraid as the first time. Remember the third time you stole a cookie? You weren't as afraid as you were the second time. You did that until you became a professional cookie thief.

Results: Men are Without Excuse

The result of man's rejection of God's revelation is "that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20). Those without excuse can be divided into two groups. First, there are those who have never heard the name of Jesus Christ. They have rejected God's revelation in creation and conscience and are, therefore, guilty before God.

The second group who are without excuse are those who have heard about Christ, but have not trusted Him. The heathen in the jungle are without excuse because they have rejected the revelation of God in creation, but the heathen in America are without excuse because they have rejected the revelation of God in creation and the Bible.

Summary: all are without excuse because they have rejected the revelation they have.

The question of how a Just God can condemn those who have never heard assumes that they have no knowledge of Jesus and, thus, have no chance to choose. Therefore, God is unfair and unjust. The truth is that all have some information, at least in creation, and therefore all have a chance. God has obligated Himself to respond to people who respond to Him. The problem is that people choose not to respond. The issue is not a lack of knowledge; it is a lack of willingness.

Suppose a man were on a deserted island with a survival kit that included a small mirror. Then one day he saw a ship approaching the island. Standing on the beach, with the bright sun overhead and the mirror in his hand, he waited until the ship came to its closest point to the island, being well aware that he could use that mirror and the reflected sun to signal the ship and be rescued. Imagine, for the sake of an illustration, that for some unknown reason, he chose to throw the mirror down and dart back into the jungle. He would not be rescued because he rejected the means of getting the ship to himself.

Suppose you were on that island and you were standing on that beach and that the ship sent a small boat ashore with the captain and several crew members in it. And suppose they pleaded with you to allow them to take you back to your homeland. If you refused to get aboard the ship, you would not be rescued, like the man who threw down the mirror.

Some men are not saved because they have refused the revelation of God in creation, others because they reject the revelation of God in Scripture. Which is worse?

HOW CAN A LOVING GOD JUDGE PEOPLE?

A small group of teenagers had gathered in one of the rooms of the church after the Friday night service to ask me questions. I had conducted these “Q-A” sessions for young people for years, so most of the questions I heard on this night were typical teenage problems to which I have “standard” answers.

It was getting late and I was about to terminate the meeting when a girl in the back row, who had not asked anything all evening, slowly raised her hand. I nodded in her direction and she began to speak: “The Bible teaches God loves everybody. Right?”

I wasn’t sure at that point where she was headed, so I simply urged her to continue. She then said, “Well, if God loves everyone, how can He judge them?”

That young girl in Minnesota verbalized a question that has crossed the minds of many adults. How can a loving God judge people? One answer is that He does not judge. There are professors and pastors who would say that since God is all loving, there is no judgment or hell. Is that the answer?

Another possibility is that God does not love everyone! I was once preaching in a Baptist church in Illinois when the pastor and I began to discuss this particular issue. He said the solution was simple: God does not love everyone; He hates the wicked. Is that the solution? If not, what is?

There is at least one passage in the Bible that discusses the love of God and the judgment of God at the same time.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God” (Jn. 3:16-21).

The first part of this passage discusses the love of God (Jn. 3:16), then the judgment of God is mentioned (Jn. 3:17-18), and, finally, the two are put together, so to speak.

The Love of God

God Says He Loves John 3:16 says that God so loved the world. That means God loves everyone. He says so. Furthermore, the Greek word for “love” in this passage is a word that means “to do what is best for the one loved.” Since heaven is the best, it is safe to say that God loves everyone in the world and wants everyone to be in heaven with Himself. That’s the point of John 3:16.

God Showed His Loves As some young ladies have discovered the hard way, just because someone says he loves, doesn’t prove it. A fickle fellow can say it to a girl and not mean it. God not only said He loves; He demonstrated it. John 3:16 goes on to say, “that

He gave his only begotten Son.” The giving of Christ proves that God loves us. Romans 5:8 says so in plain language: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” If you want to see the proof of God’s love, look at the cross.

The cross did more than prove God’s love. It also paved the way for everyone to go to heaven. The penalty of sin is death. On the cross, Christ paid that penalty. Now it’s possible for everyone to be forgiven and to be given eternal life. Again, the point is that God loves everyone and wants everyone in heaven with Himself. He says so and He made it possible.

God Made it Simple He also made it simple to receive eternal life. John 3:16 claims that all anyone has to do is believe in Christ. The Greek word “believe” means not only to accept something as true, but to *trust* it. In this case, it is believing that Christ is the Son of God who died and rose from the dead, and trusting Him, and Him alone, for forgiveness and eternal life. That’s simple. It’s not necessarily easy, but it’s simple, indicating that God not only loves the world, but He wants everyone in it to be in heaven with Himself.

If God had wanted to keep anyone out, He could have made the requirement for entrance into heaven very difficult. For example, He could have said that to get to heaven one must run a mile in ten minutes. That would eliminate those with no legs, not to mention those in poor health or those out of shape. Or, He could have said that one must understand some complicated concept. When Einstein first published the theory of relativity, it is said that only ten or twelve people in the world understood it. God could have concocted such a theory and said that comprehension of it was the way to heaven. But He didn’t. That would have prohibited some—those with low IQs. Or, He could have said that one must pay \$1,000 to live forever with Him. That definitely would have limited the population of heaven. Some never see that sum in their lifetime. (Come to think of it, that might just work in America, especially if it were possible for us to say, “Put \$10 down and pay \$10 a month,” or, “Put it on a credit card.”) But God didn’t do that.

A pastor friend of mine illustrates it like this. Suppose a man were blindfolded and gagged, his hands bound behind him and his feet tied together. Then imagine that he was dropped into a large barrel that was closed and locked. If someone bored a hole in the side of the barrel and shouted through the hole, “Hey, you in there! Christ died for you and rose from the dead. If you trust Him, you will have eternal life.” The man inside the barrel could get saved. He would not have to do anything or say anything. He couldn’t! But if he understood the gospel and trusted in Jesus Christ, he would go to heaven. It’s that simple.

So, God does love the world and He does want everyone in the world to be in heaven with Him. He says so, He proved it and He made it simple to get there.

With all due respect to my pastor friend in Illinois, who is now with the Lord, I must say that simply concluding that God doesn’t love everyone is not the answer to the problem of how a loving God judges people. Well, then, maybe God does not judge everyone.

The Judgment of God

God’s Salvation John 3:17 says, “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” The word translated “condemn” is literally the word “judge.” Notice carefully that John 3:16 discusses the love of God and John 3:17 introduces the subject of the judgment of God. In sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to the earth, God intended to save mankind, not judge the human race.

God's Judgment Be that as it may, God does judge. Verse 18 goes on to say, “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” Again, the word translated “condemned” is literally the word “judged.” Thus, this verse is teaching that he who does not trust in Christ is judged already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

When Christians think of the judgment of God, they usually imagine a future court-like scene where all men stand before God. There are passages that point to such a picture, but this passage says that men are judged already! It is as if the case has been presented to the court, the jury has deliberated and given their decision to the judge. The verdict is guilty. If you have not yet trusted Christ, the judgment of God rests upon you this very moment.

The half has not been told. John 3:36 says, “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” God has judged already and His wrath rests—present tense—on all who have not yet trusted in His Son.

Judgment was not God’s intent in sending His Son (Jn. 3:17), but judgment is the result.

When Henry Ford invented the automobile, his original intent was for good, namely to put the horseless carriage into the hands of the average man, but even though his original purpose was for good, much harm and even evil have resulted. Thousands are killed each year by the automobile in America alone, not to mention those injured and the property damage that is done. Likewise, God’s intent was to save. But make no mistake. Judgment does result. God does judge, even now.

So, with due respect to those who differ, we who believe the Bible must say that God does judge. Frankly, I personally have never been able to understand the position that says there is a heaven but no hell. Our authority for one is the same as our authority for the other. How can a professor say this page in the Bible says, “There is a heaven to gain; I like that idea, I’ll keep that page,” and then say, “This page says there is a hell to shun; I don’t like that idea, I’ll rip that page from my Bible.” He who does such a thing acts as if the Bible is inspired in spots and he is inspired to pick out the spots!

Well, if God does love and God does judge, how can those two things be reconciled? The answer is in the next verse.

The Rejection of Men

Proves Guilt John 3:19 says, “And this is the condemnation,” As in verses 17 and 18, the word “condemnation” in the Greek text is the word “judgment.” Westcott, a Greek scholar, contends that John 3:16 should be translated, “This is the process of judgment.”

To communicate the process of judgment, John uses the illustration of light. He says that light has come into the world, but men love darkness rather than light and refuse to come to it (Jn. 3:19). He continues in the next verse by adding that such a person hates the light and does not come to the light lest his deeds should be exposed.

What is the point? The point is simply this: Jesus is the light of the world (Jn. 8:12; 9:5). Men reject Him because they are evil and their very refusal to come to Him proves that. Therefore, men are judged because a just God judges sin and refusal to come to Christ proves that all are guilty.

Let me illustrate. Suppose you were among a large group that went to a mountain lodge for a retreat. No sooner did you arrive than a snowstorm dumped so much snow on the site that all there were stranded until they could be rescued. Then imagine that the next day someone in the group went to the leader and said, "I left my wallet in my room and now it's missing. Someone in the group is a thief."

Suppose another came with a similar story, and another, and another. The leader could begin to see a pattern and anticipate where the thief would strike next. He deliberately planted some money where he anticipated the next strike. Sure enough, a short time afterward, it was missing.

Then the leader called the group together. Standing before them, as they assembled in the dining room of the lodge with a covered table behind him, the leader explained the events of the last several hours. Then he says, "I know something the thief does not know."

He goes on to explain that on the last batch of money that was taken, he had sprinkled a powder. He might even caution them, "Don't look at your hands. You cannot tell if it's there. It is colorless, odorless, and will not wash off. It only wears off slowly." (Granted, I am making up this story, but there is such a powder.)

Then, lifting the tablecloth from the table behind him, he reveals an ultraviolet light and explains that if you have the powder on your hands, it will show up under the light.

The plan was that everyone in the room would put his hand under the light. One by one, all the members of the group slowly and soberly file by, each one momentarily placing his hand under the light. Systematically, almost everyone in the room has passed the light when one fellow screams, "No! I will not put my hand under that light!"

Very interesting. What have we here? Most would agree: a thief. His very refusal to come to the light proves his guilt. Likewise, those who refuse to come to Christ, the Light of the world, prove their guilt by their very refusal to come to Him. A just God must judge, so even though He does love and provides salvation, He does judge.

Without a Savior There is a second reason why a loving God judges people. It is not so much stated in this passage as it is implied. John 3:20 says, "and does not come to the light." When you understand that the light is Jesus Christ, the only Savior of the world (Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12), you begin to see that if a person refuses to come to Christ, he leaves himself without a Savior. After all, there is no other Savior. Therefore, there is doom and death.

Let me illustrate. Suppose you were with a group that took a cruise on the ocean. One day, while strolling on the deck, you fell overboard. A man aboard the ship quickly grabbed a life preserver with a rope tied to the end and hurled it to you.

Imagine that you were bobbing up and down in the water with the life preserver in front of you. For some unexplained reason, you decided not to cling to the lifesaver. You would drown, but that does not mean that the man aboard the ship did not love you or provide you with rescue. Likewise, God sent a Savior and man's rejection leaves him without a Savior, but that does not mean that God doesn't love; it does mean that God is just.

Summary: A loving God judges people because their rejection of His Son as their Savior proves they are guilty of sin, leaving a just God with no other choice, and leaving them without a Savior.

Either you will trust Christ and experience the love of God, or you will refuse to trust Christ and experience the judgment of God.

IS CHRIST THE ONLY WAY TO HEAVEN?

Some features of Christianity, by the nature of the case, tend to provoke intellectual questions. When one is confronted with the idea of God, it is logical to ask, “How do you know there is a God?” When considering the claims of Christianity, it is reasonable to inquire, “Is the Bible, the sourcebook of Christianity, trustworthy?” When contemplating the Christian faith, it is natural to probe: “Are miracles possible?”

One facet of Biblical Christianity often provokes an *emotional* reaction. The Bible claims that Jesus Christ is not just one way of many ways to get to heaven; it declares that Jesus Christ is the only way to God! It says, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Jesus Himself said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (Jn. 14:6).

When some hear that, they begin to hurl questions and even accusations: “How can you say there is only one way to God?” “Christ may be the way to God for you, but how can you claim that He is the only way for everyone?” “What about the sincere Moslem or Buddhist?” “Isn’t Christianity too narrow, intolerant, bigoted, arrogant, haughty?” Tension can mount rapidly when the exclusiveness of Christianity is being discussed with an unbeliever.

As one lady put it, “Isn’t it just condescending, intolerant, and unloving to go around telling people that they’re going to hell if they don’t believe as you do?”

So, what’s the answer? Is Christ the only way to God? If the Bible teaches that, what about the sincere Moslem? Is Christianity too narrow, or worse yet, bigoted? Let’s first determine the facts, that is, what the Bible teaches, and then consider the objections.

The Truth Is Christ Is the Only Way to God

Not Christianity’s Decision Some seem to think that Christians got together in a holy huddle and decided they did not like people of other religions, so they came up with the exclusive clause. If they would only be less bigoted, their “fraternity” would get together and change the membership rules.

Such is not the case at all. This is not a matter of personal preference; it is a question of truth. This is the revelation of God. Christians could not change it, even if they wanted to do so.

God’s Decree The fact is Christ Himself taught that He was the only way to God. Notice His statements carefully, “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (Jn. 3:18). Therefore, I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins (Jn. 8:24). Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (Jn. 14:6).

In the New Testament, these truths are presented, not as the opinion of mere mortals, but of the truth of God. Ultimately, the issue is the nature and reliability of the Bible (cf. chapter 2, “Is the Bible Reliable?”).

Some issues are socially determined. For instance, the officials of a community decide on the fine for running a stop sign or a red light. Conceivably, the fine could be abolished. The penalty is not inherent in the violation.

There are laws, however, that are not socially determined. No legislature in the world, even by a unanimous vote, could suspend the law of gravity for an hour a day from noon to 1:00. They could pass that law unanimously three times a day every day for a month, and it still would not change the law of gravity. The law of gravity simply cannot be changed by social consent. The penalty is inherent in the violation.

In a similar fashion, God has determined that there is a spiritual law in the universe called faith in His Son. No group on the earth could can that law. They simply don't have the authority, the right, or the power to do so.

The Objections Don't Change the Truth

The very fact that this truth cannot be changed is exactly what upsets people and causes them to object. Let's consider the objections one by one.

Sincerity Christianity's exclusiveness eliminates sincere people who are seeking God through other means. Isn't that true? How does Christianity answer that?

Jesus appeared to Saul of Tarsus, turning him into Paul the apostle, the most zealous, passionate, propagator of Christianity in the history of the church. In the strongest language of the New Testament, he thundered the exclusivism of the Christian gospel. He asserts, "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8).

The assumption behind that objection is that because they are sincere, they are right. The problem with that, however, is that sincerity (or the lack of it) has nothing to do with determining truth. One can be sincere and be right, or obviously, a person can be sincere and be wrong. If an individual is sincere, but wrong, the sincerity does not change the reality! Notice carefully that there is no question but that many people who belong to other religions are sincere. That is not the issue. The point is, you can be sincere and wrong, and that can be fatal.

Charlie Brown, of Peanuts fame, once said after a devastating defeat in a baseball game, "I don't understand it: 147 to 0 and we were so sincere." Some years ago, Jim Marshall of the Minnesota Vikings picked up a fumble and fought off tacklers repeatedly until he crossed the goal line. Marshall, however, crossed the wrong goal line and scored for the other team. He was sincere; he was just wrong.

Or consider the incident of the nurse in a large hospital who changed an oxygen tank in an oxygen tent for one of her patients. She sincerely thought she was doing her duty and being helpful, but the reality was that the tank the nurse had affixed to the tent was filled with nitrogen, not oxygen, and the patient died. The tank was improperly labeled. The nurse sincerely thought she was attaching oxygen to the tent, but she was not. The consequences were deadly.

Right for You Another objection to the exclusiveness of Christianity goes like this: "It may be right for you, but that doesn't mean it is right for everyone. So you like Chevys, but that doesn't mean everyone should own a Chevy. It's a personal preference. Different strokes for different folks! Everyone needs to do his own thing."

Before His departure, Christ commissioned His disciples to proclaim His message to the ends of the earth. They were as exclusive as He was. Consider their preaching, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

This objection assumes that truth is determined by belief or lack of belief. Obviously, such is not the case. Whether or not someone believes in something does not make it true, or for that matter, false. After all, there was a time when popular opinion believed that the earth was flat. That didn’t make it so. In fact, just because most people today believe that the earth is spherical doesn’t make it so. The shape of the earth is determined by objective criteria.

One Christian illustrated the whole thing by asking a non-Christian: “Do you believe in the polio vaccine? I mean, do you believe that everyone ought to get themselves and their children vaccinated?” “Of course,” the unbeliever in Christianity agreed, “That’s a great idea.” To which the Christian responded, “Isn’t that condescending, intolerant, unloving and narrow?”

Too Narrow The basic objection in the face of Christianity’s exclusiveness is that it is simply too narrow. That, in turn, makes Christians narrow-minded, and in our society, intolerance can’t be tolerated! Many non-Christians feel that they do not want anything to do with a God who encourages people to be so narrow and exclusive.

There is simply no doubt Jesus Christ taught that there was a narrow way. One of His most well-remembered statements comes at the end of the Sermon on the Mount in which He said, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Mt. 7:14).

The assumption here is that anything narrow is wrong. Again, the narrowness or the broad-mindedness of a position, per se, doesn’t make it right or wrong. Truth, by definition, is narrow and is always intolerant of error. Someone once observed, “Tolerance in personal preference is a virtue, but tolerance in truth is a travesty.”

The fact that one plus one is always two is very narrow, and math teachers get intolerant at that point. Mathematicians have even convinced bankers of the truth of arithmetic, and they are narrow, intolerant, bigoted, arrogant and haughty about it. They will not bow or bend. If you doubt what I say, just deposit \$200 in any bank and then try to withdraw \$250. You will discover that truth is narrow and intolerant.

Frankly, I like the fact that truth is narrow, and I get security from knowing that our society understands that. I have traveled a great deal, which means that I fly a lot. I want the pilot to land on the runway, not the highway. I want him to land in the middle, not to the right or to the left. I want him to land right side up and not upside down, and to land when he is told, not before or after. I admit to being narrow, intolerant, and bigoted about it. I am narrow-minded and I want a narrow-minded pilot!

Summary: The truth is, yea, the reality is Jesus Christ is the only way to God. All the objections to that don’t change it. Christianity is both narrow and right because it is the truth.

A person can be obnoxious with the truth. Admittedly, it is not good to be repulsive about anything, but that doesn’t stop the truth from being narrow.

By the way, Jesus didn't just claim to be the only way to God; He claimed to be God. As God and as the payment for sin, Jesus Christ is the only solution to sin and, thus, the only way to heaven. You have a spiritual disease called sin and Christ is the answer.

Upon hearing that a pastor doubted that Jesus was the only way to heaven, Patricia said, "I'd be curious to know what the other options might be?" All other options involve works. Jesus is the only way, but His way is good news. Salvation is free!

Suppose you had a disease that only one wonder drug would cure. If a doctor told you that if you didn't take that one drug you would die, would he be narrow, intolerant, bigoted, arrogant and haughty? If you insisted that you sincerely believed that another solution, like drinking salt water would cure you, and the doctor was dogmatic about the fact that it wouldn't, would he be narrow, intolerant, bigoted, arrogant and haughty, or would he simply be telling you the truth?

IF CHRISTIANITY IS TRUE, WHY ARE THERE SO MANY HYPOCRITES?

On more than one occasion, I have presented the good news of the forgiveness of sins through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ to someone, only to have him react with, “But there are so many hypocrites.” Often, when the issue comes up, I have had the person tell me a tale of a professing Christian who cheated them out of money, or of a pastor who ran off with the organist, or a preacher who lied.

If the case of the non-Christian sites is personal or involves a person he knows, the issue may not be an intellectual problem with Christianity; it may be a case of anger or of bitterness. Nevertheless, people who question Christianity do bring up phonies. Besides, even when there is an emotional reaction to inconsistent Christians, the intellectual question needs to be faced and answered.

So, let’s ask, “If Christianity is true, why are there so many hypocrites?” To answer that and other questions related to the issue of hypocrisy, let’s discuss the “official” Christian position, the current reality and then consider the correct perspective on the subject of hypocrisy.

The Christian Position

What is the “official” Christian position on hypocrisy? What does Christianity say about hypocrites? To answer that question, one must turn to the Bible.

The Greek Word The Greek word translated “hypocrite” comes from a verb meaning “to answer, to reply.” The word then came to mean “to answer on stage or play a part.” At this point in the evolution of this word, it had only good connotations. A hypocrite was simply an actor. One ancient orator was favorably called an exceptional and many-talented hypocrite.

The word, then, degenerated until it was used in the bad sense of one who was playing a part offstage. A hypocrite, in this sense, was someone “putting on an act.” He was pretending to be someone he was not. It is in this sense the Bible uses the word. A hypocrite, in the New Testament sense of the word, is someone who is pretending to be something he is not.

Dennis Prager, the radio talk show host, makes a distinction between being weak and being a hypocrite. Some do what is wrong because they are weak. They want to do what is right, but they are weak to do it. Hypocrites pretend to do what is right, but they intend to do what is wrong.

Jesus What does Christianity say about hypocrites? As you would guess, the Bible condemns them. Christ condemned the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. In fact, Christ had more to say about hypocrisy than anyone else in the Bible and He reserved His strongest words for them. “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense, make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea

to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. Woe to you, blind guides, who say, "Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it." Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? And, "Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it." Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift? Therefore he who swears by the altar swears by it and by all things on it. He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done without leaving the others undone. Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you, cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, "If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets." Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt. Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? (Mt. 23:13-33).

According to Christ, these hypocrites were not saved (Mt. 23:13, 33). Rather, they pretended to have "goodness," but they didn't. Their goodness was merely external, not internal. Their goodness was designed to impress men, not please God. Their attitude was, "To me be the credit," not "To God be the glory." Theirs was theatrical goodness (cf. Mt. 6:2, 5, 16, 23:28). Actually, their problem was more serious than just a wrong motive. They hid their motive and an evil heart behind the cloak of pretended piety (cf. the Lord's use of "lawlessness" in Mt. 23:28). The hypocrite deceived himself and others (Mt. 23:15, 24).

Peter and Paul According to Peter and Paul, Christians can be hypocrites. Peter said, "Therefore, laying aside all malice, all guile, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking" (1 Pet. 2:1). Paul said something similar in Galatians, "the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy" (Gal. 2:13).

Unfortunately, Christians can pretend to be something they are not.

The Current Problem

Non-Christian Hypocrites What is the situation today? Obviously, hypocrisy is still around, or it would not be used as a stone against Christianity. Some of the hypocrisy today is practiced by people who do not know God. For example, many delight in rehearsing the worst travesties perpetrated in the name of Christianity, like the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, or the Salem witch trials. In his *Pensees*, Pascal wrote, "Men never do evil so

completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction.” In many, if not most of these cases, the people involved probably didn’t know the Lord.

More recently, objectors will point to examples of financial exploitation, adultery, divorce, lying and other forms of unethical behavior. Granted, these inconsistencies and abuses exist in the church, but in many, and maybe most, of the cases, these people have profession without possession. There is a difference between Christianity and “Churchianity.”

People join a church for family, business, and social reasons. They have the externals of religion but no internal reality of Christ. Church attendance does not make one a Christian any more than going to a ballpark makes a person a baseball player.

Christian Hypocrites Does that mean that all hypocrites are not Christians? I wish that were true. Unfortunately, even genuine believers fall prey to the pretense of being more righteous than they are. Some want to impress other people or become the center of attention. A yearning for acceptance, a fear of rejection, or a feeling of insecurity can motivate a believer to put on a facade of spirituality.

The simple reality is that believers are not perfect; they’re only perfectly forgiven. They are not claiming to be perfect, only to know the Perfect One. The issue is not perfection, but progression. Even Christians forget how long it takes to grow.

When people trust Christ: they are forgiven, but they still have the capacity to sin; they need to grow more and more toward Christ-likeness, who alone is perfect. The problem is they still have the ability to sin and do; they will not be perfect until they get to heaven. Paul vividly describes the conflict that goes on within the bosom of the believer. “For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. 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. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. 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. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. 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? I thank God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin” (Rom. 7:14-25). There is deliverance (cf. Rom. 7:25), but believers do not always take it (Rom. 7:19)!

Paul readily admitted that he was not perfect but did say he was pressing toward the goal God had set before him. His testimony is recorded in Philippians, “But indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to

have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:8-14).

The Correct Perspective

Christ is Perfect Now what about the charge of hypocrisy leveled against Christianity? Several observations need to be noted. First, Christianity claims that Christianity stands or falls on the Person of Christ, not the performance of Christians. If Christ was a hypocrite, then Christianity comes crashing down, but the evidence indicates He was not.

In their book, *I'm Glad You Asked*, Boa and Moody have succinctly summarized the data concerning Christ when they say, “Jesus spoke the noblest words ever spoken and the standards He raised were so high that they were humanly unattainable. But in the life of Jesus, His words and work were a seamless piece; His precepts were perfectly matched by His practice. He spoke of loving one another and displayed unmatched compassion for people on every level. He spoke of servanthood and became the model of servanthood. He spoke of obedience to the will of His Father and walked every moment in complete dependence and submission to the life and will of God. He was the humblest and wisest man who ever lived, and in His character, He perfectly realized the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. He spoke the truth and lived the truth, and when publicly asked, “Which one of you convicts Me of sin?” no one was able to respond. His own disciples who lived with Him day and night for more than three years, declared Him to be sinless (I Pet. 2:22; I John 3:5).” “Jesus was against hypocrisy and His life was the antithesis of hypocrisy. Our job is to help those who raise the question of hypocrisy see that they actually agree with us and with Jesus on this issue. We need to tell them, “Christ strongly denounced the hypocrites and was the opposite of a hypocrite in His own life and character” (*I'm Glad You Asked*, Boa and Moody, pp. 170-172).

Christians are not Perfect Secondly, Christianity does not claim Christians are perfect, only that they know the Perfect One who perfectly forgives. In fact, the Bible, unlike folklore, does not hide inconsistencies and imperfections of even its leaders and heroes: Noah got drunk. Moses got angry. David committed adultery and murder. Peter denied the Lord.

Hypocrites do not Disprove Christianity Thirdly, the presence of hypocrites does not disprove the claims of Christianity, namely, that Christ is perfect, men are sinners, and God forgives. There are quacks in the medical profession, but that does not prove there are no genuine doctors. Counterfeit money does not mean there is no real legitimate money. Forgery does not prove there are no original paintings.

Actually, the exact opposite is the case. The presence of hypocrites indicates that Christianity is genuine and valuable. Men do not counterfeit paper sacks; they counterfeit \$20 bills. The very presence of a bogus bill tells you something!

Summary: Hypocrites are in the church because depraved people want to appear righteous, but that does not prove Christianity is not true.

Underlying the discussion of hypocrisy is the insinuation that the presence of hypocrites indicates that Christianity does not work, and therefore is not true. Obviously,

Christianity does not work as it should for hypocrites, but that doesn't mean that it has not worked for hundreds, thousands, and millions of others. The fact is that Christ has changed millions of people. Christianity does work. It is true.

The presence of hypocrites should not prevent you from becoming a Christian any more than the existence of quacks should stop you from seeing a bona fide doctor. Counterfeit money does not prevent you from accepting and giving paper dollars. Reproductions do not hinder people from seeking and securing originals.

If you think about it, it would be foolish to go to hell because of a hypocrite. Most of them end up in hell (Mt. 23:33), so why plan to spend eternity with people you dislike so much?

WON'T GOOD WORKS GET ME TO HEAVEN?

I remember well the day it dawned on me. I was a young Christian actively involved in witnessing to people about Christ. On that day, I had talked to several people one right after another, all of whom gave me the same basic response. I was walking back to my car when it hit me: most people think that living right is the way to get to heaven.

That was many years ago. Since then, I have traveled all over the United States talking to people about their relationship to Jesus Christ. I've talked to people from Connecticut to California, from Alaska to Florida. The last time I counted, I had preached in more than forty states. After hundreds and thousands of conversations stretched over the entire country for at least four decades, I've concluded that my impression years ago was correct. Most people in this country and Canada feel that a good moral life will qualify them for heaven. I would say it is the most common theory or question people ask about getting to heaven.

Is it true? Will a moral life do? Will good works get a person to heaven? To answer these questions, let's look at what the Scripture says, beginning with the standard for entrance into heaven.

The Standard: God Demands Perfect Righteousness

The Human Perspective What is the standard for getting into heaven? This is no small problem. The religionists of the world might point to the basic tenants of their religion: the Ten Commandments of Judaism, the Golden Rule of Christianity, or the Five Pillars of Islam. If this is the correct approach to determining the standard, which one is right? Who decides?

Many Americans compare themselves to someone they know. For example, "I'm not as bad as so-and-so." If the standard is another person, who should that person be? Albert Schweitzer? Mother Theresa? Jack the Ripper? The Boston Strangler?

Some simply compare themselves to their own past performance, like, "I'm not as bad as I used to be." It is as though the human race were on a ladder with good people being at the top and bad people being on the lower rungs. If you were to ask people to select the rung on which God would draw the line for entrance into heaven, most would respond that the cutoff point is just below their rung. Yet they also have within themselves a nagging doubt. They can't be sure. In the final analysis, they don't know where God will draw the line.

No one can objectively determine what the standard is! Consequently, the whole situation becomes confusing and frustrating. Yet it is amazing how many people hope that they will make it.

The Divine Perspective What is God's view? The Bible says that God's standard is Himself. Consider these statements from the Scripture: "For I am the Lord your God. You shall, therefore, sanctify yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (Lev. 11:44). "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). "Because it is written, "Be holy,

for I am holy” (I Pet. 1:16). Moses, Paul, Peter and Christ all agree the standard is God, and God is perfect.

The Situation: Human Goodness Is Not Good Enough

People Fall Short With the standard in mind, consider the human situation. How do people compare with the standard? The answer is that in every case, people fall short. The Bible declares, “As it is written, ‘There is none righteous, no not one’” and “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:10, 23).

Someone will object, “Are Christians saying that a good life is worthless?” No. A moral life will keep you out of trouble, and good works make a contribution to society, but that’s not the issue. We’re talking about heaven, not earth. Though some men are better than others in terms of morality and good deeds, all fall short of God’s standard for heaven, which is perfection.

Suppose a number of people lined up in California to swim to Hawaii. A long-distance swimmer would swim many miles. Some experienced swimmers could even cover several miles. The average person would probably not make it very far. The non-swimmer would drown shortly offshore. The reality though is that without some outside intervention, all would drown. Though some are better than others, all of them fall short of the standard.

Goodness Does not Pay for Sin There is another reason why human goodness is not good enough. As we have seen, people have fallen short. The Biblical word for that is “sin.” Now, people’s problem gets complicated because there is a penalty for sin. It is death, eternal separation from God: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

The point is that human goodness will not, cannot, get people to heaven, because goodness does not pay the penalty for sin, which is death. Suppose you ran a stop sign and got a ticket. Before the judge, you might plead that you would never do it again. For the sake of an illustration, suppose, you were able to fulfill that promise. For the remainder of your life, you never ran another stop sign. All that “goodness” would not pay for the one stop sign you did run. Either you or someone else must pay the fine, or the judge must have mercy and forgive it, but all the goodness in the world would not, by itself, pay the penalty for running a stop sign.

Thus, the Bible dogmatically declares that morality or a righteous life or good deeds cannot get one to heaven. Morality will not do it. Romans 3:28 says, “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.” Right living will not do it. Titus 3:5 says, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” Good works will not do it. Ephesians 2:8-10 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Well, then, if that’s the case, can anyone be saved?

The Solution: God Provides Perfect Righteousness

Believers are Forgiven because of Christ God does have a way to get people to heaven. He deals with the root problem—people’s sin—and the penalty of sin, which is death. What He did was send His Son to *die* for the *sins* of the world. The New Testament repeatedly says that Christ died for sin (cf. Rom. 5:8; 1 Cor. 15:3, 4). Those who trust in Christ and His payment for sin are forgiven and are given eternal life.

God’s method of getting people to heaven is ingenious. It allows Him to be just, insisting the penalty be paid. He does not wink at justice. At the same time, it allows Him to be loving and gracious. Thus, by sending His Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross to pay for sin, God was at one and the same time just—He paid for sin and merciful—He saves sinners based on Christ’s death.

During the Great Depression, a police officer hauled a frightened man before the magistrate in a New York City night court. They charged him with petty larceny. He was starving and had stolen a loaf of bread. By coincidence, the mayor himself, Fiorello La Guardia, was presiding over the court that night. La Guardia sometimes sat in for judges as a way of keeping close to the citizens of the city. La Guardia heard the case and fined the man \$10. “The law is the law and cannot be broken,” he insisted.

La Guardia then took a \$10 bill from his own wallet and told the man he would pay the fine for him. Turning to the others in the courtroom, he “cited” each of them for living in a city that did not reach out to help its poor and elderly, tempting them to unduly steal. He fined everyone in the court fifty cents each, passing around his famous fedora to collect the fines and turning over the contents to the amazed defendant.

In a similar fashion, God insisted that the penalty be paid, but He and His Son provided the payment. They not only forgive offenders, but they also bless them besides.

Believers are Righteous in Christ When sinners become children of God, God justifies them (Rom. 3:28), which means that God declares them righteous. Thus, God sees them as righteous and fitted for heaven.

A little boy, looking at his father through an orange balloon, cried, “Daddy, Daddy! You’re an orange daddy! You’re an orange daddy!” The father smiled, removed the balloon, and said to the son, “Now what do you see?” The boy replied, “Ah, you’re just an ordinary daddy.” He quickly pressed his face flush against the balloon and excitedly declared, “You’re an orange daddy again!” When the father inquired why he appeared orange, the little lad said, “Because I am looking at you through my orange balloon.” God looks at His children through His Son and sees the righteousness of His Son imputed to them.

Summary: Good works will not get a person to heaven because the standard is perfection and because man’s goodness is not good enough, but God has provided the righteousness a person needs to get to heaven through His Son Jesus Christ.

A student once said, “If God grades on a curve, I’ll make it.” Well, God doesn’t. Therefore, you will not make it on your own without help. This is not a case of doing the best you can or just squeaking by. All such thinking is overly optimistic about man’s goodness and appalling ignorance of God’s holiness. Sin must be eliminated, not just minimized.

Well, what must I do? The answer is to trust Jesus Christ. He will freely pardon you and give you His righteousness. The problem is not a lack of good deeds; it is sin and a lack of trust in Jesus Christ.

If a criminal is handed a pardon by the governor, the issue is no longer his crime, but what he will do with the pardon. If he refuses the pardon, he will remain in prison. If you stop to think about it, the questions, “Why is he in prison?” and “Why is he not out of prison?” have two different answers. He’s in prison because he was convicted of a crime. He is not out of prison because he refused the pardon.

In a similar fashion, the answer to the question, “Why will a person go to hell?” is “Because he is a sinner.” The answer to the question, “Why will he not be in heaven?” is “Because he did not trust Jesus Christ as his Savior.”

ISN'T FORGIVENESS BY JUST BELIEVING TOO SIMPLE?

When I was a full-time itinerant evangelist, I used to spend a lot of time with teenagers. At least one night during an evangelistic crusade, I met with them—without any adults present—and attempted to answer any question they cared to ask on any subject pertaining to the Bible. That sounds like I either know all about the Bible or that I was taking a great risk. Neither was the case.

Two things enabled me to allow teenagers to ask me any question they wished concerning the Scriptures. In the first place, if a young person asked me a question I couldn't answer, I simply said, "I don't know." I often offered to look up the answer and get it to him later (I learned a great deal that way). The other reality which helped me was that I knew beforehand what they would ask, for I discovered that teenagers in the United States would only ask about ten different questions, for example, "How do you know the will of God," "How far is too far," etc.

Likewise, I learned as an evangelist that if you present the gospel to people, there are only a few questions they will ask or, for that matter, can ask. Usually, the people who ask questions of an intellectual type are asking questions like, "How do you know there is a God," or "What about those who have never heard?" One of the questions commonly asked by "ordinary" people is, "Isn't just believing too simple?"

Scores of times, I have people ask me and say, "You mean, that is all there is? I can't believe that. That's too simple. That's too easy."

There are two related issues that also often come up. Many will add, "You mean you don't have to do anything to get to heaven?" Others have said, "It doesn't seem fair that a bad person can just believe and make it to heaven, while a good person who doesn't believe won't get to heaven."

In light of these common questions, let's ask, "Is just believing too easy?" To answer that, let's look at the assertions of the Bible and then the answers to these objections.

The Assertion of the Bible

Among other things, the Bible tells us what we must do to go to heaven. It does that in various places throughout, but three books in particular discuss that subject in detail.

The Gospel of John The first and foremost book that discusses the subject of how to get to heaven is the Gospel of John. It is the only book in the New Testament whose purpose is to tell us how to get to heaven. It says, "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name (Jn. 20:30-31). Again and again, this book says one must believe to have eternal life (Jn. 1:12; 3:16; 3:36; 5:24; 20:31; etc.). The word "repent," by the way, does not occur in this book at all.

The Book of Acts The second book that has a great deal to say about getting to heaven is the book of Acts, which contains the preaching of the apostles. Repeatedly in that book of history, we see the early leaders preaching the message of faith. For example, "And He

commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. To Him, all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:42-43) and “And he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” So they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:30-31).

The Book of Romans The third book, which discusses the subject in depth, is the book of Romans. It, too, teaches that salvation is by faith. Paul says, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1) and “For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness” (Rom. 4:3).

The Bible clearly teaches that salvation is simply by believing in Jesus Christ. There is, however, one thing that needs to be clarified. What does the Bible mean when it says “believe”? The English word “believe” is anemic. The Greek word, however, is much stronger. Both the noun (faith) and the verb (believe) mean: (1) to accept something as true; (2) to trust, rely on or depend on something or someone.

Let me illustrate. It is one thing to say that I believe a 747 will take me to Hawaii. It is another thing to actually get on a 747 and sit down. In the English sense of the word believe, one believes when he accepts something as true, in this case, the fact that the plane will get me to Hawaii, but the Greek word goes beyond that. One does not believe, in the New Testament sense of the term, until he depends on, relies on, rests in, trust that plane to get him there.

The Answers to he Objections

That is too Easy That is the very doctrine to which some object. One of the objections is that it is too easy.

Well, it is and it is not. Let me explain. True, it is simple for you, but it was not easy for God. It was not easy for God the Father. He had to be separated from His Son. He gave His Son to die for sinners. How easy would it be for you to give your son to die for someone else’s crime?

It was not easy for God the Son. He had to be separated from the Father and die for sin. As a matter of fact, the Scripture says He became sin: “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). He was betrayed, belittled and beaten. Being nailed to a cross is no vacation on the beach.

Nor is it easy for some to admit that they have sinned and trust Christ for salvation. There are people who would rather do anything than admit they are wrong.

While it is not easy, it is simple. Jesus paid. All you have to do is trust. Imagine that a very wealthy man knocked on your door. When you opened it, he said, “I understand your dream car is a \$120,000 Rolls Royce. How would you like to have one?” You might say to him, “I don’t know how to put a magnificent machine like that together. I don’t know the difference between a drive shaft and a crankshaft. Besides, I don’t have enough money to purchase such a car.” Suppose the person responded by saying, “You don’t understand. Expert craftsmen have already put the car together and I have personally paid for it. Here are the keys. All you have to do is accept them.”

Simple, isn’t it? It is simple to receive, but it is not simple to assemble or purchase.

That is Something for Nothing That illustration, as accurate as it is, brings up a related issue. When people say it is too simple, what they mean is “You don’t have to *do* anything.” They object is, “You don’t get anything for nothing. Does not the Bible say, “God helps those who help themselves?”

The objection arises because of the conditioning we receive in our society. We are taught from the time we learn to talk that if you perform, you will be accepted and you will succeed. Be a good boy and you’ll get an ice cream cone. Study hard and you will make an A. Do the prescribed work and you will get a merit badge. Work at your job and you’ll get a promotion.

Then someone comes along and says, “All you have to do to get to heaven is trust in Jesus Christ.” To a person raised on the work ethic, that’s unbelievable. That’s too easy.

No. Free to you doesn’t mean that nothing was done or that someone else didn’t do something for you. In this case, Christ did the work. He died to pay for your sin. All that is left for you to do is trust what He did.

Let me illustrate. There are public drinking fountains. All you have to do is drink. That’s simple, but that doesn’t mean that no one worked to provide it for you. Someone dug a long ditch to put in miles of pipe. Someone else purified the water, and still others installed the fountain. They did the work; all you have to do is drink. With that in mind, listen to what Jesus said, “On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (Jn. 7:37-39).

Bible does not say God helps those who help themselves. It says, “Here’s water.”

That is not Fair That illustration introduces another related objection. Some complain, “You mean, anyone can drink, no matter what he has done, and he will be refreshed and renewed? That doesn’t seem fair. If a bad person gets to heaven by just believing, why bother to do anything good.” In short, it’s unfair to good people for bad people to just believe.

There are several facets of this answer. In the first place, the Bible teaches there are no righteous people. Romans 3:10 plainly says, “There is none righteous, no not one.” Granted, some are better than others, but all fall short of God’s standard. God’s Word says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

The second answer may surprise you. Even people going to hell should do good works. I say that for two reasons. Sin has consequences. I would advise you not to rob a bank, for people go to jail for that crime, but I also say that people going to hell should do good works, because God judges people based on deeds done and some people in hell are worse off than others. The Apostle John writes, “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:11-15).

That is not the issue. The issue is that no one can buy heaven with good works. Some things are only available as a gift. If I wanted my own personal high-rise office building in downtown New York, Chicago, or Los Angeles, the only way I could ever get it would be for someone to pay for it and offer it to me as a gift. Either I would receive it, which would be easy for me, or I'd never had it. Either way, it would cost the buyer a fortune, and it would be free to me. That doesn't mean it's cheap.

Someone will object, "A Howard Hughes could buy that office building." Granted. So, the illustration is not perfect, but not even Howard Hughes could buy California, Hawaii or the moon. Likewise, no one can buy heaven, for all the money in the world, nor for all the good works in the world.

Summary: since Jesus Christ paid for sin, salvation is as simple as trusting Him to get you to heaven. You can't work your way to heaven because He has already done the work, and your work wouldn't be sufficient anyway.

The person who says, "That's too simple," simply doesn't understand the situation. Let's put the whole thing like this: suppose you were on the fifth floor of a tall building and floors two through four were totally engulfed with flames. The fire department is summoned and arrives on the scene. Then they go to all the trouble to run a basket up to you and say, "Get in." Can you imagine someone in that situation saying, "You mean all I have to do is trust that basket and I'll be saved? No. I will not do that. That's too simple. I'll depend on myself."

Ridiculous!

IF CHRISTIANITY IS TRUE, WHY DOESN'T EVERYONE BELIEVE IT?

We've looked at the questions non-Christians ask questions that challenge the Christian faith. From looking at the answers to these questions, it would appear that Christianity is logical and true. Now, if that is the case, why doesn't everyone believe it?

One obvious answer is that not everyone has heard about Christianity. That, of course, is the case. Another answer is that among those who have heard, many do not know the support or the evidence for Christianity. Again, that's true, too.

The fact remains, however, that there are those who have looked at Christianity and its supporting evidence and still do not become Christians. A person could take the material in this book, or material like it, and present it to an unbeliever and not have the unbeliever believe. Now, if Christianity is true, and it can be logically demonstrated as true, why doesn't everyone believe it? Or at least, why don't all who are presented with the facts believe it?

To answer that question, consider a passage in John, "If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true. There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true. You have sent to John, and he has bore witness to the truth. Yet I do not receive testimony from man, but I say these things that you may be saved. He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light. But I have a greater witness than John's; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish--the very works that I do--bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me. And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form. But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe. You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life" (Jn. 5:31-40).

In John 5, a controversy erupted over who Jesus Christ was and what He did. In response to the attack on Him from the religious leaders, Jesus defended Himself. In John 5:31-39, He gave three arguments to do just that. Let's consider those three evidences for the claims of Christ.

The Witness of John

To His Person In John 5:31, Jesus says, "If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true." He means that if He were the only one supporting His claim, He would not necessarily prove His case. So, He says, "There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true" (Jn. 5:32). He identifies this witness as John, the Baptizer (Jn. 5:33), and adds, "I don't receive any testimony from men, but I say these things that you may be saved" (Jn. 5:34).

So, the first bit of evidence Jesus offers is the witness of John the Baptizer. What was the testimony of John concerning Jesus? The answer to that question is found in the first chapter of the Gospel of John.

In John 1:15, John, the Baptizer, said, “This was He of whom I said, “He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.” What did he mean when he said, “He was before me”? It cannot refer to age because John was born six months before Jesus. It can’t refer to his ministry, because John had a growing ministry when he baptized Jesus, which was before the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. It can only mean that Jesus lived before John. But since John was born first, it means that John believed in the preexistence of Christ, or, in short, His deity.

To His Works John not only had something to say about the Person of Christ, he had something to say about the work of Christ. In John 1:29, he said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” Jews sacrificed lambs as a symbol of the fact that the penalty of sin was death and had to be paid before they could be forgiven. Yet they looked for the coming of One who would once and for all really, not symbolically, take away sin. John is saying Jesus is the One who would do that.

So, John’s testimony was that Jesus Christ was the living Lord and dying Lamb. So what? So, some prophet is willing to say that he believes in the deity of Christ. That doesn’t make it so. That doesn’t even seem to be a strong case. But in Christ’s day, it was, at least to those to whom John was speaking.

Jesus said John “was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light” (Jn. 5:35). The point is that John was someone they knew and trusted. The force of the argument, then, is this: “Someone you know and trust will tell you that I’m God in the flesh come to die for sin.”

A lady once brought a friend of hers named Ruth to hear me speak. Ruth was an atheist and consequently was not the least bit impressed with what I had to say. After the service, Ruth decided she had some questions she wanted me to answer. The three of us got together and I began to try to prove to her that there is a God. I used every philosophical, theological, and abstract argument I knew. She was still unimpressed.

Then I said to her, “Let’s forget all the philosophy and theology and let me tell you a simple story. The Bible teaches that we’re all sinners, that the penalty is death, and that Jesus Christ died to pay for sin. If we would simply trust in Him, we could have the forgiveness of sins.”

That shocked her. She said to me, “I’ve heard that story before. My brother was drafted and then went to Vietnam.” Apparently, he trusted Christ in Vietnam and then wrote his sister about his newly found faith. When he came home, he was obviously changed. With that, she was impressed. So, when I told her the same story her brother had told her, she was willing to listen because she knew someone she trusted who was willing to tell her about Jesus Christ. On the strength of her brother’s testimony, not my arguments, Ruth trusted Jesus Christ.

The Works of Jesus

Miracles The Lord was aware that the witness of John was not the greatest evidence He could offer, so He gives a second line of argument. In verse 36, He says, “But I have a greater witness than John’s; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish--the very works that I do—bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me.”

This is a reference to the miracles Christ performed when He was on the earth. He changed water into wine, healed the sick, calmed the sea, and raised the dead.

Even Christ's enemies acknowledged that He worked miracles. In Matthew 12, He cast out a demon. When the crowd saw that, they said, "Could this be the Son of David?" The religious leaders were on the spot. If they said, "Yes," then Christ was the Messiah and He was right about what He had said concerning them. On the other hand, if they said, "No," they had to explain how He did something supernatural. They couldn't do that, so they said He worked miracles by the power of the devil. Thus, his enemies admitted He performed supernatural deeds. The force, then, of His argument is that they saw Christ do supernatural works before their very eyes.

This kind of evidence doesn't have the same kind of impact today because Christ is not here working miracles for people to see. And yet He is here and He is working miracles. He is not so much changing water to wine as He is changing sinners to saints. He is not so much healing the physically sick as He is the spiritually ill. He is not so much calming the sea as He is calming the soul. He is not so much resurrecting the physically dead as He is spiritually dead.

Changed Lives I have seen God change lives. I recall speaking with a girl at a college retreat years ago. She had intellectual doubts. By her own confession, she was an agnostic. I asked her if she had ever read what Jesus Christ said about Himself. She said, "No." For several hours, I sat with a Bible and showed her one statement after another concerning the claims of Jesus Christ. She was overwhelmed. As a result, she trusted Jesus Christ. Six months later, a friend of hers said to me, "I can't believe the radical transformation in her life. She was so skeptical before; she is so saintly now."

Once after I preached in a church, a young man said to me, "I am the youth pastor of a church, but I do not believe the Bible." Fred was a member of a liberal congregation. I asked him, "Have you ever studied what Jesus Christ had to say about Himself?" I challenged him to read the Gospel of John and underscore every time he met the word "believe" and let me know what he thought. Several weeks later, he wrote me a letter and said, "I have done as you have asked and I've concluded that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and I want you to know that He has radically changed my life. This has profound implications because of my position, but be that as it may, I am totally convinced that Jesus Christ is who He said He was."

I have personally led dozens, scores, and hundreds of people to Christ whose lives have been changed. They include atheists, agnostics, and even Satanists, as well as scores of ordinary citizens. I personally know at least three men who have Ph. D.s from Harvard, each of whom would be delighted to tell you that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and He has changed their lives. I also know people who didn't make it past the eighth grade who would say the same thing. I know millionaires who would give the same testimony and many paupers who would agree.

The Words of Jehovah

The Scripture There is more. Both arguments mentioned so far are subjective. The next is objective. In verse 37, Christ claims that the Father Himself has testified of Him. As He explains, He does not mean that they have heard His voice or seen His face (Jn. 5:37), but that they have His words (Jn. 5:38), that is, the Scripture (Jn. 5:39). So, not only the witness of John and the works of Jesus but also the words of Jehovah are evidence of who Christ is.

The Specifics The question might be asked, “What are the specifics? What does the Old Testament say concerning Jesus Christ?” The answer is many things, including the town of His birth (Micah 5:2); the manner of His birth (Isa. 7:14); the time of His birth (Dan. 9:25ff), and the purpose of His birth (Isa. 53).

The point of all this is that there is evidence for the claims of Christ, and it is good evidence. Years ago, a man named Lou Wallace decided to write a book disproving Christianity. He investigated and wrote a book entitled *Ben Hur, a Novel*. The subtitle of that book is, “A Story of the Christ.” Wallace was converted by looking at the evidence.

But that is the whole problem. Not everyone does what he did. Why not? The answer is that they were not willing. Jesus gave evidence for His claims and then said the problem was a lack of willingness on the part of the hearers of that evidence. Here’s the way He put it: “But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life” (Jn. 5:40). The problem is not in the head; it is in the heart. The problem is not I.Q., but “I will” (or, more accurately, “I won’t”).

Summary: the problem is not a lack of evidence; the problem is a lack of willingness.

Bill Bright, the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, is reported to have said, “For years, it has been my privilege to speak to thousands of students, as I have visited approximately fifty campuses each year. Students and professors alike have come for spiritual counsel. During these years, I have not met one person who, to my knowledge, has rejected Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior of men for intellectual reasons alone.”

The problem is a lack of willingness. That’s not always clear. People don’t like to admit that. So they hide behind questions, but that is a smokescreen.

The clearest example I’ve ever seen of the real issue was a college student I talked with in Minnesota. He was not a Christian, but he was interested in what the Bible had to say. I presented the claims of Christ to him with evidence and what I felt was sound, logical arguments. When I finished, I asked if he wanted to trust Christ. He said, “No.” I was surprised. I asked about the arguments I had presented and he said, “I can’t answer them.” I was really surprised. People usually want to argue, even with sound arguments. So, I asked, “Why, then, won’t you trust Christ?” He simply said, “I choose not to.” I thanked him for his honesty and dropped the discussion.

The problem is not a lack of evidence; it is a lack of willingness. When a person is not willing, there is nothing else anyone, not even God Himself, can do.

CONCLUSION

The questions that challenge Christianity have reasonable answers. Hopefully, the discussion of each of these questions, though not exhaustive, has demonstrated that there are Scriptural and sensible answers to intellectual questions. With that in mind, two concluding observations need to be made.

In my opinion, in the final analysis, all of these questions come down to two issues. Biblical Christianity rests on two presuppositions: (1) there is a God, and (2) this God has revealed Himself. Admittedly, the Bible does not try to prove either one of those presuppositions, though it does give evidence that can be examined to support them. As has been demonstrated, the evidence makes sense. It is reasonable to assume that those two things are true. But in the final analysis, one accepts both of them by faith, faith based on facts, but faith nonetheless. Don't let that scare you. Any other position is also based on faith, but, in my opinion, doesn't have anywhere near the facts of Christianity to support it.

It seems to me that once those two presuppositions are accepted, everything else discussed in this book logically follows. If there is a God who has revealed Himself in the Bible, if miracles are possible, and Christianity is not just a psychological experience, then Christians have every right to say there is only one way to heaven, that all men who have not trusted Jesus Christ are headed for hell, and that good works will not get anyone to heaven for the simple reason that God said it in His Word.

One other observation needs to be made. Believers need to know the reason for the hope that is within them to answer their own intellectual questions and those of others who challenge Christianity, but in the final analysis, reasonable answers do not win people to Jesus Christ.

Please do not misunderstand. When non-Christians ask an intellectual question that challenges the validity of Christianity, they should be given a reasonable answer. In my experience, unbelievers with honest, intellectual questions will accept sane, sound, sensible answers, or at least they will accept the fact that the answers are reasonable.

There are others, however, who will not accept reasonable answers to intellectual questions because, in their case, the issue is not an honest intellectual question, it is a moral problem. In my book on evangelism, entitled *Evangelism, a Biblical Approach*, I explain the three moral issues I have discovered and how I deal with each one (cf. "The Intellectual Wolf," pp. 159-165, *Evangelism, a Biblical Approach*, G. Michael Cocoris), The witnessing Christian needs to offer reasonable answers to those with honest intellectual questions and speak as pointedly as possible to those using intellectual questions as a smokescreen for moral problems, but in the final analysis, intellectual answers do not win people to Jesus Christ. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16).

Reasonable answers to intellectual questions may eliminate barriers people have to trust Jesus Christ. But only the gospel of the grace of God can introduce people to Christ. According to the apostle Paul, the gospel is that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead (cf. I Cor. 15:1-8). So, after you have answered the intellectual question, make sure you clearly communicate that as far as the Bible is concerned, the issues are: 1) All have sinned. 2) The penalty of sin is death. 3) Jesus Christ died to pay for sin and bodily rose from the dead. 4) For people to be forgiven of their sin, know God and have eternal life,

they must trust in Jesus Christ for the gift of eternal life. God's question of people, including those with intellectual questions, is, "What have you done with My Son?"