

The Most Important Message

Part 1: The Most Important Message

I. THE MOST IMPORTANT MESSAGE

Since this is the west I assume you are all familiar with the idea of God. For all who are the least bit interested in I and others like me have to say when we ask “Would You Like To Know God Personally,” Here it is (for the meat of it, just skip to page 2; for **Table of Contents** see page 13).

There is much more to this paper than just the good news I am about to express. The rest is a defense and explanation of it all. A full **Table of Contents** is on Page 14. I realized I was never going to finish this to my satisfaction, and since there is some urgency to this (since any one of us could die tomorrow, or even this day), I have decided to post what I have now and regularly update it. Therefore, if something is lacking that you think would be useful, check back to see if it has been added. It is rather long, but like I said, you are under no obligation to even read as much as you have already. If you choose to read further, just look at the table of contents on Page 14 to see where I have addressed a particular question or concern. If you do choose to read on, it's not expected that you read the whole thing. This is meant to be a reference guide for *your* sake, not a homework assignment for you to drudge through. Just read the sections that are relevant to you. If that means that you read one page, then great. If that means that you read everything, then that's great too. This is for *your* sake.

(If you see a term you are not familiar with, see Section V).

(Also, I know some of you will be familiar what I am about to say, don't feel as though I assume you know nothing. I just try to be thorough in case others are not familiar with it all. That

said, what I have to say may be different from what you think I am going to say, so keep that in mind. This may be more useful to you than you think).

Anyway, here it is, the Gospel message (quotations from the Bible in red):

1. There is one perfect God. He is the eternal, uncreated, and immortal creator of all things, and is perfect. He created all things, even humans.

2. All men have committed evil against God. The first man sinned (that is, he did evil against what God commanded). Since then, all men have been sinners. This includes and me and it includes you. Have you ever lied, stolen, murdered (that one probably not), done anything you ever have felt bad about? You know you have...it is part of my nature and yours.

“If we claim we have not sinned, we make him [God] out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives” (1 John 1.10).

3. Sin separates men from God, and sinners will be condemned by God after death (though there is good news). The one true God is loving and good. However, because all men have sinned, no man, on his own, can be with Him or know Him personally. Your sin prevents you from knowing God. That is why the world is so full of pain and evil today; we are, to a very real extent, separated from God (though not completely), and all all good things come from Him **(James 1.17).**

Also, though we will die, we will also be resurrected (made to live again, basically) at an appointed time. Bodily death is not the end. Because all have sinned, all would be condemned and rejected by God on that day, if not for the good news to come.

**“For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God”
(Romans 3.23).**

**“For the wages of sin is death [both physical death and the separation and rejection of by God], but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”
(Romans 6.23).**

**“[Regarding God’s kingdom] Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life”
(Revelation 21.27).**

4. THE GOOD NEWS – Jesus Christ. Knowing that you couldn’t become perfect, because He loved men, who God created in His image **(Genesis 1.27)**, God provided a way, through His only begotten Son, Jesus. Jesus (called the Christ, meaning the anointed one) was a man who walked the earth 2000 years ago. I doubt anyone of you haven’t heard of Him, but it’s important to mention. He was also much more than that. There is no other way to be saved but through Jesus.

**“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”
(John 3.16).**

**“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father [that is, God] but through Me.’”
(John 14.6).**

5. Jesus died for your sins. Jesus committed no sin, and was perfect. Though He was not deserving of death, He was crucified; not because He couldn't stop it, but because He loved you and the world and did it so you could be saved. Although the exact mechanics are not clear, His death on the cross allows any who trust in Him to be forgiven of all their sins.

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace”

(Ephesians 1.7).

6. Jesus rose from the dead. On the third day in the grave, He rose from the dead, in a body that is glorious and immortal. Even more, all who believe in Him will also rise from the dead, glorious and immortal, and will be with God in a place of joy and peace, with no pain or suffering, for ever and ever, when this occurs.

“By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures”

(1 Corinthians 15.3-4).

“In a loud voice they (the angels) sang: ‘Worthy is the Lamb (Jesus), who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!’”

(Revelation 5.12).

“[Regarding the future life with God those who believe in Jesus will have]: And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away’”

(Revelation 21.3-4).

7. If you believe in Jesus, and accept this message about His death and resurrection as truth, you will be saved. Everyone who believes that Jesus died for their sins and rose again, and declares Him Lord, will be spared God's wrath and their sins will all be forgiven (unfortunately some disagree that it is this simple...we'll deal with that later). Though you are a sinner today, God will make you good; He will make you righteous. If you believe in Jesus, you will be accepted by God not as a sinner, but as if you were as perfect as Jesus. You cannot earn forgiveness, but it is a gift – by accepting it through faith, by believing that Jesus is the Son of God, that He died for our sins and rose again, the gift is given to you.

“But what does it say? ‘The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,’ that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved”

(Romans 10.8-9).

“He who believes in Him is not judged [condemned]; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God”

(John 3.18).

“He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned”

(Mark 16.16.).

“For by grace you have been saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2.8-9)

There you have it: you have now heard the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. Have my words spoken to you? Do you believe it? Do you accept this Gospel, this good news, and want to accept Jesus as Lord and be saved and know God? Then read on to the next section.

Do you have questions still? Do you have doubts? Do you still think this is a load of balderdash (but are interested enough to read more)? Then please read on (and check the table of contents on page 14).

Again, this isn't meant to be read in full by most, though you are welcome to if you want. If you have questions, just find a section that will address it, and read what is relevant to your concerns.

II. HAVE MY WORDS SPOKEN TO YOU?

A. You Believe; Now What?

If, having heard the Gospel, you believe it, then let's do this thing. Many people use the "sinner's prayer," a cookie cutter prayer from the 1800's that people who hear the Gospel are sometimes told to pray. If you believe, here and now, that Jesus is Lord, that He loved you and gave himself for you (as He did the world) so that you might be saved, then pray. Get on your knees, fall on the ground, sit there, whatever. This is a huge moment in your life. Pray! Just talk to God. It's okay if it feels weird the first time - He still hears you. After all, He is the master and creator and knows everything anyway. Just call out to the Lord. Cry out right now (though you can do it silently, in your heart, if you are in a library or something). Thank Him for His sacrifice. Thank Him for dying that your evil will be forgiven. Ask Him to fill your heart so that you will not continue sinning (what we like to call "repentance"). Ask Him to save you and He will. He will. He will.

Consider praying something like this (it's just a model; exactly what you say isn't all that important in comparison to the fact that you have decided to do it).

"Most High God, I have sinned against you and am not worthy of you but I believe in your mercy, in Jesus, your only begotten son. I believe that you gave your only begotten son for my sins, and that you raised Him from the dead. I believe that because of this I can have eternal life and know you. Please have mercy on me, a sinner, and forgive all I have done wrong. I did not love you but you first loved me, so please accept me in accordance with your unfailing love, and draw me to you. Thank you for your compassion. Strengthen me and embolden me with your Spirit to become righteous and able to do your will. My

Father in heaven, I surrender to you. I pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ.
Amen.”

B. Now, To Live Life As One Who Now Has Life

You may be asking “is that all?” Yes and no. If after this you cross the street and get hit by a bus, you’re going to be with God in heaven for ever and ever.

BUT: since you don’t plan on getting hit by a bus, there’s an immeasurable amount of work for you to do. The good news: it’s not really you who will do it, but Jesus through you. It is written: **“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me”** (Galatians 2.10). You may not feel all that different (though certainly you will feel different in some ways). But tomorrow, when you think, “boy, today I’m a child of God,” you’ll feel a little different. When you start reading the Bible, it will start coming together for you (and if you don’t have a Bible, you can probably ask a Christian friend to get one free from his or her church. If you have internet access, you can also go to Biblegateway.com, an amazing website with many different translations of the Bible that you can read for free). Rather than seeing a verse and thinking “oh that can’t be true,” you might just start to think “maybe there is a way this can make sense,” and you will start to investigate. And as days go on you’ll start realizing “this is all true, I really made the right decision here.” That’s what happened with me. Soon you’ll find yourself a little more caring for others. Soon you’ll find yourself a little bit happier in unhappy situations. Jesus will be working in your heart (He sends you the Holy Spirit), and He will make you better and more righteous each day. And soon you’ll understand what it means when the scriptures say, **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come”** (2 Corinthians 5.17). You are changed forever, and soon it will show more and more.

Of course, you're going to have to make some changes in your life. Now that you are one in Christ, you are dead to sin (Romans 6.2). In other words, you used to do things that go against God as part of your daily life. Now, you need to stop. But like I said, it's through the power of Jesus Christ that you will. On our own, all of us are sinners by nature. We like to do what is wrong. Even if we try not to, it's part of us and ultimately wins out. But that will change.

“My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2.1-2). When you realize something is a sin, you must stop it Period. However, since none, even as we follow Jesus in this life are fully sanctified (made righteous), when you do sin, God will forgive you. Realize what you have done and confess it to God, and He will forgive you. Stop sinning, because you fear God. The fact that you believe in Jesus means you fear God. When you start to realize that God, the LORD, is absolutely perfect and infinite and just simply is who He is, you will stand in awe and reverence. When you understand that you have done evil against Him (and need the forgiveness that only comes through Jesus), that means you fear Him. After all, He could blow you to smithereens or worse. There's almost nothing He could not do (it is impossible for Him to lie or to stop being God, but that's not much comfort to those who oppose Him). However, do not fear that you are His enemy now, as it is written “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8.1). Notice that those who “fear” God are not in danger, but are in fact loved and protected by Him. It is written: “Surely his salvation is near those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land” (Psalm 85.9). Again, “He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them” (Psalm 145.19). So to “fear” God is to have no reason to fear God. Paradoxical? Yes, but I hope that makes sense anyway.

Stop sinning, because you fear God. However, do not fear that He will not forgive you if you do. Unless you had really awful parents, did they not still love you when you did wrong? They may have disciplined you, but that is not the same as revenge. Discipline is temporary and is done for the child's sake, so that they will grow up to do what is good. God does that with us as well. It is written “My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline, and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in” (*NIV*, Proverbs 3.11-12). But do not fear that God will reject you if you fail and sin, because “as a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him” (Psalm 103.13). And even the best fathers are full of wickedness; God is better than anyone.

More good news: as you flee from sin and strive to do what is right, Jesus carries you through. You might have thought you'd never want to stop looking at porno or getting drunk, that you'd never be able to forgive your parents or those former friends of yours who have betrayed you, that there are some commands made in the Bible that you know you could never fulfill. But you're different now. Soon, without even trying to, you will change. That's not to say you won't sometimes want to sin, but there is that intangible something that will keep you from clicking the mouse, pulling the trigger, speaking of God lightly (you won't be quick to hear me say “oh my God!” or “God damn” anything – except just there of course).

Don't get me wrong, you won't become a saint overnight. Well, technically you are a “saint,” but you know what I mean. It's okay that you're not perfect yet. But try. Try your darndest. And when there is a hill that you cannot climb, a sin you cannot kick by simply just not doing it, pray. Even if it seems easy enough, still pray! God loves you. You are now a child of God, same as Jesus.

Jesus said to a crowd once: "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?!" (Matthew 7.9-11)

Jesus, speaking of God himself, didn't say "MY Father in heaven," but "YOUR Father in heaven." If you believe in Jesus, God adopts you as His own child, for it is written of Jesus that "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, He gave the right to become children of God" (NIV, John 1.12).

So seek God's help in everything. If you have trouble staying pure He's not going to say "No! I've helped you enough." He's God; He isn't going to run out of strength or love. Don't judge God by abilities of any human, even yourself. You might run out of love or patience, but God won't. His love endures forever (Psalm 106.1).

Just remember, sinning is bad. Never ever think "it's okay to keep sinning, Jesus will save me." Anyone who lives like that is not of God, but of the Devil. Remember the book of 1 John, and how it says that if you do screw up and sin that God will forgive you? Well, the same letter, written by the same man at the same time also said this of those who continue in their ways of sinning: "No one who lives in him [Jesus] keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him" (1 John 3.6). If you see a professing Christian sin consistently and without remorse, they may very well not really know God at all. But that will not be you!

C. Other Advice

You should also find a Christian you know who is trustworthy to show you the ropes (I'm always available...). Find a good church. Like I said before, get a Bible. Get baptized right

away— this can be a contentious issue among Christians as to exactly what baptism means; I urge you if you have any questions to ask me or someone who is well studied on the subject.

What I say (that is, what I believe the Bible says) is this: your faith saves you; baptism is not actually physically saving you. But, it is one of the most important things you can do as a Christian. Though it does not save you, it perfects your faith you're your Christendom. It marks the clear line between you before you knew God and you after. I liken it to when you get your drivers license. When you first pass the test, you get a paper license. It is totally valid, and you can begin driving right away. However, until you get your official laminated driver's license with your photo and such, it isn't really complete. That's how baptism is. You are saved now; you have the license to drive,. If you die today, you will be with God for ever and ever. However, getting baptized is like when you finally get your actual license card in the mail. It completes what was really already completed.

When Jesus rose from the dead, and appeared to His followers, He gave them this command: "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (*NIV* Matthew 28.19-20). That's why, when all this began, every person who believed the Gospel got baptized in water. Since the people were to be taught everything that Jesus' original followers were taught, it makes sense that we who believe to day still tell others about Jesus (as I have done hear), and why we still baptize.

Though it is not the difference between heaven and hell, it is more than just a symbol. When baptized, you and your old sinful self are essentially buried with Christ (Colossians 2.12). Now, the verse right before affirms that what actually saves you is something done "without men's hands;" it is not baptism but God working in your heart that is demonstrated in baptism. It

was written also that “baptism now saves you - not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience” (1 Peter 3.21). Baptism does save you, but as it says, not in the act (the washing away of dirt), but that when you do it, you appeal to God for a clean conscience. However, even in believing the gospel and confessing you sins, as you have done, you have appealed to God for a clean conscience. When that was written, the person would hear the Gospel, accept it, and literally be baptized on the spot. That coincided almost perfectly with their acceptance of Jesus. Since I am not with you in person, I told you above to pray to God and appeal for a clean conscience so that you will know you are saved, even if somehow you die before your baptism. You are saved now. But I urge you to find a believer who is willing to baptize you and get it done right away. Now, I regret having waited as long as I did (about 7 months, although I had some good reasons in my case, but that’s a whole different story).

There are also other aspects to it. It is your first step into fellowship, for while you can ask Jesus for forgiveness alone, read the scriptures alone, etc, baptism by definition requires another Christian to do it to you. It’s also a commitment to Jesus and to your Christian community to stay righteous (Romans 6.3-11). Not one conversion takes place in New Testament narratives, except one involving a thief being crucified in Luke 23, in which the convert is not baptized. In Acts Chapter 10, a group of people heard the Gospel, believed it, and the Holy Spirit came to them. More on that later, but know that all who have the Spirit of God are children of God (Romans 8.17). Yet even then, they still got baptized in water!

The Bible sets no real limits on who can baptize you – any mature Christian will suffice. Find someone who professes believe in Jesus, has done so for a long time, and demonstrates their belief with their actions. Once you’ve done that, tell him/her the joyous news of your new life and ask him/her to baptize you. And it’s easy and painless; all you need to do is find a Christian

and a body of water. You confess that Jesus is Lord, they put you under for about 2 seconds, and pull you back up. And it is an experience that will leave an indelible mark on who you are in Christ.

I'm just scratching the surface on these issues; how to live a pure life, baptism, etc. But now you can get started. So you've heard, you've responded, and you're saved. Now go out there and show the world you are a child of God.

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Part 2: Some Groundwork

III. WHAT I WILL AND WILL NOT TRY TO DO HERE

- I will try to refute common arguments against the message I have just preached to you (including emotional, logical, and moral arguments).

-I will attempt to give reasons to believe in the existence of God, and for the truth of the Gospel message I just told you.

- I will also try to correct common misunderstandings about what followers of Jesus believe, as is relevant to defending the Gospel.

- I will, for all who hear my message and consider it, who have something in their hearts that tells them it's true but are unsure, attempt to assuage your concerns so that you can make that step of faith and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the son of God.

- I will **not** try to prove the truth of the Gospel message beyond any reasonable doubt. To do so is impossible. To be frank, there are many plausible explanations for the existence of God or of gods, or of no deity. What I preach to you above is the truth and the only truth, but objectively, there are plenty of alternative possibilities that could possibly be true. If God wanted to make it undeniable to anyone, He would have. There is something in the heart that separates those who believe and those who do not (what that is will be discussed later on). Nobody is saved or condemned because of the quality of the arguments of those who tell them the good news. **If you don't want to believe in Jesus, you can find any number of reasons not to.**

IV. SOME BASICS ABOUT CHRISTIAN HOLY WRITINGS (THE BIBLE)

A. Core Facts (And Some Things Not So Well-Known)

Ok, so, I'm sure most of you reading this have heard of the Bible. If not, in a nutshell, it's a collection of sacred writings that Christians believe are from God. There's a lot more that I could go into about that, and I will later on when appropriate, but I should lay out some basics about the Bible, both what is indisputable and uncontroversial, and the specifics of what Christians believe about it.

Before I was a Christian, I had heard of the Bible, and I had heard it quoted on occasion, but I knew very, very little about it. One thing that amazed me when I first came to follow Jesus and believe the good news I outlined above was how many very basic things I didn't know. Some of you may know a lot more than I did, but some will be just like me, so here are some important things I should say.

- The Bible did not just fall from the sky one day, nor was it written by one person all at once. Unlike the Islamic Qur'an, which according to Islam was God's very words written down by Muhammad, the Bible contains 66* separate pieces of writing, written hundreds of years apart (though all are sacred).

- Because different books were so far apart (both in time and geography), context, writing style, use of idioms and figurative and metaphorical language, etc must be considered when reading it.

- Some books are anonymous. Back when they were written, it was not considered of great importance who wrote it.

-The books of the Bible are not arranged chronologically, except that the Old Testament (the first 39-46 books) are all from before the New Testament (the last 27).

- Each book is separated into chapters, and each chapter into verses. However, verses and chapters are NOT put in by God or the original writers. Men separated them this way to make it easier to read and find certain passages. Sometimes it is treated as though each verse is a separate rule or teaching, but this is not the case. Simply put, each book was written for whatever reason by whichever author, and the separations were added later for ease. NEVER look at a single verse on its own.

- When someone cites the Bible, it will often look like this: “Book Chapter:Verse.” For example, the 16th verse of the 3rd chapter of the book of John is “John 3.16.”

- Like chapters and verses, the titles of the books were simply made up by men to categorize them. Thus, what some call “2 Corinthians” might elsewhere be called “Paul’s 2nd letter to the Corinthians.” Sometimes abbreviations of book names are used as well.

- Because it is a collection of books, there is some disagreement about specifically what pieces of writing really are from God. Regarding most of them there is complete agreement, and those in question are not key to the gospel. But there is some controversy nonetheless. For example, though I said there are 66 books, some believe there are 73 books that belong in the Bible. I won’t go into that too much. Though a few doctrines are affected by whether or not certain books are considered scripture, the Gospel message I preached to you as a whole is not greatly affected.

- In a similar manner, if it were to turn out a single book here or there should not have been added (for example, if one of them is a forgery), that does not mean the whole Bible or the

Gospel message is untrue. It means we'd all have to buy new Bibles with only 65 books...but it wouldn't destroy the faith entirely.

B. A Breakdown of the Books of the Bible

1. Old Testament (books from before Jesus)

a. The Torah (aka the Law or books of Moses)

The first 5 books of the Bible. They are largely narratives, telling everything from the creation of the universe (in Genesis) to the reception of the Law from God by Moses (think Charlton Heston in the Ten Commandments) to the formation of Israel (the ancient kingdom, not the modern country). The commandments given to Moses are collectively known as the Law. The Law is very very important, and will be discussed more in-depth in several parts of this.

b. The Writings

These are narratives that take where the Torah left off. They span over many centuries (exactly how many is debated by historians). They are not necessarily as key to doctrine and direct application to our lives as other books are, for they are largely narrative, but they are true and useful to us nonetheless.

c. Poetic and books of Wisdom

These are books you may have heard of like the Psalms, Proverbs, Job, and others. They contain teachings of wise men, and many are quite poetic...They also have prophetic elements, speaking of future events on occasion (such as in the Psalms).

d. Writings of the Prophets

The prophets, men who were given messages directly from God, wrote down what they were told. These prophecies were compiled, either by the given prophet or by others, into a succinct book that bears their name (e.g. Ezekiel). The prophets speak of events to come in the

future (many of which have occurred by now, some of which are to occur at the end of the world). They also speak of present issues, God's rebuke of sins being committed, and the like. All books from Isaiah to Malachi are books of the prophets.

2. The New Testament (the books written after Jesus)

a. The Four "Gospels"

They tell of Jesus' life, mostly the final 3 years. They contain many of His teachings, as well as narratives of major events that occurred (most importantly, His death and Resurrection). Three of them are very similar and tell a lot of the same stories (in a different manner and with different emphases on details, but ultimately accurately). The fourth speaks of many events not included in the others. That is okay, for none claim to be anywhere near exhaustive (think about how long an exhaustive biography of anyone, let alone Jesus would be!).

b. The Book of Acts

A book that tells of events immediately proceeding from Jesus' resurrection to about 30 years later. It tells of the acts (get it, acts...?) of the first Christians, and how the Gospel message was spread early on. Much of it focuses on two men, apostles, named Peter and Paul. They will become very relevant later on.

c. Epistles of Paul

Epistles (letters) written to churches by an apostle named Paul. In a nutshell, he was a man who originally persecuted and murdered Christians, until a dramatic conversion (described in the book of Acts). He wrote to various churches about problems they had, as well as to teach them doctrine. He claims that what the commands he writes in them (at least in part) are directly from God (in 1 Corinthians 14.37). He will also sometimes put in His own personal interpretations, though he specifies when this occurs (like in 1 Corinthians 7.12). His writings are

said to be scripture in other parts of the Bible (e.g. 2 Peter 3.16). Therefore, either what he says is legitimate, or he is a dirty rotten liar who blasphemes the name of God and should not be listened to. There is not much in the way of middle ground with him in this regard.

d. Other Epistles

Letters written by others to churches and to the church as a whole. Similar concept as the Epistles of Paul – just not written by Paul. Peter, the other guy from Acts I brought up, wrote 2 of them (1 Peter and 2 Peter).

e. Revelation

A book of a vision given to John (believed to be the Apostle) from Jesus. It describes future events, including of the end of the world, using very bizarre symbols and imagery. Much of this imagery comes from the Old Testament, and it is believed that it was used in part to make its meaning less obvious to those who persecuted Christians. It worked, as much of its meaning is still hotly debated today.

C. That Covers The Basics

This is the basic stuff about the Bible. Now, much of this deals with all kinds of questions about the Bible, but now you'll know what I am talking about when we get there, if you didn't already of course.

V. SOME BASICS TERMS AND NOTES

(It's fine to skip this and just come back to this later if you see a term you don't know).

Apostle:

In most contexts, it refers to Jesus' most supreme group of followers. Of all His original disciples (that is, His followers/students), twelve were selected to be apostles. They were given special authority and responsibilities from Him. One of the twelve betrayed Him (Judas, for those before now wondered why "Judas" is commonly used as a figure for the idea of betrayal). One named Matthias was selected after Jesus' death to replace Judas. Also, a former persecutor of Christians named Saul, after His conversion, was called by God to be an Apostle as well.

It can also refer in general to an appointed servant of God, though it is usually used to mean the first definition.

Body of Christ:

A term from 1 Corinthians 12.12 and other passages that refers to all the believers of the world collectively. We are illustrated as parts of a body, to which Jesus is the head. It's just a way of saying "everyone who believes in Jesus, collectively."

The Church:

When a Christian refers to "the" church, he usually is referring to all the believers collectively, aka the "body of Christ."

Eternity:

It has several meanings in parlance, but for our purposes, it means all time, for ever and ever, from a given point. By definition, it never ends. No matter what is true about God or man, it is the theoretical concept that no matter what, there is more time after any point. It is infinite time basically. If you have eternity, and then a googolplex of years pass, the same amount of time still remains (being infinite). Some get into philosophical mumblings about timelessness and so forth but they are not really relevant here. The point is, it is for ever and ever.

Faith:

Like many words, it can mean different things in different contexts. For our purposes, it is the belief that what the Gospel says is true, and the commission of one's trust in Jesus for salvation. It does not mean simply to believe the message is true. A 2 year old is not necessarily saved because he believes in Jesus; his parents tell him to and he doesn't know anything else. (Regarding 2-year-olds who die, the Bible seldom talks of them, so we really can't say. Like those who never heard of Jesus, they are a gray area. That said, many Christians, including myself, are optimistic. Basically, we don't know how God deals with them, but we know He will do what is right.) Even demons are aware that Jesus is the Son of God. No, to have faith means something more, to truly believe from your heart that Jesus is who He says, and to be willing to follow through on whatever that requires (even if it means dying for your faith – more of an issue then than now but still).

Heaven:

This phrase can have a number of meanings actually. If you hear a Christian speak of it, it is usually spoken as a colloquialism for where the saved will be for eternity with God. Literally, it can mean many things. For example, talk of the heavens or heaven can refer to the sky, outer space, of the realm beyond space where God resides. There is some debate over whether man will be in the heavens with God, or if God establishes a kingdom on earth. Ultimately, location is irrelevant, because the fact is “**there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain**” (Revelation 21.4) and we will be with God and know Him in a way that is impossible right now.

Hell:

The fate that awaits those who die in their sins. It is the fate that you can be spared by turning to Jesus, lest you miss out on your chance of eternal life! See Section XIII.

Intermediate State:

A reference to the fate of the dead before the resurrection (raising of the dead, described below). The typical belief in is that man has two (or 3) parts. Though the body dies, the soul (or soul and spirit), which is/are immaterial and invisible, lives on. It is believed to go to a place of punishment if you are unsaved, and a place of reward for the saved.

A minority believe that between death and the resurrection, there is no consciousness, that the dead are simply dead in every sense. I am personally ambivalent, though really it doesn't matter all that much. This is temporary, but what happens after the dead are raised is what will go on into eternity.

Israel:

For our purposes, it is NOT the country in the Middle East founded in 1948. Rather, it refers to a kingdom formed thousands of years ago by the descendants of Israel (originally named Jacob). They were to be God's special earthly kingdom from which the Messiah (Jesus) would come. He did. However, the kingdom of Israel split up around 800 BC, after which both parts were conquered by 550 BC. The remaining people returned to the land that was Israel, but it was never independent again (when Jesus came, Rome controlled it). Israel is the focus of most of the Old Testament (although peoples of other nations got involved now and then). Jesus Himself spends most of His time in Israel, preaching and doing miracles etc. His crucifixion happened in Israel. It was after His resurrection that He told His disciples to tell the whole world about Him.

Lord:

Title given to Jesus, and also used to describe God.

LORD:

When you see LORD in all capitals in your English translations of the Bible, it is in place of God's Hebrew name. The thing is, the Hebrew lacks the vowels, and Jews, and after some time, stopped pronouncing God's name in fear of using it in vain. It is the equivalent of leaving us with the name YHWH. Today, kind of have to guess how it is said. Some say “Jehovah.” Others (more scholars today, I would say) believe it is pronounced “Yahweh.” God is given many titles throughout the Bible, but this is the name He gave for Himself.

New Testament:

The 27 books written after Jesus. These include the 4 “Gospels” (4 historical accounts of Jesus’ adult life and ministry), the book of Revelation (a bizarre and highly symbolic account of future events leading up to the end of the world), the book of Acts (a historical account of the Apostles in the years following Jesus), and the epistles. The epistles are letters written by apostles (more than half of them by Paul) containing moral and theological instruction to either specific churches or the church as a whole. According to the belief of those who follow Jesus at large, their teachings are based directly or indirectly on divine revelation, and are considered sacred scripture by virtually all Christ followers.

Old Testament:

Basically, all the books of the Bible that preceded Jesus. These include the book of Genesis (talks about creation and the lives of some early and very important human beings) and the other 4 “books of the Law” (speak of the founding of and early years of Israel, and contain the many commandments of God for Israel). It also includes the books of the prophets (compilations of the writings and life of a given prophet), the book of Psalms (a series of writings typically written for temple worship which including thanksgiving to God, as well as lament over hardships), and many miscellaneous writings.

Prophet:

An individual who receives direct revelation and instruction from God and is typically instructed to share it with the relevant people.

Resurrection:

An event that will occur at the end of the world when all people, saved and unsaved, will be raised, in bodies, from the dead. I don’t believe it is entirely clear if the resurrection of the saved and the resurrection of the unsaved occur at the same time or separately (there are some who will argue either one). However, though the details are not always clear, one of the most important and core aspects of Christianity is in the resurrection of the dead.

The Saved:

Anyone who believes in Jesus and is therefore destined to be with God for ever and ever (which I hope will be the case for you when all is said and done).

Salvation:

The state of being saved.

Sin:

Resisting God, violating His commandments, basically doing anything that is wrong or immoral or evil.

Scripture:

The term generally refers to any “sacred” writing of a people or religion. However, for our purposes, it refers to the books of the Bible (since those are the writings that come from God and are actually sacred).

The Unsaved:

Also called the wicked, the lost, the condemned, the unsaved, and so forth. They are any people who do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thus are not forgiven of their sins, and do not get to be with God but instead go to Hell (explained in Section ?).

Notes:

- When a passage from the Bible is cited, you will often see, in parentheses, acronyms like ESV, NASB, or KJV*. This is to indicate different translations of the Bible. As I explain later, the Bible is written in Hebrew, Greek, and a few parts in Aramaic, so it has to be translated into English and other languages. Many translations are still copyrighted today. You can read for free online (it'd be pretty slimy to keep people from reading the Bible). However, a lot of them ask that you cite the translation when you use it, and I am obliging.

*KJV (King James Version) is public domain, as are most if not all from before 1900. This is one reason (aside from its popularity throughout its history) why a lot of times, out and about, you might here people quote from the Bible in very Shakespearean English (such as oft-quoted Matthew 7.1, "Judge not lest ye be judged"). KJV was published in 1611, which is why it is written in Elizabethan English.

- Although there is debate about specifically when the Bible is literal or not, it is generally agreed upon that the Bible, though typically literal and straightforward, is not always so. Prophets do use poetic language and metaphor at times. Epistles do contain explicitly personal references (for example, when Paul writes to a pastor named Timothy, he tells him to drink some wine for his stomach; that doesn't mean all Christians are commanded to start drinking wine to help our stomachs, which probably aren't bothering us in the first place).

- When a person is quoted, it doesn't matter if they are wrong in what they say, for that does not impugn scripture. Think about it: if a newspaper reported that a professor said "2+2 =

5,” we wouldn’t say the newspaper got it wrong – they are right in what they say, that someone said it.

- The Bible was not written in English. Our English is a translation of manuscripts (handwritten copies) of the original books written thousands of years ago. No ancient document, even religious documents, that I am aware of, even claim to still have the originals in existence. Now, regarding language, the Bible is written in the 3 languages. The Old Testament is written in Hebrew and, a few parts, in Aramaic. The New Testament is written in Greek because it was written after Israel became part of Greece and then Rome. It is false that because the Bible has been translated into so many languages that it now says something different. Every time it is translated into a new language, the manuscripts of the originals are translated. It’s not as though it was translated into English, and then the English was translated into Spanish, and then the Spanish was translated into Mandarin etc. All are a translation of the original language, so English Bibles are translated from the Greek and Hebrew and Aramaic, as are the Spanish translations and Chinese translations etc.

- Yes, Jesus was a Jew. His disciples were all Jews. But they also believed in Jesus (obviously) and followed Him, which ultimately makes them Christians too. And of course Jesus believed in Himself. Jews and Christians claim to worship the same God. Christians say that Jesus was the Son of the God. He was a manifestation of that God. He was raised by the dead by that same God, and no one who denies Him can know that God. Jews today disagree. But before Jesus, the Jews were God’s people. Before there was Jesus, you couldn’t be a Christian, obviously. The Jewish prophets spoke of a holy God, and a savior to come, who ended up being Jesus. That’s why Jesus was born an Israelite and obviously followed and worshiped the Jewish God, as do I. However, like Jesus, I believe that Jesus is all that I just said. The resurrected Lord,

as He appeared to the Apostle John in glorified, heavenly form, told John to write to a church and spoke of how they are “true Jews” and those who call themselves Jews but persecuted the followers of Jesus are not (This is in Revelation 2). There is also a cultural aspect as well. After Jesus came, Jews who believed in Him still followed Jewish customs, followed the Law to the extent applicable, etc. However, they accepted the gentiles, the non-Israelites, into the body of Christ, and did not make them follow the customs or the bulk of the previous commandments (see Acts 15). Today, a group of people who still follow Jewish customs but believe in Jesus exist. They are called Messianic Jews. For our purposes though, they are Christians.

VI. LET'S CALL A SPADE A SPADE...

A. I Am a Christian

I am a Christian. I may sometimes use other words because this title has become so loaded over the last 2000 years, but whatever I am called, I believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, actually was crucified as a sacrifice to atone for my sins and the sins of man. I believe He was resurrected and sits at the right hand of His Father on the throne. He is the Lord. And I believe that the 66 books of the standard, protestant Bible actually are God-breathed and authoritative scriptures, and that they are the only definite and infallible source of doctrine we have.

I am not “half-Jewish and half Christian.” There is no such thing. Religion isn’t passed through DNA. We treat it that way because we are taught that “religion” is just a set of made up beliefs that people have followed throughout time because they needed something to explain what science back then couldn’t, and that that some like to stick to because their parents did. But if you have one parent who is Jewish, and one who is Christian, then:

First of all, neither one is probably all that devout since both religions prohibit intermarriage (at least if you actually follow their respective books). Secondly, that doesn’t make you a believer in either. It does complicate things that being “Jewish” can be referred to as an ethnicity, so technically you can be a “Jewish Christian.” However, there is no such thing as a “half Christian.” Ultimately, you either believe or you don’t. I will make a big point of this later.

No, with a Jewish mother, I am only “Jewish” to the extent that I would have gotten gassed in Germany along with however many millions of others. To the extent that you can be a Jew in terms of ethnicity, I am (at least in part). But I am not Jewish. I am a Christian. You are

one or another. Jews don't believe the Gospel, Christians do. That's it (although there can be some wordplay involved – a “messianic Jew” for example is someone who holds Jewish customs yet believes the Gospel. For our purposes though, they are Christians all the same).

B. People of Different Faiths Can Get Along, But The Faiths Themselves Cannot

You may have heard it said by Christians that other gods are idols, or that other religious beliefs, or lack thereof, are false, and been totally offended. That's perfectly understandable. How do you think we feel when people tell us that Jesus wasn't the Christ...? Or even worse, when they give us a pat on the head and say, “well I'm glad you've found something that makes you happy.” That pretty much says flat out that you don't think our God exists.

Either we're right or we're wrong. Either there is one God, one who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life, or there isn't. And if we are right, then other gods *are* idols, because they aren't real (and if you're right and I'm worshipping someone fake, then you could say Jesus is an idol – I've heard it before, and honestly I'm no more offended by that than when people simply deny Jesus).

This isn't an issue of “tolerance.” Tolerance doesn't mean that you believe all beliefs are correct; if you did, that would in fact make most of them wrong, as many are logically incompatible with many others. Who then is being intolerant? Ultimately nobody is, as both I and the unbeliever are simply asserting a statement of fact, both of which cannot be true.

Let me ask this question to those who accuse me of being “intolerant.” Am I using duress to get people to follow Christ? Am I calling for genocide or persecution of non-Christians? Do I not have non-Christian friends? Do I tell those who don't believe as I do to go suck a lemon? Do I believe in a state sponsored church or any limits on the free exercise of other people's faiths (within the obvious limits of our society, like no human sacrifices)? I support your right to

believe different from me; the 1st amendment is probably my favorite of all of them. But as to what is true or not, it is not intolerant to say, “I am right, you are wrong” because one of us has to be wrong (if not both). This truth is simple logic that is not the least bit dependent on your faith.

Think of this: if it’s just a “personal choice,” then that means my God doesn’t exist, because if He did then there’d only be one right faith. People of different faiths can and should live in peace with one another. However, different faiths themselves are not compatible. They can’t all be right. I say, Jesus is God’s only begotten Son, that He died for our sins, and that as the son of God, He is in His very nature God (Philippians 2.6). I’m really oversimplifying here, but bear with me. Islam says, however, that Jesus is just a prophet, and to say that He is God’s son or anything more than a prophet, is blasphemy. It is shirk, an unforgiveable sin. Obviously, we can’t both be right. There can’t be one God and at the same time many Gods, so Christianity and however many polytheistic faiths can’t both be right. It’s impossible for a person to die just once and then face judgment (Hebrews 9.7), and yet be reincarnated over and over, so neither Hinduism nor Buddhism can be right if Christianity is. At least one *must* be wrong. Jesus can’t be the savior the prophets in the Old Testament vaguely spoke of, and at the same time not be, so Christians and Jews cannot both be right (though we do have many agreements and follow many of the same sacred writings). See where I’m going here? The same can be said among other religions. There can’t be one God and many, so Islam and Judaism are both incompatible with Hinduism or some tribal religion where there are many Gods. And for all you atheists, there can’t be no God and yet be one or many. Therefore, either you are right, or, if *anyone* else is right, then you are wrong.

Now, it is logically possible that “all religions lead to God,” even though they are wrong about things. However, that is not the case if the Bible is correct, as it teaches that only through Jesus can you find God (John 14.6), that whoever disbelieves the Gospel is damned (Mark 16.6, John 3.18, 2 Thessalonians 1.9, 1 John 2.22-23), and that “salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4.12). At the very least, you who have heard of Him now will be condemned if you do not believe. No other “religion” will lead you to God.

To say that “all religions are the same” or the like is to call most world religions wrong; I agree that most are wrong (all except faith in Jesus), but if saying that other religions are wrong is intolerant, then so is saying that they are all the same. Ultimately, it’s not intolerant either way; those are just statements of beliefs regarding fact. You believe one thing, and I believe another. Neither of us are being intolerant, but we cannot both be right.

Many have said to me that “I’m glad that makes you happy, but it’s not really for me.” One person, however, said that she respects my right to believe what I do, but that she thinks I belong to a cult and need to see a psychiatrist. You might say that is offensive, but I’d rather hear that than “whatever makes you happy”! At least she takes me seriously. Either I am right or wrong. Either you are right or you are wrong. Either Jesus is “the way, the truth and the life” and nobody gets to the Father but through Him, or that’s not the case. It’s not about what makes you happy to believe. If that were the case, why would anyone believe in Hell? If that were the case, I’d believe in universal salvation, that everyone eventually gets eternal life with God.

If you were dealing with anything but religion, would you tell a person who was believing a lie because they liked believing it that “I’m glad that makes you happy”? Of course not. Such a person is deluded. Such a person is a liar. Of such a person we condemningly write

plays about (like *Death of A Salesman* by Arthur Miller). Now, I know there are people who say, "I'll be a Christian" but don't actually believe in Jesus. Some people go to church and call themselves "Christian" or "Catholic" but will tell you they don't even believe in God. This is especially true here in America where we are civilized and believe in religious freedom – yes, I made a judgment and spoke badly of other cultures that persecute people because of their faiths. Deal with it. But anyway, those people are not saved because they go to church. I am not qualified to judge people's hearts, but the Bible does make clear that if you disbelieve, you are damned, so I can say that those who go to church but don't even claim to believe are going to Hell! If you don't even believe intellectually in Jesus, how can you have faith? How then could you give Him your heart and repent of your sins?

VII. THERE IS NO ABSOLUTE TRUTH?

If anyone tells me “there’s no such thing as absolute truth,” I must ask: If that’s true, isn’t it then in itself an absolute truth? Think about that one: if it’s ever false, then there are absolute truths. If it is always true (and therefore there are no absolute truths), then it in itself becomes an absolute truth (which means the statement is untrue).

It may be that we don’t always know the truth, but you cannot say that there is no absolute truth.

VIII. I AM NOT ASHAMED TO SPREAD THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

A. The Gospel Message Offends People, But That's the Way It Is

Some might say, “it’s pretty tactless for you to try to convert me, you know I’m a devout Jew/Hindu/Muslim/whatever else.” Well, if I’m right about Jesus, then how dare I not tell you the good news so that you might believe and be saved? If I’m wrong, why should you be the least bit bothered by what I say? Seriously, if you actually believe in what your religion teaches, why care what I say? I don’t get offended when people probe and question me about my beliefs – I am convinced they are true. Besides, believers from the beginning have been commanded to spread the good news (Matthew 28.18-20; Mark 16.15; Acts 1.8; supported by history). Now that may have been a specific command for a small group, but the principle surely applies. If the word is not spread, who will come to believe it? It is written, **"How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"** (Romans 10.15b).

Some will say I am “imposing” my beliefs on people. But am I? Am I holding a gun to anyone’s head, forcing them to declare “Jesus is Lord”? Am I blackmailing anyone? Are you not free to stop reading at any time? Heck, you’ve been free to stop the moment you started, I even said that in the beginning, and you never had to start to begin with. You didn’t have to read any of this, and you could have stopped at any time. I am IMPOSING nothing on anyone. Even if I wanted to, even if I did put a gun to your head, I couldn’t force you to believe what I do anyway. All I could ever do is force you to pretend (such as with a gun), and I’m not doing that. I’m not. You can stop reading anytime and never have to think about it again, but you will be without excuse when you go before God. You can never say you never had a chance to hear the Gospel. You can never say “nobody told me about Jesus,” because I have.

If the fact that I have written this message upsets anybody...I can't say I'm sorry for anything I've done. I am blameless and have done nothing wrong. If some of you go as far as deciding to stop being Facebook friends with me, I wish you'd reconsider, but if that's the way it must be, then it's the way it must be.

B. This Isn't Just Me Being Socially Immature

Some might say, "he's just socially immature, he just doesn't understand that you're supposed to keep your religious beliefs to yourself, that it's not acceptable to push your belief on others." Granted, I am a pretty awkward individual, but I'm not a child anymore. If I wanted to do something socially acceptable, I would have told you I respect your beliefs and that all our beliefs are valid.

When it comes down to it, being "mature," having "tact," etc., are sometimes at odds with being godly, with doing what is good. And we ALWAYS have to do what is godly over anything else. It really is as extreme as I make it sound. That's not to say godliness and maturity are always at odds – that's why I'm not running around a subway screaming "accept Jesus, the end is near!" However, if you believe in Jesus, then you follow Him as you believe He commands, without exception. Period. It's not like with your parents or teachers or the president or the king or even in the military. There is never ever an exception. God is God. He is your God.

Here's the thing: to be "wise" is to keep silent To be "mature" to do what is practical and for your good, and to not upset people, even if the right thing is to do the opposite. But to do what is good and what is right sometimes means harming yourself and making strife where there was peace. It makes sense if you think about it. How often do we see in film or literature where a character is in the right, and everyone tells him he is wrong, or that it's not worth acting upon it? Yet he or she acts upon it, causes all kinds of problems, but ultimately, is vindicated. We cheer

for that character. It's no different here, except we Christians have an eternal reason to be so immature. Indeed, I have considered the very worst consequences of writing this message (although the most serious, like one of you murdering me, I obviously consider unlikely). I know it's tactless, I know it's socially improper, and I know it will upset some people. But what else can I do?

C. I Foresake No One

Does this mean I have forsaken all of you, my non-believing friends? Of course not! Don't you know it is my heart's desire that every one of you come to know Jesus and be saved? Don't you know I want all of you to call my Father your Father, to call my God your God, to call my Lord your Lord? I want every one of you to be a part of my family, and not just my Facebook friend. I know I write to some who actually are literal family, some who I have known since my infancy, and some who I only sort of know. A few of you may even say, "you've never actually met me..." It doesn't matter. You're on my Facebook so that puts you in my circle well enough, all 400 something of you. Jesus said **"whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother"** (Matthew 12.50). We are told regarding other believers **"Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity"** (1Timothy 5.1-2). I have not forsaken you; just the opposite – I want you to be part of my eternal family, a family not based in biology, but in blood (by which I mean, the blood of Jesus Christ), that we might all be called children of God).

Ultimately, I don't care if I haven't earned the right to talk to you about this kind of stuff; I have to spread the message, and you know I can't develop a strong and deep personal relationship with every one of you, not on this side of eternity anyway.

Every one of you I love, and I desire you each, individually, to become my like brother or sister or mother or father. That doesn't mean I won't love you should you never come to the Lord. I still will, and I'm biblically commanded to do so anyway (see Romans 13.9, Galatians 6.10, Matthew 5.43-48). But I don't want you to be just my neighbor, or acquaintance, or worse yet, my enemy. I want you to be my family. Or if you are really cynical, think of it this way; if you accept Jesus, I have no choice but to accept you as family. So no, though I have dared to say what may make some of you feel bad, I have not forsaken anyone.

IX. DEFENSE OF MISSIONARIES

And one more thing: as I said before, we Christians are commanded to share the Gospel. Exactly to what extent and how is debatable, and surely varies from person to person. This is in part dependent on exactly how to interpret commands Jesus gave to His followers at the time regarding this insofar as they apply to us. Obviously, I'm not in Papua New Guinea preaching the gospel to people night and day. However, specifics aside, it is submitting to God to spread the Gospel message to others. Missionaries don't go to other countries because they hate other cultures, but rather to fulfill the great commission,. This is because of the following: **"Then Jesus came to them [His disciples] and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age'"** (Matthew 28.19-20). If you hate those who spread the word, and want to stop them, to stop me from preaching the good news of Jesus, we'll frankly die before we shut up if that's what it comes to. We won't run into the sword – we don't look for martyrdom, and will run to safety when danger lurks. However, when it comes down to life or the Gospel, we will always choose the Gospel. Jesus once said, to those who followed Him and might have feared for their safety, **"Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it"** (NASB, Luke 9.24). In doing so, He is playing with the word "life" which, in the Bible, doesn't always refer to literal biological life. It can be used figuratively as well to refer to knowing God. Jesus declared in prayer to the Father that **"Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent"** (John 17.3). Now, Jesus' declaration that His Father is

the “only true God” does make the relationship their relationship and the explanation of God’s nature complex, as any of you with experience with Christian theology will be aware of. We will deal with that in the Section XXV.

Don’t get me wrong, I don’t want any harm to come to myself or my brothers and sisters, but it will, at least to some of us. Throughout history this has been the case. In most of the world, it still is. But we’re dealing with something way bigger than life or multiculturalism. Do you know what eternity is? It’s not a long time; 15 quintillion years (roughly a billion times as long as the universe has existed according to the Big Bang theory) is a long time. Eternity is forever and ever! Think of the longest period of time you can think of. After that, it is no closer to ending than when it started. There is no end ever! No matter how much time has passed, there is always just as much left. You can’t explain its significance in words. I don’t understand it well, and I contemplate it all the time. Only in a few brief moments of thought can my brain even start to understand it. Nothing is greater. Therefore, working for God and His eternal kingdom is #1.

As Jesus said, “Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 10.32-33). He also said, as He sent His disciples out, “Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (NASB, Matthew 10.28). There’s a reason Christians go to places where if anyone discovers them, they’ll be imprisoned or tortured or murdered. We have bigger fish to fry than life. If missionary work were done just to make Christians feel better about themselves by making more of them, why would they risk so much? People talk so venomously about the Apostle Paul, but the man spent the latter half of his adult

life in prison and according to most historians, was eventually beheaded. Whether they are right or wrong, their work of spreading the Gospel around the world isn't done for worldly gain.

Indeed, there are wolves in sheep's clothing, "missionaries" who really go around committing great evil. There are pastors who don't know God and just try to make a quick buck. 1950 years ago, as the New Testament was being written, the issue of false believers came up. The book of Jude is almost entirely about that issue. Many do evil under the Christian banner, but carrying that banner does not make them children of God. This aside from genuine believers who are generally godly but do err – they exist too; I would know. But most missionaries are true Christians who live there lives of danger, poverty, and discomfort to serve those who they "impose their beliefs upon." And I know the kids of many missionaries. Contrary to popular belief, when giving food and aid to the poor, it is NOT conditional on their acceptance of the Gospel. Indeed, there are a few (throughout history, quite a few) who do that, but they are at best sourly misguided and at worst, not really true Christians to begin with, which would mean they are going to Hell same as everyone else. Those who have been reborn know compassion.

And anyway, what would be the point of forcing people to believe what we say? A true believer, because they know that the story of Jesus is actually true, knows the pointlessness of forcing people to pretend to believe in Him. You can't make a person actually believe, not even under pain of death. You can only make them say they do. And that's pointless, because they'd still be damned! Obviously, missionaries do tell them the good news as they help them with their material needs, but again, that's imposing nothing.

X. JESUS IS NOT A CULTURAL THING – HE IS FOR EVERYONE, ESPECIALLY YOU

Some may say “well that’s fine for you, but it’s different for me. I’m Indian” or “my family is Buddhist, we’re not Christians.” But Christianity is not a family thing. It is not a cultural thing. It’s not a thing for white Americans while Islam is for Arabs and Buddhism is for Asians. Jesus told His apostles to “**make Disciples of *all* nations**” (emphasis added) (*NIV*, Matthew 28.18). This all began in the Middle East anyway. Therefore, it’s hardly something “western.” No, it’s a movement for the whole earth, not just a group of people in their given region.

It’s a matter of what you believe and how you live your life. It doesn’t matter what your family “is.” You may be a “Christian” but do you even believe in Jesus? You may be “Jewish,” but have you even ever read the Tanakh (what I would call the Old Testament)? We call people who actually follow the laws of the Torah and the Talmud and whatever else (I’m no expert on Judaism) “ultra-orthodox” Jews. Call me crazy, but I just call them Jews. They actually believe. They’re wrong of course, for the Messiah came 2000 years ago, but they are Jews. They actually believe. Since some of you are “Jewish”; maybe you even had a Bar or Bat Mitzvah. I must ask, do you even believe in it? Do you believe in God? Do you believe in the coming Messiah or in the words of the prophets? Do you believe all those rules are from God? If so, then you’re a terrible Jew for not following them. And if not (which I’m guessing is the case for most if not all of you), then what do you really believe?

This is all the more the case with all you “Christians.” Do you actually believe in Jesus? Do you actually believe any of that stuff in the Bible? You put “Christian” or “Catholic” on your Facebook page, but would you be a “Christian” if your parents didn’t take you to church

when you were little, or maybe baptize you as a baby? If you are a Christian, how come you never go to church, or read the Bible, or pray? How come you sleep with your boyfriends and girlfriends and get drunk on weekends? How come you have no qualms about smoking marijuana and doing all kinds of erotic activities when nobody is looking? Do you actually believe in Jesus? Do you actually believe in anything in the Bible? Because if you did, you should be thinking twice! There's no real reason to think twice if you don't know Jesus. Any honest person knows marijuana is no more harmful than tobacco, and getting buzzed is pretty much physically harmless as you believe unless you go really crazy. If you don't know God and understand how great and powerful sex is, then you quickly get numb and can enjoy premarital sex because sex is really really fun; I've heard it's like the greatest feeling ever. If you just have no problem doing these sinful things, then can you say you have the outlook of a person of God?

No, your outlook is the same as the rest of the world's. As I said before, the Gospel message is simple and accepting the gift of salvation is easy, but you have to actually believe the message and act upon it! Your life changes. Your whole outlook on the world changes. You could have played the 2nd shepherd in every church Christmas pageant from age 3-17, gone to every church breakfast, and had a baptism certificate on your wall with a confirmation certificate next to it. You may have been dragged to service every Sunday by your mom and dad and continue going in college because they want you to. You could confess your sins to a priest every Sunday and be a Godfather or Godmother to 18 different kids, and you can still end up going to Hell! It doesn't matter what your family "is." You can't have been a Christian your whole life. A baby can't believe. It's not about your family. The Lord said a day would come when the righteousness of a father could not save his son or vice-versa, when every person would be held responsible for his own sins (Ezekiel 18.19-23). Now, that was speaking of an earthly judgment

(bringing war), but how much more true is the idea here?! Your faith will save you, and your lack of faith will condemn you.

The good news is, if you really do believe in Jesus, and you have just lost your way, then all you have to do is come back. Stop the sinning, ask for forgiveness, and it is yours. It's that easy. King David may not have been a Christian (since he lived before Jesus), but he was a man "after God's own heart" who had the spirit of God same as a Christian (Psalm 51.11). He was a child of God as much as I am and would have believed in Jesus if he had lived 1100 years later (he did prophecy directly prophecy about Him, such as in Psalm 110). Yet he committed adultery and murder! This is all in 2 Samuel 11. But what did he do when the prophet Nathan confronted him (in chapter 12)? He realized what he had done and repented! God had mercy on him. If you are cut to the heart, then turn from sin and go back to God. He will take you back, or for some of you "Christians," you may really be meeting Him for the first time. Either way, repent, give your life to Jesus, and whatever your past position was, you'll be His now.

When you sin, it is like hitting Jesus in the face with a baseball bat, but He will always forgive you, because He is better than you. He's done the same for me. God abounds in mercy. If you believe in Christ, then you are a child of God, so start acting like it. It is written that "just as a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him" (NASB, Psalm 103.13).

It's not about your family. You're religious beliefs are what YOU believe...or choose to believe for some. If your mother is Jewish and you had a Bar Mitzvah at age 13, that's no excuse not to follow Jesus. If you're Arab and raised by Muslims, that's no excuse not to follow Jesus. If you have been taught by secular humanist parents that Christians are simple-minded morons who believe in a sky daddy and follow a zombie from Israel, that doesn't make it true. Just

because you're Indian and your family is Hindu doesn't mean you're one shot at the kingdom of God isn't found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Of course, if I'm wrong about Jesus, then who cares what I say? But if you think I'm wrong, tell me I'm wrong. Let's call a spade a spade. Don't hide behind your family or ethnicity. If you don't believe what I say about Jesus, then you believe I am wrong about Jesus. No need to make bones about. I can either be right or wrong, and if you don't believe me, then you believe I'm wrong. Of course, I am not wrong, but rather right, for Jesus is Lord.

Nobody who doesn't actually believe that Jesus was raised from the dead and is Lord is a Christian. Of course, I know how society puts it: Christianity is a legitimate religion, and good people go to church. However, if you actually believe that the Bible is God-breathed and therefore accurate and authoritative, then you are a "fundamentalist." And if you actually believe in your heart and mind that Jesus is the Son of God and that by believing in Him you are saved, then you are a "radical." (For a Muslim to be called radical, he must blow up buildings; for a Christian to be radical, he must hold up a picket sign that says "Jesus loves you"). If you actually believe that Jesus is the only way to salvation, like the Bible says, and that other religions are therefore wrong (making the logical conclusion that two contradictory ideas can't be true), then you are a bigot and practice "religious intolerance." If you tell people the Gospel and follow the Lord's command to spread His word, then you are "imposing your beliefs" on others, and people get mad because you try to "convert" them. And if you dare do it in another country, then you are "destroying culture." But really, can you blame us for trying to help people avoid going to Hell?

XI. THE CROSS – FOOLISHNESS TO THOSE WHO ARE PERISHING

Now that I've established that indeed spades are spades and truth is truth, if you never really considered following Jesus, and something I have said really speaks to you, I want you to seriously think about giving your life to the Lord. Do you think I might be right? Maybe you never really thought of eternity because you didn't think it mattered or maybe you were too busy to care. Do you care now? The cliché would be me asking "if you died today, where would you go? Do you think you'll go to heaven? How sure are you?" I'm not going to ask that, beyond the extent that I just did, because I know many people aren't really moved by an old man on a box shouting 'you're going to hell for ever and ever and ever and ever!' But is something tugging at your heart? Do you think I might not be so crazy? Is something drawing you to continue reading?

USEFUL SEMITANGENT

An aside, I do find it amazing how many non-Christians believe in heaven and even Hell. Where on earth would you get such an idea without believing? There's no Jesus (or 'he was just a great teacher'), but there is a heaven you will go to? Some say, when asked how likely they think it is that they will go to heaven, that they have a pretty good chance since they are each a "good person." As I said before, you are NOT good enough to go to Heaven. Nobody is without Jesus. You will not go there without Him (John 14.6).

END USEFUL SEMITANGENT

Know that Jesus died for our sins out of love for us. You may think, "oh, people die to save other people all the time. It's nothing special." Well, how many people who were perfect and sinless, who were completely good and lacked any evil, have died to save monsters? How

many of such people have died to save murderers and thieves, even the people who wanted to murder them?! How many of these martyrs were glorious in heaven from before the foundation of the world, were with God and were God (John 1.1) before they became flesh and suffered and died for you? How many, when speaking of their doom, can say “for God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (*NASB*, John 3.16)? Jesus was perfect, as was nobody else, and died not to save the righteous but the evil. As it is written, “very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (*NIV*, Romans 5.7-8). He wasn’t just another hero, He is the Lord.

“If you love Jesus so much, don’t you wish He hadn’t been crucified?” Indeed, at times I feel guilt, or the emotionally overwhelming lack of understanding. It’s to be expected. And yet our hope and joy lives in Jesus’ death and resurrection, so no, not one true Christian will tell you they wish He had never been crucified (they will tell you they wish they had never sinned so it wouldn’t have been necessary, but never that He never had been crucified). Jesus’ death and resurrection IS the Gospel. It is written, “by this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...” (*NIV*, 1 Corinthians 15.2-4).

Jesus had every opportunity not to die. Indeed, He was a man and treated as a lamb to be slain. However, He was also the Word of God, through whom God created all things, co-existent with, and indeed one with the Lord God Almighty. Indeed, that doesn’t always make perfect

sense, but Jesus never said it did. That is why in heaven, the Lamb shares the throne with God, and they are the light and the temple. There's no separation between them. If you know one, you know the other. He wasn't some poor sap; He was in on the plan, as it is written: **"the reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father"** (*NIV*, John 10.17-18)

Furthermore, Jesus wasn't unable to protect himself. Many times He escaped danger in the scriptures. He rebuked His disciple Peter (or the devil, who was influencing Peter) for speaking out against His upcoming death (Matthew 16.23). Most importantly, when He was arrested and Peter tried to fight off the soldiers, He rebuked him again. The Lord said, **"do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels? How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way?"** (*NASB*, Matthew 26.53-54)? God is a big boy, and despite the tremendous cost, He was wanted it this way. Because of that, we can be saved. Indeed, Jesus dreaded His doom. Soon before the crucifixion, He prayed to the Father and it is written that **"and being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground"** (*NASB*, Luke 22.44). However, He by no means gave himself grudgingly. He loved His disciples (John 13.1; 34). Jesus was given but He also gave himself (Galatians 1.4, 2.20), because He loved me and you too. He wants you to be saved. When He was crucified He called all men to Himself (John 12.32). It is true that there is **"there is no one who seeks God"** (*NIV*, Romans 3.11), but He seeks you. Stop ignoring Him.

In short, Jesus isn't angry with you or me about the crucifixion. His death is His glory and God's. Heck, He prayed for the very soldiers who were murdering Him, saying **"Father,**

forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (*NIV*, Luke 23.34). He doesn’t want you to scourge yourself with loathing and hatred. What He wants is your heart, soul, and mind to be His. He wants you to repent from your sins (that means to stop doing them, not just to apologize) and declare Him Lord. He doesn’t hate you. If He did, why would He die so that you might live? If you want to do the right thing, if you want to make Jesus happy, then just declare Him Lord and give your life to Him. Following and believing is not just for your benefit, it’s what the Lord wants too. After all, like when a shepherd loses one sheep, and finds it, He is happier about finding the one than the other 99 not getting lost in the first place. So is the truth whenever a sinner repents (Luke 15.7). Or since we’re not shepherds...aren’t you happier when you find a lost \$1 bill than you are about not losing the rest of the money in your wallet? Whatever the case, it was God’s will and for His glory that you are in this position, that you might believe and have eternal life.

Part 3: Dealing With Tough Moral Questions

XII. THIS IS BY NO MEANS EXHAUSTIVE...

As I've at least tried to hint at, I think about this all the time. In fact, I've been examining God from a philosophical standpoint for many years. Ever wondered what I was doing on weekends? That is it. You might think "Christians are only Christians because they don't think about what they believe." That is by no means an absolute truth. And even to the extent that it is true...perhaps a lot of the time at that...it is not true in my case. Obviously I don't hold a doctorate in Philosophy, and I am just a man so what I can understand or adequately convey is limited. However, I bet a lot of you are kept away from God because there are just too many serious philosophical questions. There are too many to count. In fact, philosophically I'd be lying if I said Christianity was an easy thing to defend. In fact, it may be the hardest faith to defend philosophically. But we don't live in philosophy, we live in reality. Here is a sampling of just a few common questions/problems people have with the faith.

XIII. WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER SIDE OF THE GOOD NEWS (HELL)?

A. Repent or Perish

Know that if you do not accept the gift of eternal life, you will not be spared God's just wrath. Your sins will be avenged without mercy, and it will be far more than you can bear. Those who believe in Jesus get to be with God (colloquially spoken of as being in "heaven" because that describes where God is, in the heavens – specifically in a realm known as third heaven, beyond "second heaven," which is outer space). Those who are condemned are spoken of by Jesus as going to "Gehenna," literally a garbage dump in a valley outside of Jerusalem, but accepted as being a figurative description for where they are headed. That is the place people refer to as "Hell."

Most people, believers and unbelievers alike, refer to the bad going to "Hell," and by that they mean a place of eternal, unending torment and pain and horror. Now, you might ask, "how can a loving and compassionate God torture His own creations day and night for ever and ever?" I can't give you a good answer. I can't explain how it can even be just. The idea of people being conscious and burned in a lake of fire for ever and ever is frankly repugnant to my conscience. It sometimes makes me wonder how we Christians sleep at night. I think few Christians will disagree with me if they are really honest with themselves (it is my belief, if the doctrine of eternal conscious punishment is true, that we are mercifully hardened by God so that we maintain our sanity).

All I can tell you is that God is righteous, God is just, and God will never be immoral or unfair or wrong anybody. At worst, He will give people what their sins deserve (although He is more apt to show mercy, as He has for me). Consider this: the same Bible that speaks of the

unsaved being sent to Hell also teaches that that God is upright in all ways. Even the angels in heaven declare God's justice (Revelation 19.2). It is written that "For the LORD is righteous, he loves justice; upright men will see his face" (Psalm 11.7) and "(the righteous will declare) The LORD is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him" (Psalm 92.15). If what the Bible says about the lost is true, then surely it is also right when it says God is perfectly just. It is man who does not fully understand justice, for it is written that: "the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure" (Jeremiah 17.9a).

I come from a completely non-Christian family, so don't think Hell isn't very real and very personal to me. Everyone who made up my entire past is, as of now, doomed. I'm forced to think about it all too often. Nothing has driven me so close to complete emotional and nervous breakdown as the thought of Hell has. I have never craved God's merciful gift of physical death as much as when I have made the mistake of focusing on the lake of fire because many whom I love are, for now, going there. It may be true that most Christians don't really think about it or care, but that is not the case with me. However, throughout all this, I have put my faith in God.

B. My Beliefs On Hell (and the Justice of God)

I will tell you this, at my own peril, for divulging this may badly damage my reputation among some believers (although it hasn't among those I know nearly as much as I had feared). I have studied extensively the less than popular (though increasingly accepted) ideas of conditional immortality and eventual annihilation of the damned, and I consider it, given the scripture, the more serious possibility. In other words, I believe that the Bible teaches the unsaved are eventually destroyed completely, not burned alive for ever and ever. I did not always believe this, and most Christians do not. Indeed, I am aware of such verses as Matthew 25.41, Revelation 14.10-11, and 20.10. I say this only for the sake of honesty and not to change the

attitudes of any of you, for although I can make a very strong scriptural argument, I can never be entirely sure. The traditional doctrine of eternal torment (how people normally talk of Hell, fire and brimstone, for all eternity), might still be correct. I do not think it is true at all, but given how common it is the idea cannot be ignored. Whatever the case, God is righteous; not cruel or evil or unfair, but righteous. It must be true that whatever the truth is, it is just.

I recently addressed this issue extensively in the paper titled “The Bible Teaches Annihilationism.” It can be found at my website, <http://3-ringbinder.weebly.com/>, where I’m assuming you came upon this. It is mainly written and directed to other believers, and assumes the reader has some background in the Bible, but it’s not going anywhere, so feel free to give it a look if you are at some point interested in the issue.

Anyway, in Heaven, it is declared that “**There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away**” (*NIV*, Revelation 21.4). Since many, many Christians have at least one lost loved one, I take this to be a promise that no longer will we mourn the horrors awaiting those who did not take the gift of salvation. (An aside, annihilationism doesn’t teach the damned will be A-okay. Even though I don’t believe the fire they will look over will be one of eternal torment, the terror of them who see it, their hopelessness, their regret, their immeasurable sadness and anger – thus all the quotes about “weeping and gnashing of teeth” - will be beyond anything you can imagine). Anyway, as we will be perfected and see everything as God does (1 Corinthians 13.12, 1 John 3.2), if eternal torment is true, we will understand and accept God’s judgment, even if it is impossible for me (and I am convinced most honest Christians) to do so today.

Those who are damned, however, will find no sympathy from the saved. Whatever their fate, they will have awoken to everlasting contempt (Daniel 12.2). The fact, then, that Hell is so

hard to accept, does not reflect upon God, but rather it comes from either our misunderstanding of what it is (which I believe is the case), or our sinful nature and inability to understand God's justice (depending, obviously, on which view of Hell is correct). So although we mourn now, we will be comforted.

When examining Hell and the fate of the damned, please believe me: God is good. Do not, I beg of you, do not hold your own misunderstanding against God. Never have I, in my walk with the Lord, been so tormented as when I have made that mistake, times when I have forgotten the Proverb 3.5; **“Trust the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”** If you have read to this point and realized you are a sinner, should it not make sense then that your moral compass is a dud, just as mine was and, as far as this issue goes, may very well still be?

C. The Book of Job – It's Relevant.

One story that speaks to me is the book of Job. Brethren, you obviously know the story. For any who do not, Job (rhymes with globe, not Bob) was a very righteous and Godly man. Thus, he was blessed, by God, with all kinds of riches and good fortune. This was a long long time ago. Job is considered by many scholars to be the oldest book of the Bible, even pre-dating Moses and the Exodus (ya know, the stuff from the movie The Ten Commandments).

Now, Satan, the Devil, basically challenged God, telling Him that Job is only righteous because of his good fortune. God, knowing Job's heart but having to prove to the angels (lest more follow Satan and become “demons”), and maybe for other reasons, sets out to prove the Devil wrong. So, He allows Satan to inflict all kinds of terrible trauma upon Job, leaving him with nothing, not even his health (he is covered boils and sores and terrible plagues). Now, most of the book is a conversation between Job and his self-righteous friends who falsely believe his

terrible fortune is punishment for some sin. They wrongly believed that it must have been all Job's fault (they are all unaware of what went on in Heaven). Job is steadfast in his faith and refuses to curse God. However, seeing the obvious injustice and hopelessness, he does cry out to God, asking for, among other things, an explanation and a quick death to end his suffering. Well, God does appear. His face is surely not shown; it is written that God said **"you cannot see my face, for nobody can see me and live"** (Exodus 33.20). However, Job knew what the light and booming voice and everything was representing. God defends Job in front of his friends, but does rebuke Job for one thing – his presumptions. Rather than actually explaining what happened, He asks Job many questions along the lines of "did you create the universe?" "Have you always been?" "Have you...?" "Do you...?" "Can you...?" The idea being, God is God, and Job, not being the creator and omniscient manager of the universe, could not expect himself to be able to understand everything that goes on in the universe. Clearly, way more than just a man's life was at stake in this whole experiment (that's not to say God didn't know what the results would be, His omniscience is without question:

http://www.whatthebibleteaches.com/wbt_070.htm).

For those curious, God restored to Job almost everything he lost; in fact, his possessions doubled. The only thing God did not restore on earth was his dead children (though he was given 10 new sons and daughters). For that, Job had to wait until the next world.

Why do I tell you this? How is a synopsis of a book of the Bible relevant to Hell? Well, Job, one of the most righteous and Godly men ever, couldn't even understand what God was doing in his own life. How then, can anyone of us expect to have perfect understanding of God's whole eternal plan for all creation? I mean think about it: if the God of the Bible exists, He not only created the whole universe, but manages every aspect of it every moment of every day, and

always will for ever and ever. The Bible tells us what we need to know – believe in Jesus, spread the Gospel, behave in a Godly manner (and what Godly behavior is), but no man can perfectly understand every detail that it gives about everything eternal. Even if one could, it is in many places intentionally ambiguous - for example, despite the fact that many like to say “the end is near; it’s coming tomorrow at 3:38 pm,” the Bible tells us over and over that we will NOT know when the end of the world will come and the dead will rise.

D. How Can A Finite Sin In A Finite Lifetime Deserve Eternal Punishment?

Although this argument is typically directed at the doctrine of eternal conscious torment, the question must also be answered by annihilationists. After all, like eternal torment, the punishment is eternal. For one tiny sin the ultimate, everlasting punishment is inflicted, lasting for ever and ever.

Well, I can’t give you a perfect answer really. The only serious answer I really have heard is “God is infinite, so any sin against Him is infinite and deserves infinite punishment.” Although I think there is something to it – sin really is that horrible - that never would have swayed me as a non-believer (especially when dealing with the traditional doctrine of Hell as a place of everlasting torment), and I don’t expect it would with many of you.

I would justify eternal punishment of some sort (be it eternal torment or eternal annihilation) with this: God is just.

That was pretty much what I said above in Subsection A, but that’s pretty much the best defense. God knows what is just vengeance for sin. Surely man does not; man is sinful!

God has one other major advantage: He is eternal. God has existed for ever and ever, and He will exist for ever and ever. He created time, and therefore can understand eternity completely.

Think of this: we find eternal punishment unjust because man's life is finite and therefore so are his sins. But imagine the opposite. What if all man's sins called for a finite punishment. Once it's over, then what? You still have eternity to deal with. Do you then allow the lost into the Kingdom of Heaven and give them eternal life? Can you really say they were punished at all? Because eternity never ends, their punishment is essentially nothing. It wouldn't even matter if the wicked were burned alive in fire and sulfur for a googolplex of years (more years than there are believed to be atoms in the whole universe). After that was over, there would be googolplex upon googolplex upon googolplex...for ever and ever. Eternity is infinite. Like I said, there's nothing compared to eternity. Therefore, in light of eternity, any finite suffering is nothing. When taking eternity into account, you can't come up with a truly just and fair punishment either way. Eternal punishment seems wrong given the finite life of man, and finite punishment results in eternal life, which is no punishment at all. Basically, you can say this means there can be nothing after death, and therefore the Gospel cannot be true because of the mismatch between finite time and eternity, or you can say and eternal God knows things we don't.

This could be seen as good ammo that you must just die and that is that, but it's not as though eternity doesn't complicate things for anyone of any belief. What if we say that there is no judgment or reward or punishment or anything of any sort after death? If that is the case, then you are left with the issue of injustice on the earth that will never be dealt with. Just as eternal life or eternal condemnation might seem unjust, so equally unjust is no life and no condemnation. No matter what, how can we make it work out right under any scenario? At least here, there is something after death that we know will make it all work out, albeit we don't understand how. In fact, the only unfairness that will ultimately arise is that some (any who

believe) will receive better than they deserve (none will receive worse than they deserve). If there is nothing, than we know that it simply cannot and will not be worked out.

I will make a quick note about ideas such as reincarnation and enlightenment. Even they are problematic, for while there is no eternal punishment, there is the eternal state of enlightenment that occurs after a finite life of perfection (or something like that).

Therefore, any religious belief, even the belief that there is no God or afterlife, runs into problems because of this mismatch of our lives and eternity. But that is to be expected. Can you explain eternity with true and complete understanding? If God exists, surely He knows more about it than any of us. If that is the case, then obviously there is something we don't understand yet.

God, as the holy and righteous judge has figured out exactly where justice is done. It is my belief that the scriptures teach that this is with eternal punishment in the form of absolute destruction in Hell (AFTER the resurrection, that is). Most Christians will argue justice is achieved through eternal conscious punishment, and a few will even teach that the punishment is finite and all will obtain eternal life (a view usually referred to as universalism). Whatever the case, we leave it to God because we can't figure out how to apply eternity to our lives. Who among us can?

XIV. SAVED/CONDMENED BECAUSE OF BELIEF?

How can God condemn somebody to Hell because they didn't believe something to be the case? As one skeptic put it, "God doesn't send people to Hell for rejecting Him, but for believing the wrong story" (paraphrased). There isn't much that is said in the Bible to address this, arguably the biggest objection raised. But Jesus does say this to a group that denied Him (not the cuddly, warm and fuzzy moments Jesus we usually see):

Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but He sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God (John 8.42-47).

This passage is probably not cited often because it is not well-known, sounds Calvinistic (I'll explain that further down), and it obviously isn't very diplomatic. If you are of God (I don't interpret that as a Calvinist would) you would believe in Jesus. If you are of the Devil, you won't... My take on it is this: even the most evil people may have hearts open to God, and they will accept Him and repent and be forgiven. The Apostle Paul once persecuted Christians, is said to have even murdered some, but when he saw Jesus, he immediately repented and spread the

Gospel to many nations, at the cost of his life and freedom. I believe that since man it is written that man does not seek God (Romans 3.11), God seeks men (John 12.32), and if you won't respond, then that is your own loss. However, this response takes place in the heart: those who would never respond instead love the devil who hates God, thus they do not know Jesus. That is how God can condemn those who don't believe in Jesus. Belief is not the cause, but the litmus test. If you have faith in God, you would know Jesus. If you chose the Devil in your heart, then you won't even know Jesus if He stands in front of you and does miracles (like those He was speaking too).

Jesus tells a bizarre story/parable (there's debate over if it was literal or a spin on an old fable), and in it a damned man goes to Hades (in short, the place the dead go before Hell – though sometimes called “Hell” which confuses many), and in it asks that a man who was apparently saved would be allowed to rise from the dead and warn the damned man's family to repent of their sins. He is told that they have Moses and the prophets (in short, the Old Testament – this was before Jesus died and rose again). He said they wouldn't listen to that, but would respond to a man coming from the dead. He is then told “if they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, not even someone rising from the dead will cause them to repent” (Luke 16.19-31). Imagine that; a man coming from the dead, who they saw was dead and buried, coming and telling them about the afterlife would not make them change.

Some say “If God came down from Heaven and told me to follow Jesus, then I would.” Would you really? Someone rising from the dead should speak to anyone pretty much as well. Yet in that case, if somebody would not put faith in God (this was ancient Israel, nobody there doubted the validity of the scriptures – but they didn't believe God's warning in them), then even the supernatural would not make them change their minds.

Here, Jesus is saying that because they hate God even when He calls them to repentance, they won't believe Jesus. Jesus was standing right there, doing miracles for them, but they would not believe in Him. Now don't get me wrong about "hating God." Nobody seeks God (Romans 3.11); Christ draws men to himself. We were yet sinners when He died for us (Romans 5.8). That's why God's love is so amazing. He loved us when we hated Him.

However, those who respond to God's chance at forgiveness are those who will follow Jesus! Believing in Jesus is the sign, therefore, that you would respond. All are depraved and Godless, but some have enough light to hear God when He calls you. Jesus refers to himself as a shepherd, and His believers as sheep; they hear His voice when He calls (John 10.14-17).

This does not mean I am calling any of you evil (beyond the extent that all men, righteous believers included, are evil. It is written "**all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God**" - Romans 3.23 - and "**every inclination of man's heart is evil from childhood**" - Genesis 8.21). If two or three of you decide to follow Jesus after reading this, then obviously you aren't children of the Devil. Several more might come to know the Lord later in life, and I have no idea which of all of you or how many might actually be children of God. Maybe I'm too pessimistic and all of you will enter eternal life as children of God. Maybe *none* of you are children of the Devil who in your hearts are turned against God even when He calls you back. That's right, maybe you are all really Children of God and you just don't know it yet. So don't take what Jesus said as insult – take it as warning!

B. What About The People Before Jesus?

This is indeed a good question. After all, many people lived before Jesus and worshipped God. Some who hardly knew God but repented of their sins in their meager knowledge, such as the people of Nineveh (big city in ancient Assyria), were saved according to Jesus himself

(Matthew 12.41-42). How can one say you *must* believe in Jesus if these people were saved and almost surely had no idea about Jesus? Prophets spoke of a savior to come, but that hardly constitutes the Gospel as I have preached being known by anyone. And of course, what of those before those prophets? Some believe that what saved the righteous back before Jesus was their belief that a savior would come. But that isn't written anywhere in the Old Testament. It never said "if you believe that a savior will come, you will be saved." Not to mention, the first books of the Bible didn't come until at least 2000 years after the first men (and depending on possible gaps in genealogies which the Bible never claims are complete, it could be far more than 2000). How would people know this Gospel to be saved?

So, I will tell you something that I don't want anybody to read more into than necessary (and please, if you read this, please please please read the rest of Part C because without it you'll misunderstand). Here it goes: Jesus' sacrifice is what literally causes our salvation, but, belief in that fact was not always what saved.

While what I say may sound to some of my brethren like I'm disregarding the whole Gospel message, it's not. What do we have in the Bible regarding this? Well, we know of a few people who weren't even Jews who were saved, we have others who are complemented for faith (a list can be found in the book of Hebrews, chapter 11, as well as scattered elsewhere) long before Jesus. We see the Old Testament speaks of the savior often but rather vaguely. I don't mean to downplay the way that Jesus fulfilled prophecy upon prophecy upon prophecy; however, nowhere is a great description of Jesus contained in a single prophecy, nor does it say anywhere in the Old Testament that a person back then would have to believe a savior was to come in order to be saved. This will be relevant in Part D as well.

Think about what was brought up in part B. Those who were of God followed Jesus, and according to Jesus himself, those who knew Him and saw Him but would not believe Him (despite many great miracles) were children of the Devil. Surely a child of God is not damned; later in the New Testament this is expounded upon, going as far as calling the saved “**co-heirs with Christ**” (Romans 8.17). Likewise, a child of the Devil isn’t saved. That’s pretty self-evident. That’s not to say that God would ever turn anyone away who comes to Him and repents saying “no, you’re a child of the Devil so I will not forgive you.” Christ explicitly said “**whoever comes to me I will never drive away**” (John 6.37b). Simply put then, a child of the Devil won’t come to Jesus. That’s what Jesus was saying above. He’s not saying that they are refused by God because they are of the Devil. It’s not as though they are falling on their knees and begging Jesus for forgiveness. These people are about to try to stone Him! They hated Him. They hated Him because they are of the Devil. So do not worry that God might turn you away. He will not at all. I love Jesus because I am of God. I pray that I can look and see that one day all 600+ will show yourselves to be of God as well.

This principle we find here is that their faith in Christ was indicative of how faithful they were in their hearts. Given that we know not every person who ever lived before Jesus was damned (and that it’s pretty safe to assume that many who are used throughout scripture as examples of the righteous – Abraham, Job, Noah, just to name a few – are not condemned...), it would seem that that one can very logically apply this principle to them. They were judged by how Godly they were in their hearts, just as ultimately those Jesus was speaking to are. Had Abraham or Job lived in Jesus’ time, they would have followed Him, because they were of God. Does that make sense?

There's a story of a whore who lived in the town of Jericho. The Israelites were about to take the town over (under God's orders). The whore, named Rahab, did not know God or follow His law. She just knew He existed. She also knew He was behind the Israelites. So, she helped them take over Jericho. She is used as an example of faith throughout scripture. She hardly knew God, but to the extent that she did, she reacted. As a Christian with full access to scripture and knowledge of Jesus, far more is expected of me. She didn't know about Jesus, but I hardly doubt that she was saved. Those who hear the message and are of God will believe. Since almost nobody before Jesus would have heard of Him (in fact, His disciples didn't even know He was going to die until the end even though they knew who He was), they couldn't believe in Him. But Jesus came when the time was right. Of those who heard the message, however, it is written "whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever disbelieves will be damned" (Mark 16.16).

It's really a matter of faith in God. The righteous before Jesus were called by God in their hearts, and they accepted Him and believed in Him. We know, thanks to Jesus' words, that anyone who would accept God will accept Jesus. Obviously if Jesus didn't exist (in human form, He existed in from the beginning – John 1.1), they couldn't believe in Him. They would have believed if He had been there...

XV. WHAT ABOUT PEOPLE WHO DIE WITHOUT HEARING OF JESUS?

A. This Is A Difficult Question To Answer

This is a very common question, and one that has many possible answers. I am not 100% sure, as very little is directly said about those who never hear the Gospel. Based on what scripture does say about salvation in general, several ideas can be seen among Christians regarding this issue. I am not 100% convinced of any one idea, but as you will see, I lean towards some far more than others.

B. God Wills That They Never Hear And Are Damned For It

A growing number of Christians believe in the doctrine of pre-destination. They believe God decided whether or not you would believe and be saved before you were even created. In that case the answer would be easy and generally goes like this: you must accept Jesus by name, so all who don't hear the Gospel are those God created specifically to send to Hell. They don't hear the Gospel because God willed they be damned.

People who tend to believe in predestination tend to be considered followers of "Calvinism," otherwise known as "Reformed theology." There's more to Calvinism than Predestination, but for the point of this explanation that's all you need to know as of now.

Those who tend to believe that people have a choice in whether or not they believe tend to be called "Arminians." There are many other aspects to Arminianism, but again, all you need to know for this is that Calvinists believe in Predestination (God decided if you'd believe and be saved), and Arminians in free will (you have a choice).

The belief in freedom of the will is a common explanation (rightly so) to many philosophical questions, such as: "How can there be a perfect God if there is evil in the world?"

(The answer to that question is this: God created beings with free-will. If He prevented them from being and doing evil, they would no longer be free. He allows them to exercise their free will for a time before restoring creation at the end of time). It is used to answer this question as well: “why is there so much sin if God is all-powerful and hates sin, and we are taught explicitly He doesn’t so much as tempt anyone to sin (James 1.13-14)?” (Pretty much the same answer; God allows sin to occur or else man wouldn’t be free).

NOTE: If you surrender to God by accepting Jesus as your Lord and Savior, God will change your heart and will exercise greater control in your life because you have allowed Him to. Another question the doctrine of free will answers is this: “If God wants all men to be saved, and He’s all powerful, why does anyone go to Hell?” Under this view, He won’t force them to obey or love Him; if He did, it wouldn’t be love. What good is the love of a robot? Respecting free-will is of of such great importance that it is even more important than people being saved.

I have not even begun to address what the scripture says; whether predestination or free-will is true (I lean more towards the former but not completely – my thoughts are very complex). That would go WAY beyond the scope of this. To study it you need to be thoroughly versed in scripture, which I hope all of you will one day be. For now, just know that if YOU believe, if you have faith, you will be saved, so accept Jesus now.

The above free-will based explanations are not meant to convince anyone against predestination (there are some scriptural merits to the claim). The ideas above will be relevant later, however.

I don’t believe in straight pre-destination. That makes the question far more complex. Scripturally it is hard to say, because little if anything is directly said of those who never hear the Gospel.

C. Maybe The Unevangelized Can Be Saved

Some believe that some of them can be saved if they have a heart for God. Verses like Mark 16.16 and the like that refer to damnation of those who don't believe have the possibility, given the context, of referring only to those who DISBELIEVE, who hear the message but do not believe. While the only way to heaven is through Jesus (John 14.6), that could, at least possibly, mean that nobody can be saved but for what Jesus did. Jesus died and rose again no matter whether or not a person believes. So, it might not necessarily mean that it is impossible that one can be saved without believing in Him (if, and only if, they never heard of Him). In other words, when Jesus says “nobody gets to the Father but through me...” He might have meant “nobody could be saved if not for what I am about to do (be crucified and rise again).”

In fact, as I was writing this I, on a somewhat unrelated matter, conducted quite a bit of biblical research and have become much more sympathetic to the idea. This led me to add part C of this section, and by logical extension of what I said there, I am much more inclined now to believe that, just as people before Jesus (who obviously never heard of Him) could be faithful to God, righteous, and ultimately saved, people today who have not heard the Gospel can be saved based on how they respond to how much of God they have been shown. I am not denying statements like “whoever disbelieves will be condemned.” Like I said, given the contexts of such statements, all one can say is that one who rejects Jesus is damned. But you can't reject Jesus if you never heard of Him.

Those who don't hear the Gospel may be children of God same as those who Jesus talks about in Subsection B who believe in Him *because* they are of God. Believe it or not, international missions work (people going around the world telling people about Jesus), gets countless people to genuinely accept the Gospel. After all, how do you think Christianity spread

around the world from a tiny group of Jews in Jerusalem? People around the world hear the Gospel and accept it much easier than I did. I don't attribute that all to a lack of education (especially given that we have one of the worst education systems in the developed world and for that reason can't assume we are better educated than said convert). If so many people around the world are willing to accept Jesus, and therefore show themselves to be of God, who's to say the convert's next door neighbor who didn't hear the message wasn't equally disposed to God? I don't see why if people before Jesus were judged by their faith in God without knowing Christ and could be saved, why that cannot be the case today.

That said, you have all heard the message. You are shown far more light than them. Also, if you do not believe in Jesus, then scripture is very clear. If you have faith in God, you would love the one He sent because you, unlike some tribesman in the Amazon who knows not Jesus but has a heart for God, have heard of the savior. Like Jesus said before, if you reject Him, you are a child of the Devil.

D. "They Didn't Hear? Too Bad..."

Another view is simply that those who never here the Gospel simply go to Hell. Thus, it is all the more important that we spread the Gospel because our decisions affect other people's eternal fates.

Aside from the obvious philosophical and emotional problems with this idea, many of biblical themes those of us who don't believe in predestination use to justify our beliefs are compromised by this idea. Those include: God's love for the world, sinners and all (John 3.16, Matthew 5.48, Mark 10.21), God's desire that all been be saved (2 Peter 3.9, 1 Timothy 2.4, Ezekiel 18.32, various talk of God's joy at repentance), and the fact that the Lord constantly laments the hard-heartedness of the unrepentant. If God wants all to be saved why doesn't He

make sure everyone at least hears the Gospel if it's the only way they can be saved? Is God so small that He can't even ensure that everyone hears a simple message? There's so many reasons why I can't believe that to be true.

To be blunt, I don't think most people who claim they believe this actually do. If any person with any compassion thought this was true, that they would make the difference in a person's eternal fate, they would not be in school or working full time or whatever they do. Why are such people not spending every moment of every day traveling the world telling people the message? Other than the hours of work need to afford basic shelter and food and just enough sleep to get by, why aren't they going from state to state and nation to nation with the message, if it really is up to them?

Not even Jesus Himself was that devoted to spreading the word, nor were any of His apostles who devoted their lives to missionary work and were almost all gruesomely murdered for it. While we Christians are commanded to honor Jesus, and it is implied that we are to spread the word as well, these men were on specific missions from God. Others, as the Bible makes clear, are called to serve God in other ways, like apologetics (that is, defending the faith to unbelievers – had to throw that one out there). Anybody who believes the unevangelized are damned but could have been saved if they heard should be outdoing the apostles, but they don't. I believe God has more control than that, and I think, when it comes down to it, pretty much all of us believers do.

E. Does Anyone Die Unevangelized?

Another possibility is this: simply put, we can't assume any person goes their whole life without hearing the Gospel. After all, you all have heard it. Maybe you never heard it until now, but now you've heard it. Maybe every living person hears it at some point. Maybe the moment a

person dies, Jesus appears to them or something like that. The Apostle Paul did write, regarding the Gospel message, that it had, at the time he wrote it, had “**been proclaimed to every creature under heaven**” (Colossians 1.23). Now, that is too tall of an order for even an uneducated ancient person who was mentally retarded (which all the Bible writers are said to have been by some detractors, despite Paul’s Roman citizenship and world-class education) to expect to complete in a lifetime. Not to mention, that phrase would indicate not only men but also animals and grass and dirt, for all are creations of God. Either Paul was being idiomatic (which is possible), or there is more to the sharing of the Gospel than just the literal proclamation of men. It at least allows for such a possibility. Little more is said for or against such an idea.

F. God Targets Those Who Will Accept

Based on my beliefs, I might be called a “reformed Arminian.” As the name implies, it’s kind of a cross between Arminianism and reformed theology. This is all really oversimplified, this whole section is, so hopefully, if you accept this message, the Gospel, and become a Christian, you will study this much more. Anyway, I believe the following: God, as creator of the whole universe, including time, exists outside of time and therefore knows the future. However, being outside of time, He can also alter the events. If you stepped out of time, you would see all occurrences in all of eternity (endlessly backwards and forwards). They would appear fixed from that perspective. However, what occurs within it is a result of your choice, either conscious or from the heart, regarding God. Put simply, God knows the future and acts accordingly. Whoever would choose on their own to accept the Gospel is destined to hear it and accept, and vice versa.

Exactly how this all works, I am not sure. But that’s okay, for an infinite and eternal God will surely know and understand things I will not. Therefore, if we say that you cannot be saved

if you don't know Jesus by name, then those who never hear the Gospel are those who would not accept it, so God just doesn't waste time and manpower on them.

If you read the book of Acts, which records the major church events in the first few decades after Jesus, God quite actively intervenes to reach certain people with the Gospel. One apostle, named Phillip, was told to walk down a certain road where he just happened to meet an Ethiopian man who accepted the Gospel on the spot. Then he was carried by God's Spirit to various towns to spread the word (Chapter 8). In other words, he kind of teleported...that's how important it was to God that Philip got to the right people.

The most relevant example is of a man named Cornelius (Chapters 10 and 11). He was a Roman soldier, so He wasn't a Jew like Jesus or the early Christians were. However, he had been told of God, and he prayed to Him and helped the poor regularly. He had a heart for God despite not being one of His "chosen people." So what happens? God sends an angel to him to tell him to send for the Apostle Peter. Meanwhile, God sends Peter into a series of bizarre trances which leave him with the conclusion, when Cornelius' servants arrive, to go to Cornelius and tell him the gospel. Cornelius and a number of others hear the message and accept it.

In several cases, God makes sure that those who would accept the gospel hear it. We have evidence to believe that God goes out of His way to reach the reachable.

Even in the Old Testament God pulled all kinds of stunts to show mercy to those who would fear Him. I'm sure most of you have heard of Jonah, the guy who was swallowed by a whale and lived. Do you all know why that happened? Well, Jonah was a prophet, and God had sent him a message to preach to the enemy city of Nineveh. Nineveh was a large city in ancient Assyria, and they gave Israel no end of grief. The people were doing all kinds of evil deeds, idol worship, sexual sins, probably some murder. God told Jonah to warn them that is they kept it up,

He would destroy the city (actually, God only told Jonah to say that He would destroy the city, but we know from Jeremiah 18.7-8 that God spares on nations He has His prophets prophesy against if they repent). Now, Jonah seemed to be of the belief that if he did not preach to them, and they did not have the chance to repent, God would destroy them for sure. Sounds like the belief that it is up to Christians to save the unevangelized, doesn't it?

Now, Jonah, out of hatred for the people of Nineveh, refuses to go and preach. That is why God had the whale swallow him without killing him, to convince Jonah to reconsider his disobedience. After 3 days, Jonah cracked and agreed to preach to Nineveh. Every man and woman and child got together, prayed for forgiveness and stopped doing what they were doing, and God spared the city (as well as their souls, according to Jesus in Matthew 12.41). God made sure that they would hear the message. If God would make a whale swallow a man while keeping him alive and undigested for 3 days to make sure he preached to who needed to hear, why wouldn't He make sure people heard the Gospel if they would accept it?

In short, whatever the case, I do not believe we have to worry that anyone will unfairly go to Hell because they didn't hear the message like we did. As one of my brothers put it, "I don't know how God deals with the unevangelized, but I know how He deals with people like Cornelius."

XVI. THE (FICTIONAL) COUNCIL OF CAPRICI OF 1147 SAYS BLACKS ARE EVIL (SO THAT'S WHAT CHRISTIANITY TEACHES)

There is no such thing as the Council of Caprici, I made that up to explain this: Not all Christians are Catholic and bound by what the church in Rome says.

Regarding “Christians vs. Catholics,” some of you might ask “What is the difference? They are the same thing.” That’s not true at all. Christianity is a big overarching term. Any person who claims to believe in Jesus is a “Christian.” Catholicism is a denomination; a Catholic is a type of “Christian.”

A lot of people claim to believe in Jesus, about 2 billion. Only half are Catholic. No non-Catholics have to follow the Pope. Simply put, I don’t really care all that much what the Pope says; his word not authoritative. The many councils throughout history, Popes, confessing to priests, while these things are not exclusive to Catholicism (Pope is, but anyway), I do not follow them. About half the people in the world who claim to believe in Jesus do not follow them. We do not believe there is a Pope or any leader who has special, supernatural authority that is equivalent or perhaps greater than scripture. What councils throughout history say can be interesting, but unlike for some groups, I do not believe that they are not authoritative. That the council of Capricia in 1147 said blacks and women are evil, only to be reversed by the Council of Narnia in 1965 (both fictional) has no bearing on me. Because I am not Catholic, Orthodox, or belonging to any group that believes in Popes and worldwide human leaders and councils, these things have no bearing on me. I believe that the crusades were evil (well, for the most part that is; the history is complex and they started off justifiably as a defense of Christian lands from invaders- though overall, the Godless rape slaughter of Muslims and Jews that ensued is indefensible, Vatican support or not). If two councils or papal decrees contradict each other

(which happens), that doesn't affect me because I don't believe they are authoritative. So don't tell me what Christianity teaches because of what some council says or what the Pope says. I don't need to defend them. I probably agree with you!

I believe the scripture is our only authoritative source of doctrine. That's not to say there's nothing good or Godly outside of the Bible, just that it's the only thing I can look at and say "it says this, so this is what God says" and be sure of it. So don't tell me I must believe something or other or ask me if I'd go fight in the next crusade. It's irrelevant.

NOTE: While as you can tell I disagree with much of Catholic theology, I am not "anti-Catholic." While I disagree, and I mean seriously disagree, with a lot of what separates Catholics from protestants and other non-Catholics, I don't hate Catholics. I know "Catholics" who are truly saved Christians, and who are my brothers and sisters, children of the same God as me I am despite some differences. I would die for them. And though I dared to say how much I disagree with aspects of Catholicism, and not state objectively "this group believes this, this group believes this" but rather say "they're wrong," that doesn't make me anti-Catholic. Catholics would disagree with me too. You Catholics who read this, would you not say that I am completely wrong? I know you don't hate me because of it, I know you Catholics (except for some extremists) don't hate me because you disagree, so please no accusations that I am rude or mean or hate Catholics. We both disagree; you aren't mean or hateful, and neither am I.

XVII. ORIGINAL SIN (ALL HUMANS ARE SINFUL BY VIRTUE OF BEING HUMANS)

A. What Is It, And How Can It Be Right?

How can we say that what Christians believe about original sin is fair? For those not familiar with the term, well, it can mean different things depending on who is saying it. In general, it refers to the sin committed by the first humans, called Adam and Eve, and how their having sinned then has affected all mankind. As I said before, ALL have sinned, including you. The Bible says this explicitly in Romans 3.23 as I mentioned in Section ###. The Bible does speak of the first humans sinning as having an affect on all men. It is written that “the wages of sin is death,” both physical death, as well as being cast into hell (referred to in Christian circles as “spiritual death”). Sin and death both came through Adam’s sin. Because of his sin, all men became, by nature, sinners. That is how we can say all men are sinners, because all mean (except Jesus) commit sins, and it is, at least at its initial source, because of Adam.

There are two predominant views on how this worked. The first view, which I hold, is that when the first humans sinned, sin, as a force, as an entity, entered the world, and became part of the nature of humans, so that all humans are predisposed to sin and inevitably do. The second view goes beyond that, saying that all men are specifically condemned not because of their own sin but because of Adam’s sin. Although I find my view more tolerable (since people aren’t directly punished for somebody else’s actions), it still has the same core problem: it is ultimately Adam’s fault.

The question then is, how can this be fair? It’s Adam’s fault we’re sinners – we never had a choice. Even babies are sinful, as it is written in the Psalm 51.5, “**Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.**” This question has been very hard for Christians

to adequately to deal with, as it does seem blatantly unfair. I will give some possible ways that God could rectify any unfairness. However, the certain answer is this: God is just and perfect, and we aren't, so we can trust that whatever the case, it will end up being righteous. Therefore, if something about the truth of Jesus Christ calls to you, do not worry that God is not just. Any seeming injustice He will reconcile perfectly. Think about it: if you accept that you are a sinner and need God to save you, than would it not make sense that your ideas of justice and righteousness are not perfect. People all around the world all have radically different ideas about what is right and what is just, and they cannot all be right. Most of them must be wrong. Who is to say you and I don't get it a little wrong sometimes?

I also cannot stress enough what God declared to the prophet Isaiah “**For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,**’ declares the LORD. ‘**As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts**’ (Isaiah 55.9). If God does indeed exist, what kind of God would He be if this weren't true. So even if it all seems unjust to us, should we say that God is unjust, or that there is something we do not understand that He does. If God is so great that He can control every facet of all of creation at every moment seamlessly, who is to say that His understanding cannot fill in the holes in ours?

I am going to suggest just a few possible ways that there can be justice and fairness despite how the idea of original sin seems. These are not expressly taught in scripture – I am only suggesting ways that could fill in the holes in our understanding. It could be that none are true, but that is okay, for if none are true, yet the Gospel is true, than surely the God of that Gospel, who's ways are immeasurably higher than ours, will fill in any holes with something that works even better than what I can think of.

B. First Possibility

One possibility is simply that we are not actually held responsible for our sins unless we do not accept the Gospel. Now, in a sense this is undeniable – those who accept the Gospel are forgiven their sins and those who do not are not. But what I mean is this: when a person is made aware of their sin, then they have two options. They can accept Jesus and try to be righteous (and they will be saved), or they can deny their chance at salvation, and decide to stay sinners. Now, if once you know you have sinned and are a sinner, you decide to stay that way, then you will be held accountable for all your past sins, even if they were Adam's fault. Why? Because your willingness to stay a sinner affectively says that even if you had had the true choice to sin then or not, you would have sinned. Those who repent, however, are not blamed for the sins caused by their inherited sinful nature, and future sins will be forgiven as well out of God's mercy.

Indeed, this idea requires a few things to be true. Remember earlier in Section ? how I discussed the idea that those who do not hear the Gospel are condemned, but only because, had they heard it, they still would have rejected it? That has to be the case here. This idea assumes that all who would accept the Gospel have heard it. It also assumes that people have some sort of say in whether or not they believe, some sort of free-will. Now, this clearly isn't the case on the surface, since people generally don't choose what to believe. However, as I explained before, God could work behind the scenes. In one example, in Acts 16.13-15, the Lord opened the heart of a woman when she heard the Gospel so that she would believe. However, she was already a “worshipper of God” before she heard it and her heart was opened. In certain parables, Jesus would say “Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him” (Matthew 13.12). It is my belief that Jesus is speaking of that little bit of something in a person that makes them believe. All men's hearts are

full of evil (Ecclesiastes 9.3). However, something clearly distinguishes between believer and unbeliever, between child of God and child of the devil. Lydia had some sense of Godliness, and so God gave her more, turning her from a sinner with a shred of godliness into a believer. He did that with me. I hope that He does that with every one of you. Exactly what that thing is, and how it gets there, is what separates Calvinism (briefly discussed in Section ?), and others. If that something is something that a person has any degree of control of, then my idea works. Even though the decision to believe or not is not entirely willful on our side, from our perspective, God knows exactly what you would do with a perfect choice, and acts accordingly. All who would accept Jesus hear the Gospel and are saved by it. Those who would not either never hear it, or hear it and are not made to believe.

Now, if Calvinism is true, then that makes things much harder to answer. All men are sinful against their will (although their wills become sinful because of it), and a few who God created are saved and the rest, by the will of said creator, are condemned. Now, being an annihilationist takes a lot of the emotional bite out of this, but it still has the same core philosophical problems ultimately. God does not create people specifically to torture them in fire for ever and ever, but He still creates them in order to bring them harm. You see, though I believe the damned will one day no longer exist, it won't be pretty. All people, saved and unsaved, will be resurrected from the dead. They will stand before God. Could you imagine the absolute horror of those who are to be cast into the fire? They won't be like "oh, it will just kill me, that doesn't scare me." It will be such an event of unspeakable terror and anguish and hopelessness that surely all who are condemned will have been better off unborn. Jesus even said of Judas, who would betray Him (for He knew in advance it would happen), "**It would have been good for that man if he had not been born**" (Matthew 26.24b). This is all aside from the fact that,

prior to destruction, there may be conscious suffering of the immaterial soul between death and the resurrection, which could last for thousands of years (as it has for some, if this indeed occurs).

“It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10.31).

So even under my scenario, the lost would be created to suffer far far far worse than would have been worth it given the joy in their lives. God would have created them for that purpose. The only defense I can come up with is that God, as the creator, technically has the right to do that. The idea that God has the right to do with His creations as He pleases is stated more or less explicitly in Romans 9.19-24. I think in the context that this is referring to something far different (I will go into Romans 9-11, the latter two chapters usually ignored with those who are curious). But still, that would be the ultimate defense.

To be fair, any scenario entails that God created a person, even if He wanted them to be saved, ultimately knowing they wouldn't be. So I guess we have to eventually accept that it is ultimately better that God created them anyway, that He is right and just to do so, and that it goes beyond our understanding. Given that this all goes back and forth through time and deals with a being who exists outside of our constructs of time and space, this is safe to assume. Why did God create unbelievers? I don't know, but ultimately, He will not be found unjust. If you have faith in Jesus, you can surely have faith in this much.

C. Practical Evidence

It is true that I still wrestle with this doctrine, and though I still have some problems totally reconciling with what I view as right and wrong (although exactly what I believe about it I am not entirely sure, for that revolves around many other issues, like election and free will). However, the more I think about it, while philosophically I may have issues with some aspects of

it, it seems to be quite consistent with the world around me. Given how humans, both “good” and “bad: behave, it seems evident that intertwined into human nature is sin and evil.

An atheist once said to me that he thought the idea of original sin was something made up by religious people in order to ensure that they can claim everyone is guilty of something. I would argue that, if anything, it would have been made up not as a means of repression, but as a means of explanation for why people are as they are.

Indeed, we all can look at the likes of Adolf Hitler and Mao Zedong and people like Ted Bundy and Jeffrey Dahmer as poster children of evil. However, when it comes down to it, while there is a huge difference, at least ostensibly, between a mass murderer and average Joe, who can deny that even good people do bad things? Even seemingly good people lie and sometimes hurt other people unjustly. Many people in America have never stolen a car, but how many have never stolen anything from anyone? Even the seemingly righteous lash out in rage every once in a while against people who haven’t wronged them. Who among us have never been teenagers? Even though these are little things, it is seemingly the universal human condition to do what is bad at least some of the time.

It only gets worse when we look at the broader picture. In other cultures, people do things we would consider appalling (like female circumcision) without a second thought, because they have been told it is good. While we in the west tend to oppose child molestation (and with good reason), countless children are sold into sex slavery in Asia, and it isn’t always treated with the harsh popular and governemtnal crackdowns that it sometimes is treated with. How many young girls are raped in South Africa because men think that it will get rid of HIV? We oppose slavery and racism today, but was the idea that blacks were animals and not human beings widespread in

the Americas (especially the British colonies) in past centuries? People were simply told it was true, and many just went along with it.

Along those lines, how often in history do we see people get wrapped up in mob violence, only to later think, “gee, I shouldn’t have done that.” Even the things people know in their minds are wrong, they still do. While most people are not Adolf Hitler, but how many “innocent” Germans had no problems with what was going on right under their noses? Obviously some did stand up, and some were prevented by totally justifiable fear from acting, but how many gladly aided in the persecution of their Jewish neighbors? The Holocaust wasn’t so effective and widespread because Hitler had a few good generals that could do his will without the people behind them...Or how about Stanley Milgram’s famous experiments involving the apparent (though in reality staged) torture of other people at the hands of the subjects. For those not familiar, in a nutshell, Milgram had a number of test subjects be told by one of the conductors of the test push a button that would painfully electricute another person in a separate room. Indeed, there was no actual person being tortured, but that wasn’t known to the test subject. And the majority, (figure), found it easier to inflict pain on another person, even with the audible screams (from recordings), than to simply say no with impunity (citation). It doesn’t take much to bring out the worst in people, as these kinds of examples show. Can we say there isn’t some truth to the messages of literary works like *Lord of the Flies*, that humans, left to their own devices, eventually become like wild animals? Might there be truth to the idea that people will follow wickedness without thought, like in Shirley Jackson’s ‘*The Lottery*’? If we say that all human beings have the tendency to do evil in their nature, then this all makes perfect sense.

It seems that there is some truth to the modern liberal relativistic idea that what separates people and their actions isn’t whether they are good or evil, but simply their environment.

However, it is not that there is no good or evil, but rather there is evil in everyone. Wealth and education and other socioeconomic factors merely affect how this plays out, how that evil is manifested. If people follow like sheep a blood-drinking madman because he appeals to their patriotism and love of those who look like them, who is to say they would not rape virgins to cure themselves of AIDS had they been born somewhere else?

I should note that I used examples that I, even as an unbeliever, would have considered examples of human depravity. The fact that humans are generally sinful should be even easier to accept for those who are religious, though not Christians. I, as a Christian, believe that sex outside of marriage, adultery, prostitution, pornography, and homosexuality (that is, the practice of it) are all immoral. Would any devout Muslim, for example, disagree with me? After all, among young people in America, having multiple sexual partners before marriage is the rule, not the exception. Don't even get me started about Europe. For those who are religious but do not follow Jesus, and who look at the the "west" and see all this and lament the sin of it all, know that I am with you. This is not what "Christianity" is. To me, America is the best nation on earth, but it is not a Christian nation (though it is founded on some good, Christian-friendly values, among which slavery and sexual promiscuity are not). There is no Christian nation. Many Americans may be "Christians," but that is no more meaningful than the fact that 100% of Saudi's are "Muslims." Now, would anybody say every single person in Saudi Arabia truly believes in and worships Allah? And this isn't to say that sexual sin in various forms are not rampant in other cultures as well. If you look deep enough, you'll find it everywhere in some form.

No matter what your cultural background, if you acknowledge that there is right and wrong (and in their hearts, even the most ardent supporter of moral relativism does), then isn't

there a lot of what is wrong and immoral within even the best of us? That sure fits the idea that human beings inherited a sinful nature from somewhere.

D. Remember – I Wasn’t Raised To Believe In Original Sin

I should make note of the fact that, coming from a non-Christian home, I was never told growing up that humans beings are inherently evil or sinful or turned against God. In fact, I was raised to believe just the opposite, and actively did. I’m not exactly a misanthrope even today. Nevertheless, my eyes have been opened.

When it comes down to it, before I was a believer, I was a “good person.” I was kind. I didn’t do any majorly bad things. But even I did my fair share of evil deeds, however small. It’s not as though I never followed the crowd into doing what I knew was wrong. It’s not as though I never spoke harshly or cruelly, or was not quick to hurth those who I felt hurt me. And it’s not as though I wasn’t at elast tempted into doing many things that I wouldn’t have even considered wrong but do now. I can’t say with any certainty that had I been born to a tribe of cannibals that I would not have killed and and devoured my enemies same as everyone else, or that if I had been raised to hate blacks that I wouldn’t have taken part in a few lynchings myself. And this tendency to want to drifft towards what is wrong and ungodly is still in me. However, I choose to walk by the Spirit of God, to submit my mind and heart to Him, to pray to be led into what is good, and through it, I am not the person I was. It is written that “**if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature**” (*NASB*, 2 Corinthians 5.17), and of those who believe, the apostle Paul declared “**For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus**” (*NASB*, Philippians 1.6). Yet now these things still linger, reminding me that indeed, from the time the first humans sinned, I, as a human, have the sin that they brought

into the world lurking over my shoulder. Even if the idea of original sin doesn't quite match up with seems right in some ways, it sure seems to be true.

XVIII. AN OVERVIEW OF “THE LAW” (BECAUSE A LOT OF ISSUES REGARDING THE BIBLE’S MORALITY STEM FROM THE LAW)

A. The Commandments Of The Law Are Not All Commands For All People Always – Specifically, The Law Was For Israel As Part Of A Covenant.

To biblically go over all of this would be long and arduous. I had to study this for some time. I just go over the basics here.

Simply put, God chose a particular group of people, the descendents of a man named Jacob, to be His chosen nation. You all know the story of Moses and the Exodus right? Ever seen the Movie *The Ten Commandments* or seen the Rugrats Passover Special? Moses leads the Hebrew people out of Egypt, 10 plagues, the pharaoh, all that. Those people (or rather their children) were to become the nation of Israel. By Israel I don’t mean the nation in the Middle East founded in 1948 that’s always in the news. I mean a Kingdom from 3500 years ago. Anyway, THEY were given a special covenant with God. If they followed His commandments, they would have lots of good fortune. Also, if they had faith in the Lord, they would obey (and by that they would be saved). As far back as Abraham (if you don’t know who he is, he’s a really important man from before Israel), faith was what God wants since all men are sinful. Abraham was given a promise by God (details not important here), and as it is written of Abraham “Abraham Believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15.6).

That purpose of the law was not to be the eternal code forever. Think of this: The law was given to Moses; it did not exist from the beginning of time. Some parts were specifically given to Israel because they had been set apart as a nation. For example, God allowed all animals to be eaten by Noah. It is written “The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth, and on all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground, and on all

the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands. Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything” (*NIV*, Genesis 9.3).

Later, when God set apart a specific nation to be His special people, for them, He commanded that they not eat certain things. Just think about that: one insists “you Christians, if you wanna think the Bible is really God’s word, you have to follow all the rules,” but how could we assume that? Even Abraham didn’t have the Law. If it was meant to be the rule for everyone, why wasn’t it...the rule for everyone? It’s unknown which rules existed before the law: prohibition on murder existed from the beginning, but many of the 613 Old Testament commands aren’t even mentioned before the Law came to Moses. As I said, originally all animals were okay to eat. How then could we say what is in the Law is eternal, for it was not in place for much of human history?

The “Law” I refer to is the 613 commandments of the first 5 books of the Bible (the Torah as Jews call it).

B. Although The Law Was Specifically For Israel, That Does Not Mean That Right And Wrong Has Changed

Think of this: if God is a personal being, don’t you think He might, at some point, command certain things of certain people? Not all commandments of God are a matter of what is inherently right and wrong. Consider this: the Bible speaks of God commanding individual people to do certain things on all kinds of occasions. In the book of Jonah, He commands Jonah to go preach to a town called Ninevah. Does that mean that we are all required to go preach to Ninevah? Of course not. It would be wrong for Jonah to disobey (which he did, before being brought around). However, it would not be immoral for us to not go preach to Ninevah, since we

have not been commanded to (and it would be impossible to do so anyway – there is no more Ninevah).

C. The Law Had A Purpose And It Has Been Fulfilled.

Secondly, the Law had a purpose. It was not abolished, at least not in the sense that it was rejected. Rather, it was fulfilled. It served it's purpose. The purpose of the law was largely this: to make it impossible for man to live up to it. It required perfection. All men from the beginning have sinned (Romans 3.23). The first man and women ever, named Adam and Eve, sinned. None have ever been perfect, until Jesus. However, if you are pretty good, and don't sin much, you might not think you are sinful at all. So, God added a whole bunch of rules, some just for the sake of making Israel different and set apart from the rest of the world.

What would be the point of that? Well, if any man could follow all the Law perfectly, he'd join God in Heaven (because all of God's moral commands and rules for every person, largely found within one's conscience, are within the Law). If you could follow the Law 100% you would have never sinned. Nobody ever did, except Jesus. The point was, it was sooooo difficult, that every person would think "well, we can't do it, so we'll have to believe in God and the one who He has promised to redeem us (the Messiah, who was Jesus). The law didn't keep anyone out of heaven, for again, all sinned already. They were all already damned. The point of the Law, rather, was so that "sin might become utterly sinful" (Romans 7.13).

Furthermore, it drew attention to the sinfulness of men's hearts. Sin, at its core, is rebellion against God. Thus, while one might not have done something evil before, once it is commanded against, we want to do it. Who would deny that we as humans have a natural tendency to want what we cannot have and do what we cannot do? This is the ultimate example. Because sin is rebellion against God, we naturally, when without Jesus, want to oppose God.

When He commands against something, that makes us want to do it. This doesn't make men evil; it shows what evil is already in their hearts. It is written that **"I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COVET.' But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind"** (*NASB*, Romans 7.7a-8). As it says right there, sin was already there, and from there comes the sinful action. It wasn't the cold, rather it was the runny nose that told you that you were sick. The Law made people commit more technical "sins." However, it didn't make them any more sinful or in need of Jesus - it just made it more obvious.

Without the Law, some might think "I hardly ever sin; I'm okay." But they would be wrong, because they did have sin. But with the Law, people might realize they weren't good enough, because they would break it more often, and because it caused the evil in their hearts to turn itself to action. Then they would instead turn to God, knowing they needed Him and could not earn his favor on their own. This did of course increase the number of sins, but that's okay because **"the Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more"** (*NASB*, Romans 5.20). Does this seem like an unnecessarily long and complicated way to do it? I wouldn't say it doesn't. Should we be thankful to God that He had the mercy on mankind to do this whole thing to save us, and should we assume that He knows what He is doing? Absolutely.

Another purpose of the Law was to be like a tutor to mankind. In other words, it was good guidance as to what is right and wrong. It is written that **"before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor"** (*NASB*, Galatians 3.23-25).

Here is a good analogy. When we were children, our parents taught us right and wrong. That doesn't change now that we are older. However, they also made us follow lots of rules that we don't follow as adults. I bet we all had a bedtime at some point. No longer do our parents order us to go to bed at 9pm. We are free to go to bed whenever we want for the most part. However, if we have work in the morning, we know not to stay up all night but to go to bed at a reasonable hour. There were also safety rules; until a certain age most of us weren't allowed to cross the street alone, and we would be punished if we did. Yet crossing the street is not inherently wrong; our parents simply wanted to keep us safe until we were able to do it safely. These rules served good purposes, and yet we do not have to follow them now. Furthermore, though we don't follow them specifically, we can learn from them. From the above, they showed us the importance of being responsible and being taking good safety precautions. In short, adding and rescinding rules can have a purpose, and it does not mean that the rule-giver was wrong or has changed.

All who follow Jesus are lead by God's Holy Spirit. We are like grown-ups. Before Jesus came, the Holy Spirit was only actively there for a small group of people (kings, prophets, and the like). If all had the Holy Spirit like we as believers do, had, God would not have said, through His prophet Joel, "**It will come about after this That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy, Your old men will dream dreams, Your young men will see visions. Even on the male and female servants, I will pour out My Spirit in those days**" (*NASB*, Joel 2.28-29). It manifests itself in all kinds of different ways, and for some it is more obvious than others (though this is somewhat controversial, I do believe that believers today can heal and do miracles and receive message directly from God). The Holy Spirit keeps us doing what is good, not evil (Galatians 5.21-23). It identifies us before God as His adopted

Children, for it is written “The **Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God**” (*NASB*, Romans 8.16). It also renews our minds, as described in Romans 12.2. One with the Holy Spirit is able to be led to simply do what is righteous without having to follow a long list of specific rules. However, God did not pour out His Spirit on all who followed Him until after Jesus came. For those who came before, just as a child needs extra rules, so too did they.

The question then is, which rules were simply put in to hold our hands (like a bedtime), and which ones were reflective of what God commands of all people? There is no hard and fast rule, but we have some ways to figure it out. If a commandment in the New Testament follows what was in the Old, we can assume it was an issue of morality. If it is set aside (like the Sabbath and dietary laws), we can assume it is like a bedtime (especially dietary laws, since they did not always exist). Common sense helps too. Since we are not Israel, it would be impossible for the assembly to get together to stone to death somebody who commits adultery. However, we can assume that adultery is extremely serious and an abomination to God, as it demanded the death penalty under the Law, and because it is spoken against in the New Testament (e.g. Romans 2.2). There is no more institution to fit the command to execute those who curse their parents, but we can imagine that cursing one’s parents is a huge deal. (I should add that not even cursing the king or prophets was necessarily a capital crime. If these commands were made up by those in power to suit their interests - i.e. kings and prophets - why did they not make it a capital crime to insult them, but rather only parents and God?). Also, I will add that simply saying something negative does not constitute a “curse,” especially if it is true. Commentators disagree on what “curse” means, but note that it appears to have been a very rare occurrence. I only add that because even I have cursed my parents in my pre-Christian life, so this did rub me as wrongly as it does for most when I first read it.

There is one other purpose to the Law. It kept God on the mind of Old Testament believers. Today, God pours out His Holy Spirit on believers, but as mentioned earlier, this was not always the case. Today as believers, our minds and actions have an influence on them always that, at least to some extent, leads us to follow God, that being God's Holy Spirit.

If they did not necessarily have God's Spirit, how would they keep their minds on Him? Of course, they would do this to some extent on their own, but if every aspect of your life is managed through a written law, even what food you eat and how mildew-prone your house is, you will always be thinking about that law, and the one who gave it. You could not help but remember God in your mind if you had to follow the Law. The Holy Spirit takes the place of the Law in that regard.

Once Jesus came and was crucified, however, the Law was no longer needed. It is written "So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law" (Galatians 3.24-25). Jesus brought the Holy Spirit, just as He promised His first followers, for it is written "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you" (NASB, John 14.26).

The Law has served its purpose. We do not follow every rule in it today not because most of us Christians are "not that religious," but because those who follow it correctly understand what the Law was for.

C. "Does That Mean Everything In The Old Testament Is Rejected?"

The answer to that question is this: no. A lot of what are commonly referred to "moral laws" are repeated as commandments for Christians in the New Testament, or are made clear that they have been sin since the beginning. Romans 1.27-31 singles out, among other things; murder,

homosexual relations, gossiping, envy, deceitfulness, slander, greed, and disobedience to one's parents (within obvious parameters of course). Drunkenness is spoken against and drunkards do not go to heaven (1 Corinthians 6.10). Sorcery (literally medication for the sake of inducing the appearance of magic), fornication (sex outside of marriage), idolatry (worshipping a God you created – worshipping Jesus honors the one who sent Him), sexual immorality in general, and other sins shown above are not the actions of the saved; those who do them don't go to heaven (Galatians 5.19-21).

Note: That's not to say you as a Christian won't be forgiven if you fall and commit one of the above sins. However it means that if you see someone doing them unrepentantly, they might not really be Christians. Actions do not make a person who they are, but they reflect who they are. It is written that “**by this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother** [fellow believer]” (*NASB*, 1 John 3.10).

What this does mean is this: many specific commandments are no longer binding. The death penalty is no longer mandated for punishment for sins like murder, adultery, blasphemy, sodomy, etc. Those are all sins still, but we are not the government of ancient Israel. How can the assembly gather together and stone someone if there is no assembly?

The many seemingly arbitrary rules of cleanliness are now also no longer binding on us. If you follow Jesus, you no longer have to follow them; if you don't follow Jesus, you'll be judged according to every one of those laws (and you've all already failed; of that I have no doubt).

Many parts of the old law are also explicitly said to be non-binding as well. Circumcision (1 Corinthians 7.18), dietary restrictions (Mark 7.19, Acts 10.11-15, Romans 14.14), the Sabbath (by most interpretations including my own - Colossians 2.14-17, also Romans 14.5).

That is why we Christians don't follow many of those rules in the Bible yet claim the scriptures are God-breathed and authoritative. God really did make up all those rules – for a specific time and place according to His will. Just as He told Jonah to go preach to Ninevah, but did not command that of all people, so He commanded the Israelites, who He had formed a special covenant with, to follow special rules. We're not hypocrites or just completely ignorant of what our own scriptures teach. Rather, we understand exactly what they say (well, in this case anyway) and how to apply it, something that can't be said of somebody who attempts to discredit the whole Bible and Christian faith with a verse or two

D. Not Under Law? What Of Matthew 5.17?

This verse is often used by Bible detractors to claim that we must follow the whole Old Testament (or, for the few who bother to know the Bible well enough to know the parts that say we don't, they claim there is a blatant contradiction).

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (NASB). Well, let's see what this verse, and the passage in general, really says. First of all, Jesus certainly did not abolish the Law. It was never destroyed or abolished. It is still here.

But notice that He said He came to “fulfill” it. How did He do that? Well, like any verse, you MUST read more than the single verse to understand what is being said. In fact, the Bible wasn't written with verses or chapters; those were added later to make it easier to read.

Here's what's going on: Jesus has just begun teaching His disciples, and He says some pretty radical things. The first 11 verses, where He says “blessed are the poor in spirit...blessed are the pure in heart,” He basically is turning the whole paradigm of the religious establishment

upside down. The people mentioned were not “blessed.” To be blessed back then meant to be rich, to be male, to be Jewish, to be well liked etc.

Continue reading the rest of this chapter, and Jesus goes on to explain how certain laws (like “an eye for an eye”) have been abused and misinterpreted. He was probably accused, or would have been accused, of trying to say God’s Law was false. His point in 5.17 was simply that He wasn’t preaching that God’s law was wrong but rather their understanding of it, as well as its purpose, was wrong. That was part of fulfilling the law.

What of Galatians 3.22? I told you earlier that we are no longer under the Law because of Christ. Is this a contradiction? No. Galatians says we are no longer under the Law BECAUSE Christ came. That’s just it, He fulfilled the Law. He came, He followed it 100%, and then He was crucified. The purpose of the Law was to lead us to Christ. Christ came, brought us to Him, so its purpose as outlined in Galatians was fulfilled, which is what Jesus said He came to do. Its purpose was fulfilled in Christ. In all the ways I have mentioned earlier in this section, Jesus fulfilled the Law.

He didn’t abolish the Law. The Law is still here. We do not have to follow the law because we are in Christ and live by His spirit (Galatians 5.18). If you do not follow Christ, your only other shot at going to the Kingdom of God is by following the Law 100% as Jesus did. Of course, every person, I think it’s safe to say, has failed, so your only other option is Jesus...

XIX. THE LAW II – DEALING WITH THE MORAL DIFFICULTIES

A. “Even If We Are Not Under The Law, What God Commanded Was Horrible!”

Overly harsh by our standards? Yes, rules such as the stoning of people who worked on the Sabbath or homosexual relations definitely are. However, a couple points must be brought up:

1. This was God’s special nation from which the Messiah was to come from. He couldn’t have them committing various sins (although they did). That is why with many commandments of death He would declare “you must purge this evil from you.”

2. We are a product of our cultures. Back then, seemingly archaic rules like “an eye for an eye” were extremely liberal. Back then, blood feuds were common. A person might offend another person, and then be killed by that person. A family member of the slain might then retaliate, and back and forth...Now, God’s people had to defer all these claims to the elders, and the punishment had to be equal to the crime committed against the other, and that was that; an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, etc. No more than that. God’s rules do not revolve around what people think.

3. Although seemingly harsh, these things are sins (or were, such as violating God’s instituted Sabbath day). If sin results in eternal punishment of some sort, then we can assume that sin is truly horrible.

4. God is God, the creator of all life. He can kill anyone He wants to for any reason. In fact, every person dies. We almost never fault God, but we accept it as the way life works. If God can kill a person for whatever reason, than any crime is enough. Also, because I don’t believe in predestination, I would argue living and having the chance to repent and be saved is in

itself mercy, for we could have been rightly killed and condemned to hell at our first respective sins, but we weren't.

5. Finally, while our consciences are against such harsh policies, that may very well just be because God doesn't want us to implement such policies. When it was God's command, I bet the Israelites had far fewer qualms about it.

B. Genocide And War

It is true that the Israelites were commanded, on occasions, to attack cities and kill everyone. Since some cities comprised entire nations or peoples, it has been called genocide, and technically it might be.

Also, they did fight war after war against various peoples, and God commanded those wars. To make it even better, sometimes they were allowed to take slaves.

There are a couple of points to make here. First of all, probably most importantly, God can kill whoever He wants. He is the creator, and man is sinful. Unless one is to say God doesn't have that right, then that ultimately covers the deaths of anyone. If you disagree that God has the right to kill anyone, then I really have no idea what to say. I mean, I can't imagine how you could ever believe in God or any gods, since people die, which would mean any deity is a murderer.

Does God then contradict Himself when He tells men not to kill? No. Not if you approach it with a little common sense. Why is it wrong to kill men? Because only God has the right to kill those He created in His image. Consider this: let's say a man owns a restaurant. Obviously, he would tell his employees not to give away free food to people (since that would eliminate the point of owning a restaurant). Does he have that right? Of course, he owns it all. Now, let's say his mother comes in. What man would charge his mother to eat at a restaurant he

owns? So he tells his employee not to charge her. We wouldn't say "he contradicted himself!" We would understand that when he tells his employees not to give food away that he is saying telling his employees not to give food away *by their own choice*, since they do not own his food. He has the right to give or not give free food, being the owner. Those who work for him have to do as he says. He is right to tell them to do one or the other, because He is the one who has the right to do as he pleases with the food he owns. Likewise, as God is the one who created men and has the right to kill or not kill a given man, He is within His rights to say "do not kill" and also say "in this case though, kill."

Secondly, when the Israelites would be told to take out entire cities and kill everyone, it was God's judgment against that city. It is no different than when God flooded the earth and killed everyone but Noah and his family. The only difference was, in the case of Jericho and the like, it was by the sword and not water. The people there had all sinned at some point, and those cities were selected because they were extra sinful. And God would save anyone who was faithful. Rahab, a prostitute who I mentioned in Section ?, Subsection C, lived in a town that was to be razed. She knew God was with the Israelites, helped them, and she and her family was spared. She is mentioned in the New Testament (in James 2 and Hebrews 11) as a model of faith.

Yes, women and children were killed, but not by the will of men. It's not as though men decided to kill the women and children. God, who could have just made them dropped dead, is the one who killed them, only this time by ordering the men to. If you accept that God has the right to end life (which you would have to if you believe in any gods), then it's not a sin that they killed those people. Does that make God heartless? Well, He saved Rahab who turned to Him for compassion...Is God heartless every time a person dies? Why would He be heartless in this case here but not when grandma falls asleep and doesn't wake up? I really don't like reading about

God ordering people to be killed: it is emotionally ravishing, but when we really think about it, what can we say?

C. Slavery

As far as the passages on slavery, remember this: God isn't saying "you Christians can go to Africa and kidnap people." In fact, kidnapping and selling a person into slavery, what we think of because that's what American and European slavetraders did in Africa, was a capital offense (Exodus 21.16). However, other forms slavery did exist, either from people taken as spoils of God-ordained wars, or when people sold themselves for money. God does not outlaw this. Instead, His laws regulate it, and offer protections and safeguards. Female slaves could be taken as a wife (admittedly, I find it sketchy, but so be it); they could not, however, be resold, but would have to either be kept and treated as a wife (not slave), or freed (Deuteronomy 21.10-14). Killing a slave was forbidden (Exodus 21.20-21). If a slave loses an eye or tooth when beaten, he is to be freed (Exodus 21.26-27). Fellow Hebrews were to be treated like servants, not slaves, and were to be freed after 6 years (Deuteronomy 15.12-18). Interestingly, God forbade that runaway slaves be returned to their masters (Deuteronomy 23.15-16). Slaves were to follow the Sabbath, and therefore had a day of rest with the other Israelites (Deuteronomy 24.6).

Yes, slavery was permitted for Israel...I don't really like it, but I am not so repulsed as to say that a good God could not, in some circumstances, allow slavery. He did at least put a number of protections for the slaves. If God allowed it then, then I am willing to say that slavery must be okay *in those circumstances*.

I should also note, this is *only for Israel*. No person who has any understanding of scripture could use these verses or other passages to justify what the slavery we saw that led to the American Civil War (which, like I said, was a capital crime under God's law). People did do

that, of course, but that's because, as I hope you've seen, using a verse or two out of context is extremely dangerous. That doesn't make them right or the Bible wrong.

A similar thing must be said about wars. God gave general rules for the Israelites on how to conduct war, but there is nothing that could be pointed to that could be used as a justification for going on a holy war today. When the Israelites went on the wars in the Bible, God specifically commanded that particular action at that particular time. If in theory He commanded His followers to go to war I guess we'd have to, but nowhere is there anything that a man could use today to say "oh the Bible says this, let's go on a holy war." People compare the acts of Islamic terrorists to religious wars of Israel, but there's a huge difference. Right or wrong (I haven't read the whole Qur'an so I don't know what it actually says), the terrorists think or at least claim that the Qur'an tells them to do what they do. The Bible, on the other hand, says "on this day in the past, God commanded this war." And again, these rules were for ISRAEL, not Christians today. That was the Old covenant specifically for that particular country. Of course, there are New Testament passages that speak to slavery. It is not outlawed today either, but the slavery it spoke to, like in the Old Testament, was as a result of war or someone willingly selling themselves, not kidnapping. By the way, masters are reminded to be fair and kind because "you (the masters) also have a master in heaven" (Colossians 4.1). They were not, according to God's command, to treat their slaves as blacks were treated in the Americas up to the 19th century. I don't like slavery and I'm glad people in most of the worlds do not take slaves as a result of war, and that people who sell themselves as servants and maids in the developed world have more rights than those in biblical times (who were more like indentured servants than slaves). Ultimately though, this is one of those things that does need to be accepted; slavery, to an extent,

is allowed by God (although I hope it helps that it's not nearly as bad as you may have been told; our antebellum slave traders could have been put to death under the law of God).

Part 4: Defending The Factuality and Plausibility of The Bible and The Gospel Message

XX. WHAT I WILL AND WILL NOT TRY TO DO IN PART 4

In this part, I will be defending the rationality of belief in Jesus. I will be showing that the Bible can be the true written word of God. I am NOT, I repeat, NOT going to try to say that it is definitely true or even most likely true. I am only going to try to make anyone who says “that can’t be true” think twice. There is evidence that what the Bible says is reliable. There are answers to the many claims that the Bible is full of inaccuracies. There is not overwhelming evidence that it is indeed true. See what I mean?

I am not trying to convince Richard Dawkins. But if you hear what I say about Jesus, and think “this resonates with me,” then this is for you, so that you will not be dissuaded by smart-sounding arguments about why it cannot be true. If you are convinced that it cannot be true because you have been told as much, keep reading, because maybe I might change your mind; not because I can convince you it is true beyond a reasonable doubt, but because you might just see that it is not so clear, that you can genuinely see all the evidence and believe.

Consider this: the people who heard this message 1950 years ago had nobody telling them “the Bible is full of contradictions,” nor did they have scholars pointing out over and over again where archaeology and independent history affirms what the Bible says. They heard, and they believed or did not, and those who believed were saved. Nobody will be saved by a good argument for Christ. I’m just here to level the playing field. If you believe, it will be because you believe in your heart, and if you disbelieve, it is because you disbelieve in your heart, not because the evidence provided made one outcome appear more likely than the other.

Belief in Jesus is rational and reasonable. It is not, however, the only reasonable or rational answer belief. But that said, it is true, so believe and be saved! Ultimately, if you believe, as I do, it is because you heard the message and believed in your heart. I'm just going to try to take away your excuse, that "Christianity can't be true, that's obvious."

XXI. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE CLAIM ABOUT ITSELF REGARDING ERROR?

All scripture is “God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3;16). Can parts of the Bible have errors and still be God-breathed? That is a tough question. I do believe, as do most true Christians (though not all), that the Bible, in its original form (not the copies of copies of copies we have today), was perfectly accurate. But is it required that this be true for a book to be scripture? That is a complicated question.

Does the Bible even claim to be perfect? Does it claim to lack error? Does it claim to be the literal utterances of God, like the Qur’an is claimed to be?

Regarding the last question, the Bible never claims that every word written is literally word for word from God. That does not mean it is not perfect or from God. It’s just a question of mechanics. How does God communicate through it? Is it like someone dictating something for a secretary to write verbatim? The Bible doesn’t make that claim. Now, there are times where it will quote God, such as in the books of the prophets. But the fact that it would point out times where it is doing that actually shows that the Bible is not all quotations of God, otherwise why would it be pointed out?

Perhaps God simply puts a message in the inspired writers’ heads and lets them explain it in their own words, pending God’s approval. That seems evident, as the style of writing among the Bible writers differs quite a bit. But if God gives them the content, it’s still “God-breathed” even if He lets them word it in their own way.

Are errors then possible, given what the Bible claims about itself? It seems unlikely that the Old Testament scriptures can have error, as the Lord declared **“The scripture cannot be broken”** (John 10.36). At the time, there was no New Testament, so the “scriptures” in view

would be the Old Testament. Not every book of the New Testament is even claimed to be “God-breathed” or unable to be broken. Some are called scripture explicitly. In 2 Peter, Peter (who wrote it) refers to the writings of the Apostle Paul (who wrote 13 or possibly 14 of the books of the New Testament) as “scripture.” The same is not said about most of the other books. However, when the books were accepted into the canon (that is, when early Christians decided they were legitimate), they were accepted as scripture as well.

So then, did those who chose the books believe they were perfect and without error? If not, the issue of inerrancy is a non-issue; nobody ever claimed they were perfect. Not many early church fathers commented on it one way or another. One, named Irenaeus, called them “perfect” (Against heresies...). Another, named Tertullian, said even if there were errors between the Gospels, it was no big deal (cite). A later father, named Chrys?, believed there were errors among the Gospels, but that this made them more trustworthy. The reasoning went that they are all really similar, affirming what they claim to have seen, but are different enough to make it unlikely that they conspired to write them together. If they had so conspired, there wouldn’t have been any contradictions.

Lastly, the Bible, unlike the Qu’ran, is not an all-or-nothing deal. General sweeping statements about scripture are made, but they don’t say what specific writings are “scripture.” In fact there has been some debate over the centuries about what books were scripture. Ecclesiastes was never quoted in the New Testament, and was a controversial book among ancient Jews. If it turns out it wasn’t God-breathed or was even a forgery, it’s not a death blow. The “Bible” as we have it would be done away with, but the other 65 books would still be legitimate. The “Bible” isn’t one book, but a collection of 66.

In fact, some Christians (Catholics, Orthodox, a few other groups) believe that 7 books that others like me do not. Their “Bible” has 73 books. For the most part, if one book here or there ends up being fake or something like that, that simply means the early church made a mistake in determining what books belonged in the Bible. If it turns out that the Gospel of Luke, which records Jesus’ life, was not unbreakable scripture but really just a good historical account, that doesn’t change what the Bible says about Jesus. You still have Matthew and Mark and John. If it turns out that some of Paul’s writings are forgeries (as some scholars believe), it may affect some doctrines, but it doesn’t mean all of Paul’s writings are forgeries. In fact, in one of Paul’s writings, Paul warns that there were false letters claiming to be by him in circulation (2 Thessalonians 2.2).

Regarding quotations, they do differ among accounts of the same events. However, there were no quotations in ancient Greek or Hebrew. We do not know at any point when a person is quoting someone if it is meant to be literal or just a general explanation of what was said. Consider this: Your parents are taking you and your brother to dinner. You are ready, but your brother is moving sluggishly. Your mother says “tell your brother he has 3 minutes to get his fanny down here.” If you called to your brother, “hurry up, we’re leaving in three minutes,” would your mother rebuke you for not quoting her correctly? After all, she said “he has 3 minutes to get his fanny down here.” You didn’t quote her exactly. But of course she wouldn’t be mad. You passed the message along, changing it slightly to better fit the situation and audience. Now, if they writers who are quoting someone say “this is literally, word-for-word what was said,” and then their quotations differ, that would be a contradiction. But that never comes up. They don’t claim to be so literal. Not even the prophets, for the most part, claim to be that part when saying what God said. So if the wording changes slightly, it shouldn’t be an issue.

In short, I believe that the “Protestant” Bible we have today, all 66 books within it, are inspired by God, and ultimately are free of error (or at least were in their original copies). I will spend the next few sections defending the Bible. However, if it does happen that somewhere a mistake was made here or there, it does not necessarily disqualify the scriptures as being of God or disprove the Gospel message.

XXII. THE BIBLE IS FULL OF CONTRADICTIONS!

A. Looks Can be Deceiving

That statement, widely accepted as truth by most nonbelievers it seems, isn't true. For starters, probably 80% of these so called "contradictions" that I'm presented with require little study beyond a cursory reading to disprove. They are usually just a result of taking a particular verse or two out of context to mean something far different than what it means. Let me make this clear. The Bible is not a book of how ever many thousands of verses, each with its own separate meaning and command. Many books, for example, are letters written by Apostles. A single verse is often meaningless outside of the context of a letter. How many contradictory statements could you get out of this letter if you took a few sentences out of context and then compared it to another three sentence block?

Along those lines, there is an inside joke in Christian circles about how the Bible says "there is no God." This is true, the Bible does say that: in Psalm 14.1 and 53.1, it says, "**there is no God.**" Of course, if you read right before that statement, it says "the fool says in his heart." In other words, "**the fool has said in his heart, 'there is no God.'**" Big difference...

Other times these "contradictions" occur because what we see as "contradictions" really are not. In order for a contradiction to occur, one statement has to not only be different than another, it must make the other statement logically impossible if it's true. Think of this. Two men witness a man on a skateboard. One says "he had brown hair and was wearing red." Another says "he was wearing blue and had a hat on." Do they contradict each other? If such a statement were in the Bible, it surely would be considered a contradiction... But it's not a contradiction, because the man had brown hair, wore a hat, had a red shirt and blue pants on. Both statements

were true, just different. Him having a hat doesn't make it impossible that he had brown hair, nor does saying he was wearing red vs. blue because he could be wearing both. See what I mean?

B. It May Be The Word of God, But Cultural Context matters

Other issues arise when you don't understand the cultural context. There are many, many examples of this. Here's just one, but a good one: "When as Jesus crucified, the third hour or the ninth hour?"

Mark 15.25 – "**It was the third hour when they crucified Him**" (*NASB*).

John 19.14, 16 - "**Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover; it was about the sixth hour... So he [Pontius Pilate] then handed Him over to them to be crucified.**"

How could He not have been crucified at the sixth hour if He already was at the third? Well, neither Gospel writer explicitly said what system of time they were measuring by, but here's one possibility that is reasonable and makes no contradiction: Mark (as well as Luke and Matthew) used the Hebrew system (most likely written in or around Israel), while John (written at least a decade later, most likely in Ephesus which was far from Israel) used the Roman system of measuring time.

Under the Hebrew system, the day begins at sundown, and is split into two 12 hour periods (kind of like our time system is, there is 12:00-11:59 am and then pm). The Roman system began and ended at midnight, and from what I understand it was like military time (24 hours, so what we'd call 11pm they'd call the 23rd hour). Now, because, under the Hebrew system of time reckoning you'd begin counting anew half a day past sundown (so...sunrise), at around 6 am you'd start counting anew. The third hour past that would be around 9 am or so (in other words their 3pm is like our 9am).

Since Roman time begins at midnight, the 6th hour would be somewhere within 5-6 am. Since Jesus hadn't yet been crucified (He was at the trial at the 6th hour), then it's perfectly reasonable that He would actually be crucified 3 hours or so later. In other words, once you understand the context and background, these contradictions disappear. He was crucified around 9am, the "ninth hour" in Roman time, and the 2nd "third hour" in Hebrew time.

Cultural context (and in this case, biblical context as well) helps explain why the genealogies of Jesus in Matthew 1 and Luke 3 differ. The most likely explanation is that Matthew 1 records the biological genealogy of Jesus, but Luke records what could be called the legal genealogy. This has been suggested as far back as about 180 AD by a man named Africanis (Tim). Jewish law had a number of rules regarding remarriage and inheritance. Basically, if a woman's husband died before they had children, the next of kin (like his brother or cousin) was to marry her so they would have children. In terms of inheritance, the son would be considered legally the son of the woman's first husband, not the brother or cousin who is the child's biological father. If a man named Heli has a wife, dies before they have kids, and he has a brother named Jacob, Jacob is, under Jewish Law (Deuteronomy 25.5) obligated to marry her. If the two have kids, then depending on what kind of genealogy you were making, you could say Heli is the father (legally) or Jacob is (biologically). And that is why Matthew says Joseph, stepfather of Jesus, was begat by Jacob (Matthew 1.16) while Luke 3.23 calls Joseph the son of Heli. Jacob did beget Joseph, but legally, he was the son of Heli. And once you understand the cultural context, you can see why Christians didn't reject one or both of those books of the Bible 1950 years ago! Both accounts are right, because they are essentially saying two different things.

Some seeming contradictions are harder to answer. Fortunately, we Christians have had a very long time to answer these questions. Some good sites to answer such contradictions are

listed below (note: I do not necessarily endorse every doctrinal position of the people and/or groups running these sites. I just have found their explanations of biblical difficulties useful).

<http://www.apocalipsis.org/difficulties/index.html>
<http://www.thebereans.net/> (see section on apologetics).
<http://www.windmillministries.org/frames/CH17-2A.htm>

C. The “Do You Really Think They Are That Stupid” Defense

Sometimes, “contradictions” are pointed out, usually based in absurd literalism, that if they meant what the detractors say, would indicate the author didn’t know right from left.

One example is Matthew 2.15, where we are told that Mary and Joseph took Jesus to Egypt. He then says “**This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON’**” (*NASB*).

It’s been pointed to, and rightfully so, that Hosea 11.1 (“**Out of Egypt I have called by son**”) is speaking of Israel. Basically, the people of Israel had been sinning, and God was reminding them of how He had rescued them from Egypt. The whole verse goes “**When Israel was a youth I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son**” (*NASB*). Therefore, it has been pointed out that this is not a prophecy about the Messiah. They then claim that Matthew misunderstood what Hosea meant, and was wrongly trying to use it as proof of his claim of Jesus’ divinity.

Was Matthew thinking this was literally a future prophecy about what would occur when the Messiah came? First of all, it’s in the past tense. Even if Matthew was completely ignorant of scripture, a baboon would know that something in the past tense is likely not foretelling a future event. There are a few occasions where such prophecies occur this way, but it is not common. This would at least cause someone to look into it further, if they thought this was literally a prophecy about the future. If we think he was a liar, then a child could do a better job. Anyone

would simply need to go to the temple, look up the passage, and see what it says. Never mind that it doesn't sound like a prophecy. Isn't it more likely that Matthew is trying to make a point some sort of rhetorical point about God and scripture?

God literally speaks of Israel, but He also is referring to something else. That's just how scripture is. Jesus, when teaching on divorce, cites Genesis 2.24, and says it was spoken by the creator. Genesis 2.24 does not quote God. However, according to Jesus, the scriptures are the very word of God (Matthew 15.6). Paul calls the scriptures "God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3.16). Scripture is treated this way often in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul declared "**The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers...**[whom he quotes]" (*NASB*, Acts 28.25). Likewise, Hebrews 3.7 attributes Psalm 95.7-11 to the Holy Spirit.

Either the writers are as stupid as Matthew, or they are at least claiming some sort of insight and Godly inspiration. Are they right? Obviously I believe so. Either way, just remember this the next time you see something like this: if a small child wouldn't be as stupid as the author would have to be, it might not mean quite what you may have thought...

USEFUL SEMITANGENT

Like I said before, some "prophecies" are cited as being fulfilled just like "out of Egypt I have called my son," which don't on their own actually speak of the messiah, unless we believe the New Testament authors. It would therefore be intellectually dishonest to point to these "fulfillments" as evidence that Jesus is the messiah spoken of in the Old Testament. That's okay, because there are enough direct prophecies that Jesus fits.

END USEFUL SEMITANGENT AND SECTION

XXIII. "BUT JESUS DID NOT FULFILL ALL MESSIANIC PROPHECIES"

Now, the issue of messianic prophecy is central to Christianity. Jesus on a number of occasion claims to be the Messiah spoken of in the Old Testament. His title, Christ, is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew "messiah," meaning "anointed one. If He is who He says, then the Old Testament must agree.

However, there are prophecies that clearly were not met by Jesus. How can He be the Christ (or "Messiah")?

There is a simple answer, and with that, a defense of it. Jesus came. But as the Bible makes clear, He will come again. Now, I should note that there are more "comings" of Jesus than just what occurred 2,000 years ago and the end of the world. But there will be a physical return. In that return, all remaining prophecies will be fulfilled, with a few caveats (which will be dealt with later).

Now, one might think that that is way too convenient. The Messiah came, did some of the things He said, and everything else He will later. Why should we believe this?

The reason we should believe this is simple: the things the Messiah is said to do cannot occur in one lifetime. One clear reference to the Messiah is made in Isaiah 11. Since quoting the whole chapter would be quite long, I'll summarize. This chosen one to come will be like a great king, only greater. He will bring peace, not only men but even among animals. It is implied that there will be no death (Isaiah says this about the end of the world explicitly in chapter 25). He will regather the lost tribes of Israel. Beyond that, people from all the nations will come and find rest in Him. Now, that sounds very much like what the New Testament says Jesus will do when He returns.

But shouldn't the Messiah be able to do this within His lifetime? Well, later, the prophet Isaiah writes about the Messiah again. He is described as the "suffering servant." This is in Chapter 53. This one to come will sinless, yet slain. He will suffer. He will be rejected. He will be punished for the sins of all men, and in doing so will turn away the wrath of God. He also will see life after this has occurred, and will be raised up and richly rewarded. This fits Jesus to a T. (For the sake of full-disclosure, there is a little bit of controversy over verse 10 and to whether or not the Hebrew word for "seed" can be used figuratively to not refer to literal offspring. Interestingly, two of the very few times it is used this way are elsewhere in the book of Isaiah, in Chapter 57, verses 3 and 7. Because of this, Jesus still can be the suffering servant, and given the rest of the description, He is a great match).

With all that in mind, one must ask this question: how can He be rejected by His people, forced to suffer, and most importantly, slain and considered a criminal (despite being sinless), yet at the same time, be like the Messiah Isaiah speaks about earlier? Granted, this could be seen as an accuse to scream "contradiction!" and reject scripture entirely. But it need not be. After all, the one in Isaiah 53 will die, but He also will be raised to life again. Surely Isaiah, when writing down the revelation of the God, would have seen no problem. What he speaks of in Chapter 11 would have occurred after the events of 53. He rises again, and later does the stuff. That's the only way this can work, and it makes perfect sense, because Isaiah very importantly included death AND raising to life in Isaiah chapter 53.

In short, the Messiah the Old Testament speaks of, even within the same book, cannot possible do the things promised in one lifetime.

That is the most important thing, as it is necessary, as far as I know, that some of the prophecies of the Messiah be fulfilled later. Instead of being a cheap attempt at trying to defend

an illogical faith, the fact that the Messiah has contradictory roles makes it make good sense.

There are other possible ideas. One commentator gives two other ideas: there would be multiple Messiahs, and the idea that prophecies were conditional (and therefore only some would need to be fulfilled. Ultimately, he concurs that it is more likely the one Messiah has two comings (Miller). Of course, if the Messianic promises are conditional, then that fits here fine as well, though I don't think it's much of an issue.

B. Additional Factors To Consider

That is ultimately the main point – the Messiah of the Old Testament will probably fulfill His works in multiple appearances, and therefore it can be Jesus. The rest is just some things to consider if you study the issue further.

First of all, not all things passed off as Messianic prophecies really are. For example, I have heard it said that the Messiah is supposed to end death (which Jesus didn't do the first time around). This is from Isaiah 25.8, when it is said that “He will swallow up death in victory” (KJV). The thing is, it is not saying the Messiah will do this. God Himself will. Now, how He will do it, Christians believe, is through Jesus, the Messiah. But it is not a Messianic prophecy in the first place.

Also, while the Bible does clearly speak of one to come (whom was Jesus), it is important to keep things in perspective. Many prophecies speak of a person to come. Not all speak of the Messiah at all. The term “Messiah” in the actual Hebrew comes up more often than in passages about the “messiah.” It literally means “anointed” (“4899. mashiach”), so a mere king could be called “messiah” in Hebrew (as is the case in 1 Samuel 26.9, when it describes King Saul). The idea of “the Messiah” came about during the 400 years between the completion of the last book of the Old Testament and the coming of Jesus. Jews looked at the scripture, saw that God would

send somebody as described, somewhat vaguely, and determined one would come who was called the Messiah (that is, anointed one). They were correct of course; that is what the Bible teaches. However, there is no master list that says “these are all the things the Messiah will do, and how He will do them, and so forth...”. It is important to remember, therefore, that not everything ever mentioned about the future is necessarily Messianic.

XXIV. THE NEW TESTAMENT GOD IS NOTHING LIKE THE OLD!

A. Things Changed With Jesus

There are two things that must be said of this. The first point is this: During the time of the Old Testament, man had yet to be redeemed by Jesus (although this had been long since planned of course). This is a common claim I hear from fellow Christians and there is some truth to it. For example, in the temple in Israel, there was a room that God would fill with His glory. If anyone but the High Priest went in (and he could only go in one day a year), they would drop dead right there. Nobody was allowed to approach God (but the high priest on that one day a year). This room was separated by an enormous curtain (it was I believe 4 inches thick – imagine 4 inch thick fabric!). Well, the moment Jesus died, the curtain tore in two (Matthew 27.51). The symbol for the separation of man from God was torn in half, and no blocker blocked the two.

B. Perspective – Stronger Point

A much stronger point, I believe, is this: God didn't change, only the perspective of the writings did.

The Old Testament is made up largely of this: historical narrative and prophetic writing. Did God kill lots of people? Yes. Thus, it was recorded. And as for those prophetic writings, they were almost all warning at some point or another of God's judgment of Israel, what He would do if they did not repent. Of course it speaks of God being harsh; it's about His vengeance!

The New Testament, however, is different. Much of it is largely narratives solely about Jesus and His earthly life (and not stories of Israel and the world, where God's vengeance and judgment would occur). Much of the rest is made up of letters by Apostles forwarding messages

and commands from the Lord to churches, as well as addressing local problems and reminding the readers of how kind and merciful God has been, giving His only begotten son as an atoning sacrifice for their evil deeds.

Imagine this: a great warrior has a book written about him. The first half is largely about the men he killed, the second half is letters from women and children and villagers he protected telling of how he saved them. Would not a different picture be painted of the same man?

It's not as though God doesn't today kill lots of people or cause other calamities, both out of divine judgment as well as for whatever other reason. We write songs and poems and books about how great and wonderful God is. What if somebody wrote a book on natural disasters? "Today, God killed 7,000 woman and children with a hurricane. Yesterday, He sent wild fires to destroy many villages..." And since there were prophetic writings too, "The Lord warns if you do not repent, He will cause an earthquake so grand that you cities will turn to dust and the ground will open and swallow your houses." It's all a matter of perspective. The same God who is illustrated as a kind and loving Father is acting like the God you know from the Old Testament.

Furthermore, it's not entirely fair to categorize the way God is depicted in the Old and New Testaments so black and white. Though admittedly few, there are examples in the New Testament narratives of God smiting people. He did kill Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. Basically, all the Christians got together and sold possessions and put the money in a big communal pot to be given to the poor. Ananias sold something, kept some of the money (which he was totally entitled to do), but then lied and said the money he gave was everything. After Peter rebukes him publically for lying, he drops dead. Sapphira comes, lies too, and drops dead. God made an example of them.

Furthermore, there are warnings of Hell, of eternal punishment in the New Testament, many from Jesus Himself. Need I say more?

Also, believe it or not, the Old Testament is full of praise to God for His love and kindness. Ever read the Psalms? These are a collection of prayers written by King David and others, many expressing various prophecies as well. Like all scripture, they are God-breathed of course (2 Timothy 3.16). Anyway, in them, King David says of God, among other things “You are forgiving and good, o Lord, abounding in love to all who call to you” (Psalm 86.5). Psalm 136 ends every line with “**his love endures forever**” (some versions “mercy” instead of “love”). The term “unfailing love” is found no less than 26 times in the Psalms and several other instances in the Old Testament. One of my favorite Old Testament verses is Psalm 103.13, which reads “**as a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him.**” The Psalms are full of praise to God for His love and mercy. It is because they were written for that purpose, just like the New Testament books full of references to God as our very Father.

Such praise is not unique to the Psalms; I just single them out, not only because they probably have the most of this, but because they were written for that purpose. They don’t describe a different God; in fact, some psalms are calls for judgment on the wicked. But they speak of a “different” God because they are prayers to God from His people. There are other such examples from the Old Testament. Remember Jonah who I brought up in Section #### Why didn’t Jonah want to warn Nineveh? He didn’t want the town to be spared, because as he said to God later, “**I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity**” (*NASB*, Jonah 4.2a). I could go on and on. The Old Testament is full of references to the same Father we see in the New Testament.

This kind and gentle Father is also the eternal judge, so the New Testament isn't all champagne and kisses. My point is, both sets of writers, when writing about God's character, show Him not to be so different from...well, Himself.

Part 5: Other Tough Issues

XXV. THE TRINITY

A. Introduction to the Trinity

Now we're really getting deep here. Most of you have probably heard of the "Trinity." Some of you surely have thought about it a lot, be it from your background or what not. I am going to try to shed some light on this idea.

For those not particularly familiar, most Christians (some would say all Christians by definition) believe that God is triune. I believe this is definitely true given what the Bible says. Now, what does "triune" mean? Well, in a nutshell, it means that, while there is only one God, He manifests Himself in three ways, as three "persons" at once. In other words, $3 = 1$, sorta...

How does this come about? Well, when we say Jesus is the "Son" of God, it is meant in some ways differently from how we think of it. God didn't have sex with Jesus' mother Mary to make Jesus, and neither the Bible nor any Christian throughout time that I am aware of have ever thought that - despite what the Qu'ran seems to say that Christians think in Surah 6:100-101 (Ali).

It is a tricky thing. It would be easy if we were just saying God became a man and walked the earth. Stuff like that happened all the time in ancient religions. That is wrong, but it does make sense. On the opposite extreme, if Jesus were a fully separate being from God, that would be easy too. Some people who even believe that Jesus is the "Son of God," died for our sins, and rose from the dead believe this about Him. Jehovah's Witnesses (those people who knock on our doors) believe this. If He were simply a created being, distinct from God, this would be easy too. But neither is true.

When we speak of the “trinity,” there are three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Not often are these three spoken of at once in the Bible, but they are on occasion. In Matthew 28.19, Jesus (the Son) tells His followers “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Now, the Bible does teach ultimately that the doctrine of the trinity is right, and it has been believed by early Christians since. However, it was first set in stone in 325 A.D. in the Nicene Creed. For those not familiar with creeds, for our purposes, it’s just when a bunch of Christians got together and put out a concise statement of what they believe. Now, the Nicene Creed describes the “Trinity” as this:

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible..

And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made...

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spake by the prophets. (Grudem 1169)

Now, that doesn’t exactly clear things up, but give you some idea of what I am talking about. I should note that there is disagreement over whether or not creeds are infalliable and on par with the Bible. I, and many Christians, believe they are not. But I think this does some up pretty well what the Bible says.

Therefore, when we speak of “God,” we speak of the Father. Yet His son, Jesus, is of one substance with Him. Before Jesus was a man, He was as the creed says. He always existed. He was one with God, and was, well, I guess you could say, made of God. Jesus was a man, but not merely a man.

B. Jesus Is God

That Jesus is God, and not an angel or mere man or created being is clear from the Bible. In the Philippians 2.6, it is written that we as believers (specifically the people in Philippi, but all of us ultimately) should be as humble as Jesus. It says of Jesus that He was “**in very nature God**” (or “**the form of God**”), but died on the cross for us. In Colossians 2.9 it says “**For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.**” In John 12.42, the writer speaks of the prophet Isaiah, saying “**These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him**” (*NASB*). In context, John is speaking of Jesus (who did some miracles yet people would not believe). The thing is, Isaiah, in the part of Isaiah John quotes immediately before, is from when Isaiah sees God (that is, the Old Testament God). Now, I assert that Isaiah did not see God’s face, which is a separate issue, but the point is, Isaiah got some vision of God, the Old Testament God, and here John is saying that Isaiah, in that scene, saw Jesus.

One of the more major such passages is John 1.1, which says “**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God**” (*NASB*). It’s clear as you read on that the Word spoken of is Jesus (He is also called the “Word” in 1 John and Revelation, both written by the John who wrote John). If Jesus is the Word, and the Word is God, then Jesus is God. In verse 14, it is then written that “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.” That’s Jesus. Of course, this verse not only says that Jesus was God, but in the same breath, that He was with God! It is as the creed above says – Jesus is God, yet distinct from God (God the

Father, that is – in the Bible, whenever someone speaks of “God” it is almost always, if not always, speaking of the Father).

Later in John, Jesus tells a group of unbelievers that “**before Abraham Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.**” (*NASB*). Now, two important things are there. First of all, this statement would indicate that Jesus was around before Abraham, 2000 years or so earlier. But Jesus was, as the people He spoke to prior pointed out, not even 50 yet (Verse 57). Therefore, He existed prior to Him being the man Jesus.

Of equal if not greater importance, is the fact that Jesus didn’t say “I was” or “I existed,” but rather “I am.” In the Greek, it literally is “I am,” as in, present tense. Why this odd, seemingly ungrammatical statement?

This goes back to the Old Testament. In the book of Exodus, the prophet Moses sees a burning bush, from which He heard the voice of God. I should note that God often represents Himself with things like fire, angels, visions, and other things. This is because, as He declares to Moses later when He lets Moses see a glimpse of His light from behind, “**you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live**” (Exodus 33.20). That’s why I don’t think Isaiah saw God’s face, but rather only a glorious sight or figure that He could tell must be God. Anyway, when Moses saw the burning bush, God declared to Him that He was God and Moses was to tell the other Israelites. Moses asks who he is supposed to say sent him, and God responds “**This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you’**” (Exodus 3.14). You might be seeing the connection here...

Now Jesus, in John 8.58, Jesus’ statement makes little sense in a normal context, but it makes perfect sense as an allusion to Exodus 3.14. Think about it. He is saying “back in the past, I am.” That doesn’t make sense. A toddler knows that that statement makes no sense. I think it is

safe to say that Jesus is saying that to make a point. What would that point be? Well, He's speaking to a crowd of Jews who would be well aware of Moses, and is telling them He existed thousands of years earlier, and here He highlights the phrase "I am." Perhaps most telling is their reaction to Him. Again, these were Jews, intimately familiar with the Old Testament. When Jesus made this statement, their first inclination was to stone Him. Under the Old Testament Law, blasphemers were to be stoned. What could be more blasphemous than a man saying He is God (unless it happens to actually be the case)? They caught on what He was saying. He was alluding to Exodus 3.14 and saying that the reason He knew Abraham despite being a man of what is believed to be only about 30-35 years of age is because He was, in His very nature, God.

C. Jesus is God, But He Is Also Seen As Distinct From God

It isn't as simple as "Jesus is God," because Jesus spoke of God and even prayed to God while on earth. The best example is John 17 (the whole chapter). In that chapter He even calls God the Father "**the only true God**" (verse 3). Of course, He also says that He and the Father are one in verse 22. In context, He clearly means one in the sense of unity in will and thought, but that still ties them together to an extent. He also says "**The Father and I are one**" in John 10.30.

That it isn't just simply God turning into a man and jumping out of the sky is clear in other ways. Most can be summed up in the fact that Jesus was a man, and He died. God is immortal (1 Timothy 6.16). Yet Jesus died. And obviously God had to be alive and around to raise Jesus from the dead. More specific differences (God cannot be tempted, doesn't grow weary, etc.) are secondary to this.

Now, does this mean that maybe the Bible is just contradictory? No, because it gets even more bizarre. Remember John 1.1? Jesus was with God, but also was God. There is some debate

over the Greek here, but any mainstream translation translates it to say this. Unless John contradicts itself within the same sentence, it seems to be saying this bizarre thing on purpose.

Also, I pointed to Philippians 2.6. But the whole passage, Verses 5-11, has the same issue as John 1.1. It reads:

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (NASB)

What can you really say about that? He was God, so then didn't decide to be equal with God, so He made Himself less and was raised back up by God? That just doesn't make sense. But it's not a composition Christians make up to explain contradictions in the Bible; this is all one single, cohesive saying in the Bible!

So that's what the Bible teaches about Jesus. He is God, but He is distinct from God. As the Christian adage goes, He is "fully God and fully man."

D. What the Old Testament Says

This also isn't unique to the New Testament. In the Old Testament, for example, we have a figure known as "the Angel of the LORD." Now, on some occasions, this just indicates an angel sent by the LORD. But on a few occasions, the Angel of the LORD is a representation of

the God. In Genesis 32.22-31, Jacob (who if you aren't aware, is a very important figure), wrestles with a mysterious man. When all is finished, the man changes Jacob's name to Israel, which means "wrestles with God." We also read that "So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared" (Genesis 32.30). See the implication there? The man Jacob wrestled was...

An even more clear example occupies Judges 13. In a nutshell, an unnamed woman and her, husband of a man named Manoah, sees the angel of the LORD. How does He appear to her? She tells her husband that "A man of God came to me" (Verse 6). She saw a man. Throughout the chapter they converse with the man, unaware of who He is. When they ask Him His name, He even says "Why do you ask my name? It is beyond understanding" (Verse 18). Then they make a burnt offering to God (that's pretty much like it sounds, burning up the carcass of an animal that was slaughtered as a sacrifice to God). The man literally jumps into the fire, and He in a big fiery plume ascends to the heavens. That is how they figured out that that was the Angel of the LORD. They understood the significance of it: "'We are doomed to die!' He [Manoah] said to his wife. 'We have seen God!'" (Verse 22). They didn't die of course; as is typical in a book as sexist and anti-woman as the Bible, it was His wife who was the voice of reason and understanding: "But his wife answered, 'If the LORD had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and grain offering from our hands, nor shown us all these things or now told us this'" (Verse 23). Though they did not die, Manoah did understand the significance. By seeing this created being, they had seen God, for God had manifested Himself this way. They didn't die because they didn't actually see the actual being of God (which is apparent to us because we have the whole Bible whereas they only had a few of the books). God showed Himself as a man here. But no Jew would say that God would leave the rest of the universe and

His heavenly throne abandoned in the process. I would agree. That God manifested Himself as a man does not mean He ceased to be also the full being of God.

This idea that God would be in one place yet still fill all the heavens is nothing new. When the temple was built, there was an area called the Holy of Holies (also called the Most Holy place) where no man could enter, except the high priest once a year (on Yom Kippur). God filled that room, yet as King Solomon (who built it) prayed to God, “**But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!**” (1 Kings 8.27). He didn’t doubt that God was there - I can assure you he knew better than to walk into that room! God also declares that “**Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?**” (Isaiah 66.1b-2a).

Many Jews today, like Muslims, find the idea of God being a man outrageous, but God was a man in Judges 13 and Genesis 32! I would imagine given how God is omnipresent according to the Old Testament (and New) that they would say this is a representation, and He is still in Heaven. Well, I say the same thing! Just as God showed Himself as a created thing in the Old Testament without while still reigning in Heaven above all created things, I would say a similar principle applies here. It’s not a perfect parallel, I grant you. Jesus is fully man and will remain that way for ever and ever, whereas the Angel of the LORD was transitory, God manifesting Himself temporarily in one place or another in the form of a created being. However, what we do see here is that, while no Jew would ever say they are not monotheistic (and rightfully so), the Old Testament already does not convey this strict and complete inability for God to merge with creation (without losing His uniqueness from it) that is sometimes called polytheistic by detractors of Christianity. The fact that God is triune explains this in a glorious

way that is just coherent enough to be logically possible but that still bends the fabric of reality as we know it (and that sure doesn't sound like the simple, primitive superstition of savages that, according to our professors and crude adult cartoons alike, is all that Christianity is). It is in this way that God can both exist as the man Jesus of Nazareth without abandoning His universal rule and control over the entire universe.

E. Now, To Try To Make This Make Sense – The Holy Spirit

How can one God be three persons? How can there be three persons of the so-called “Godhead” yet there be only one true God?

The thing about it is, the longer I've known God, the more sense this makes. I don't really have any problems with it anymore. It's what the Bible lays out clearly on a few occasions and indicates in many others, and that's enough for me. But I have thought about it quite a bit, as have Christian thinkers for nearly 2000 years.

First, let's look at the Holy Spirit. So far we've only looked at the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit, the “third person” of the “Trinity,” is treated as a person at times. For example, on several occasions when an apostle or New Testament author quotes the Old Testament, it will be said that the Holy Spirit said it (see Acts 28.25, Hebrews 3.7, 10.15). The Holy Spirit is a “counselor” or “helper” John 14.16. It is also referred to as a force or power or part of God. In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit falls upon the 12 Apostles. Jesus, soon before this, tells them about what will happen, saying “I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high,” (Luke 24.49).

In some ways, explaining the Holy Spirit and God is easier is simpler than the Son and God. Here is what I would say: The Holy Spirit is God wherever God Himself (the Father) is not literally present. Put another way, God is a defined being who is in heaven, and yet He is

everywhere. It is written “where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there” (Psalm 139.7-8). Wherever the Spirit of God is (the Holy Spirit), God is present. God is far, far away, yet He has perfect control over everything, because His spirit is everywhere, so He is everywhere. He can talk to anyone and everyone all at once, control the electronic energy in the computer I type this one with the same power and precision He can control the snap of His metaphorical fingers.

Now how can this make sense? All too often it’s just said to be a “mystery.” However, if I can at least make it seem logically possible, I have done my job. So I will try to explain, at the very least, my understanding of how this can be.

And consider this: if everything about God makes perfect sense, shouldn’t that raise doubts in our minds? If humans made up a god, wouldn’t we expect that god to be within the understanding of its creator? The fact that so much of this is bizarre and borders on impossible (though it isn’t impossible, which would indicate it is false) and relies on speculation and is shrouded in mystery, in some ways, fits with a true God as high as the God of the Bible.

With this in mind, I will try to explain the Holy Spirit.

Before I was a believer, before I ever had any reason to try to make the “Trinity” make sense, I came up with an idea. Frankly, it was to aid in me doing sinful things... But nonetheless, I, not knowing of the complexities of God, was able envision this. I imagined how cool it would be I could essentially separate from myself. I didn’t just want to be a spirit who left a body. No, I wanted to leave my body, yet I wanted my body I left behind to have the full powers of feeling, judgment, movement, emotion, reason, and everything else as if I had never left it. Yet my other “self” would also have all those abilities too. It would be invisible. It would be physical, able to

touch things, when I so chose. Likewise, it would be non-physical so I could go through walls and such, if I so chose. Basically, there would be two of me, but each would know everything the other knew, both would never disagree with the other. My second self could do anything like a normal person with full control over itself. However, the main self could fully control and even call back the other self as well, so it in practicality my main self had full control over my second self, even though my second self was distinct. Just try to imagine (believe me, it would come very handy for a person who wanted to commit all kinds of evil deeds).

As odd as this is, I as an ungodly man could imagine this. I think this is more or less how God the Father and His Holy Spirit are. The Holy Spirit is God, it can do anything God can, etc. Yet God, the Father, who is on His throne in Heaven (probably a metaphor), can control the Holy Spirit, His self outside of Himself. The fundamental difference would be this. I would only have one other “self,” yet the Holy Spirit would be anywhere. It would be omnipresent, and thus a God who can be seen (although if any human did in this life, he would immediately die – Exodus 33.20) can also be infinite and omnipotent. Just as I could imagine on my own having more than one “self,” why couldn’t God actually do it (albeit on an infinite scale)?

Exactly how this would go on an infinite scale goes beyond what I can really say. If God had an infinite number of “other selves”, that would work philosophically, but it would also seem to contradict the idea of the Holy Spirit’s personhood. Of course, since it is ultimately God, it could be that the description of the creeds was simply a more shallow explanation of the truth. However, I’m not willing to say that. Similar things could be imagined, but they too run into issues. However, I think this idea of mine at the very least explains how multiple “persons” can truly be one person. Honestly, I think being unable to further application on an infinite scale is far less problematic. Before, $3=1$ may have seemed to have violated the most basic laws of logic.

Now we can fit what the Bible teaches into what is logical, if we leave room for lack of understanding of the infinite. And who can adequately explain infinity? That's the one thing that no worldview can explain. Why would we expect any different? We are finite beings. Any belief in an infinite deity has problems, but of course it does; it is something infinite to the finite. Because infinity does exist undeniably, we can accept infinity and see parts of it (I of course would further say we can because we were created by an infinite being). But there are parts that just won't make sense, in any worldview. Now, at least, one God can be multiple persons without tearing basic truth at the seams.

F. Now, To Try To Make This Make Sense – The Son

In dealing with Jesus and God the Father, I would simply add this idea to the equation. If I could imagine a second self fully like myself, then surely I could have another second self who could also become less than my full self. Jesus was in His very nature God, gave up His glory and died, then was raised back to the highest place as before by God (Philippians 2.5-11). So, just imagine your other self becomes like a lesser being. Maybe it becomes a bird or a worm or something, albeit holding onto some aspects of your main self. Then, at the time the main self appoints, the main self makes the other self as great as the main self. Basically, if you could swallow my idea for the Holy Spirit, then all you need to say is that the third self can be made less great for a short time, then brought back to normal. That's exactly what happened with Jesus.

H. Conclusion

As for how one God can be three is bizarre, and requires some very out of the box thinking. However, these words written thousands of years ago were accepted by those who

received them, and I know that if you can accept the gift of God that is eternal life through Jesus Christ, you will accept it too.

XXVI. “CAN GOD CREATE A ROCK SO HEAVY THAT GOD COULDN’T LIFT IT?”

No. But that doesn’t mean God doesn’t exist. This statement disproves the idea of a form of omnipotence so extreme that it must also include the ability to fail. Such an idea is inherently impossible as it contradicts itself. But that’s not what the Bible says about God. In fact, I’ll throw the users of this analogy a bone big enough to choke one: The Bible says there are things God cannot do. God cannot lie (Titus 1.2). He cannot be tempted to do evil (James 1.13). He is immortal (and alone is immortal – 1 Timothy 6.16), so He cannot die (although theoretically one could say He could give it up, but we know He won’t because He promises things that require His existence for eternity, and He cannot lie). As Richard Deem points out, “by defining omnipotence as requiring one to have the ability to fail, atheists have defined omnipotence as being impossible.” And if that form of “omnipotence” were required to be true of God for Him to exist, then indeed, He wouldn’t exist. But nobody, not me or the Bible or anyone else ever said it was. The one true God, who I am telling you about, is the God who we already admit cannot do certain things (lie, sin, etc.), so this is irrelevant.

XXVII. THE PROBLEM OF PAIN AND SUFFERING I – THE LOGICAL ISSUE

A. How Can It Be Logically Possible That A Good and All-Powerful God allows Evil and Suffering In The World He Created?

God is good. God alone is good. Yet if He is good, and omnipotent, and created the world, how can it be that there is evil and pain and suffering? This may be the most weighty and serious problems that a Christian has to deal with. To be honest, I don't think it has ever been completely and undeniably resolved, and I don't know if it will ever be. However, can it at least be a logical possibility that God could create everything, and have ultimate control over it, yet have there be suffering while He is good? If so, then we can at least say that the problem of evil has not disproved the truth of Jesus Christ.

One of the key arguments, though not one agreed upon universally, is that of free will. The idea is that God gives man has the right to choose is whether or not they would choose God, given the revelation He gives to them, and the call He has issued to all human beings. This is not universally agreed upon, that He calls all men, but many do believe this. They would cite passages like John 12.31-32, which reads “**And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.’ But He [Jesus] was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die**” (*NASB*). Since not all men do go to God, the idea is that it is a call that though they are drawn, they can choose to accept or resist. If this is true, then men can choose to accept God, or not.

However, even if this is true, how is it relevant, and why would God give such a choice? Well, if He did not give a choice, man's love for God would be meaningless, so the argument goes. They would choose Him because He forced them to, and their love and worship is no better than that of robots. However, if God chooses to let men choose, then they can also choose

against Him. And if men choose against Him, they choose sin and evil. This would directly explain suffering at the hands of men, as they choose evil over God.

God did not have to choose to allow the possibility of evil, but if He wants creatures to have free will, then indeed, evil must be a possibility.

How does this explain natural disasters, and things beyond just humans doing evil. Well, what made the world so awful in the first place was sin. Because of sin, this is a world in which “cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it, all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you” (*NASB*, Genesis 3.17b-18a). This will not always be the case, for God will undo it all and make the world perfect again. However, if sin is why the world became this way (or, one could say, why God made the current, temporary world like this), then that explains virtually every other form of suffering. Death, earthquakes, fires, the very nature of things that cause us pain came from this. And this happened because the first humans had free will, and they chose sin.

Of course, one will ask why God allowed the world to turn when man sinned, and why we all are part of that same world as the first human. It makes sense that He would curse the world of the first humans who willingly chose to sin (although probably as a disciplinary measure). As to why it stayed that way for their offspring, being us, that deals, in some ways, with the issue of original sin (admittedly a somewhat fluid term), which comes up in Section 7. Ultimately, because we know that all men are sinners (not only because they are humans like Adam and Eve but because all men sin as they did), can anyone blame God for not turning the world perfect again (though He will; this is only temporary)? There are many reasons as to why God would have kept the world cursed for the time being, and one could speculate until the cows come home. Maybe it is so that those who will listen to the message of Jesus will realize that sin

causes pain and misery. Maybe it will make them long more for God; if the world were wonderful, why would they think that they need to turn to God (who by nature they are opposed to), and away from sin? I'm sure we could make up all kinds of reasons. Maybe none are true and it's something else entirely. That's fine too.

Even if you deny that men have any real free will today (as indeed, no man can choose to be perfectly sinless in this life, for example), this idea still provides a logical explanation for how a good God could allow suffering. If the first humans did have free will, the point is still the same. They had the choice, and by God allowing them that choice, He had to allow for the possibility that all this would happen as a result of their decision. Because God is outside of time and knows all things, He knew exactly how to use their sin, if they were to do it, for the result He wanted. As I said, God planned the cross before He made men. One may ask the question about what the point of free will is if God knows the future anyway. That is a good question indeed, and that is a reason not all hold to this view. Ponder that as you will. Fortunately, I have more to say.

B. God Understands Things That We Do Not

Regardless of where one ends up with the argument from free will, God declares that “**as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts**” (Isaiah 55.9). Now, how much higher can the sky be from the ground? They are the epitome of height and lowness (especially to the people who God addressed this analogy to). In fact, since we know things that the people God was speaking to did not (like the massive expanse of the universe), some of the force of this statement is lost on us. After all, we also think in terms of time travel and 5th and 6th and 7th dimensions and all these things that go beyond just “Oh, He created the earth and heavens, and His thoughts are as high as the heavens while men

are as low as the earth.” But remember, God, when He said this, wasn’t talking to Steven Hawking. Had He phrased like that, nobody would have gotten it. That’s because, just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so His ways are higher than theirs (and ours). The point is, the God of the Bible, whom you are now pondering over, is bigger in everyway imaginable. If this God exists, He created everything – the earth, the sky, every human being, every plant, every mountain and atom and subatomic particle and bacterium, every star, every galaxy, every thing that can possibly be conceived of as part of the natural universe. Not only that, but He can manage and have control over all of it, everywhere, at once. It makes your head spin. Their just can’t be such a being envisioned by the human mind. How can He be in one place, personally communicating with men or heavenly beings (which He also created), yet also be everywhere else? I explain some of that in Section ? on the Trinity, but the point is, if this God exists, He cannot be understood by our minds.

There is a small-scale biblical example of this very point, from the book of Job. I am quoting from Section ?, on Hell, so if you read that, just skip past the writing in bold.

One story that speaks to me is the book of Job. Brethren, you obviously know the story. For any who do not, Job (rhymes with globe, not Bob) was a very righteous and Godly man. Thus, he was blessed, by God, with all kinds of riches and good fortune. This was a long long time ago. Job is considered by many scholars to be the oldest book of the Bible, even pre-dating Moses and the Exodus (ya know, the stuff from the movie The Ten Commandments).

Now, Satan, the Devil, basically challenged God, telling him that Job is only righteous because of his good fortune. God, knowing Job’s heart but having to prove to the angels (lest more follow Satan and become “demons”), and maybe for other reasons, sets out to prove the Devil wrong. So, He allows Satan to inflict all kinds of terrible trauma upon Job, leaving him with nothing, not even his health (he is covered boils and sores and terrible plagues). Now, most of the book is a conversation between Job and his self-righteous friends who falsely believe his terrible fortune is punishment for some sin. They wrongly believed that it must have been all Job’s fault (they are all unaware of what went on in Heaven). Job is steadfast in his faith and refuses to curse God. However, seeing the obvious injustice and hopelessness, he does cry out to God, asking for, among other things, an explanation and a quick death to end his suffering. Well, God does appear. His face is surely not shown; it is written that God said “you cannot see My face, for no man can see

Me and live! (*NASB*, Exodus 33.20). However, Job knew what the light and booming voice and everything was representing. God defends Job in front of his friends, but does rebuke Job for one thing – his presumptions. Rather than actually explaining what happened, He asks Job many questions along the lines of “did you create the universe?” “Have you always been?” “Have you...?” “Do you...?” “Can you...?” The idea being, God is God, and Job, not being the creator and omniscient manager of the universe, could not expect himself to be able to understand everything that goes on in the universe. Clearly, way more than just a man’s life was at stake in this whole experiment (that’s not to say God didn’t know what the results would be, His omniscience is without question: http://www.whatthebibleteaches.com/wbt_070.htm).

For those curious, God restored to Job almost everything he lost; in fact, his possessions doubled. The only thing God did not restore on earth was his dead children (though he was given 10 new sons and daughters). For that, Job had to wait until the next world.

Why do I tell you this? How is a synopsis of a book of the Bible relevant? Well, Job, one of the most righteous and Godly men ever, couldn’t even understand what God was doing in his own life. He was suffering for no apparent reason, but behind it all, there was all kinds of stuff that Job probably never would have imagined in a million years. How then, can anyone of us expect to have perfect understanding of God’s whole eternal plan for all creation? I mean think about it: if the God of the Bible exists, He not only created the whole universe, but manages every aspect of it every moment of every day, and always will for ever and ever. The Bible tells us what we need to know – believe in Jesus, spread the Gospel, behave in a Godly manner (and what Godly behavior is), but no man can perfectly understand every detail that it gives about everything eternal. Even if one could, it is in many places intentionally ambiguous - for example, despite the fact that many like to say “the end is near; it’s coming tomorrow at 3:38 pm,” the Bible tells us over and over that we will NOT know when the end of the world will come and the dead will rise.

How do we know that we aren’t just a world full of Jobs?

Ultimately, whatever our view on free will is, we surely have to accept that this is true, that if a God like this exists, He would understand what we don’t, and He might understand how

He could allow for suffering despite Him being good. Even those who accept free-will must accept that God was right to believe that it was better than man have free will than that the world be free of sin and evil and suffering (though, in the future it will become that way again, and will stay that way for ever and ever).

Does this then mean that we have no idea of what is good or bad? Can we use this as an excuse to do whatever we want, since we can't trust ourselves about what we think is good or evil? No. We know as much as is revealed. We know it is evil to murder because He says so, both in scripture, and to an extent, in our consciences. The Bible speaks on several occasions about people who burned their infants alive as an homage to a god called Molech (Jeremiah 32.35), and condemns it. We rightly would agree in our hearts that such a thing is unspeakably horrid. The heart is full of evil and deceit (Jeremiah 17.9), but it isn't totally useless, after all. We know that He is good, so when we believers obey various commandments of His, we know that that is good, and to do otherwise is evil. Still, this is only because of what is revealed to us. If God understands it perfectly, and some is revealed to us, clearly that much, we know is good and evil. There is so much we do not know, but if you believe that the Bible is God's word (as I do), then we do definitively know as much as it tells us. We know enough about what is good and bad as we need to, and we have a duty before God to follow that much. We know that we are to help those in need, and so we help those who have been harmed by an earthquake. It is not our place to know if the earthquake was evil or not. All we know is that it is good that we help them. It is okay, I believe, to leave the bigger questions for God.

C. Why Should We Accept That God Is Good And There Are Things We Don't Understand?

Consider this: "the answer to the question of the presence of evil in a world created by God, He did not exempt Himself from that evil" (Long). After all, God is triune, which means

that Jesus is, in His very nature, God. As He says, “**I and the Father are one**” (*NASB*, John 10.30). Yet Jesus was beaten and tortured and murdered, despite being the only truly innocent person to ever live. Through Jesus, God, in a sense, subjected Himself to evil of the world and the suffering from it. I do want to make it clear that there is a distinction between the Father and Son (and Holy Spirit). That is part of the mystery (and utter coolness, in my opinion) about God being triune. Though He tasted suffering and death through Jesus, it is not as though while Jesus was dead God ceased to be God or reign in heaven, controlling every facet of the universe. Still, it is one thing to suggest that by us suffering, this all-powerful God must not be good. But what then of the fact that He choose to become part of it all? The fact is, the death and resurrection of Jesus was planned out before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1.4; 1 Peter 1.20; Revelation 13.8). This does not show that God is not all-powerful. Yet even though this same hypothetical God I speak of is all powerful, HE suffered too! This God who inexplicably is good yet created a world that would become what it is today and allowed us to suffer also choose to suffer through His son. It doesn't make sense, that is for sure, but it sure makes it hard to say that He is heartless and hates us. Obviously, there is something to it that we do not understand. With that in mind, this defense that “it is a mystery” is not, in this case, a cop-out.

D. But What Good Can Come From Suffering?

I can't answer in the fullest sense. However, we know that, in the world as it is, the world we can see, suffering can be for people's good. Now of course, we say this in a fallen world full of sin, where suffering is inevitable, so it's just a matter of how suffering is applied to make things as close to perfect as possible. As to why it would result in more good then if God had just created the world incorruptible in the first place I have few answers to. But then again, I can't answer as to why God would choose that the cross occur, something He planned before there

were humans or sin. But that what seems evil can result in good within this world at least gives us the principle that it is not always as it seems. Suffering can result in joy, and God can, rather than preventing it (though He can prevent it), use the evil of other people to make good happen. The cross is an example. God didn't make people elect to murder Jesus. But He knew that they would, and rather than preventing it, He ensured that he would be successful. Was that immoral on God's part? No, because Jesus is in His nature God. If God can kill any human being (which He does), then certainly He can kill His own son, who is one with Him. It was sin for people to do it because they are not God. That's why we fill with fury at murder, yet, though deeply grieved, generally natural accept death (God killing someone) as a natural part of life. But though they planned evil, it made good result, so God allowed it, because God, in allowing it, was intending for, and brought about, what is good. In doing it, many people are saved, t God's glory. And remember, since Jesus was in His nature God, He wasn't a patsy. When Paul speaks of Jesus, He not only speaks of Him as having been given for his sake and ours, but as having given Himself (Galatians 2.20).

We know in this world that suffering can bring people to God, saving them from their sins. For the Israelites, He often told them that their suffering were meant to bring them back to Him. As awful as that sounds, just think about how much sense it makes. When we were children, our parents would discipline us. Now, sometimes parents punish their children out of anger. That is childish and wrong. But most of our parents would discipline us for our own benefit most of the time. We're not small children anymore, so I think we all can understand this now. When a parent says, while spanking a child, "this hurts me more than it hurts you," we now are old enough to realize they aren't insane. Parents (when parenting well) will discipline a child for the child's benefit.

What then is the difference? In both cases, someone hurts someone else to ultimately benefit the person they hurt, and the recipient doesn't always understand it at the time (like a small child).

God is shown as a disciplinarian in the Bible (albeit for His followers, not all men). It is written in Proverbs 3.11:

My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline
And do not resent his rebuke,
Because the LORD disciplines those he loves,
As a father the son he delights in.

Hebrews 12.7 says "Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?" If God hurts believers for their own sake, and would hurt Israelites to bring them back to Him, who is to say this might not be the case here?

Sometimes, only in the midst of tragedy will one understand how desperate they are for God. Maybe it is, in some bizarre abstract way for your benefit. Let me tell you a story from the Bible. This story is found in the book of John, chapter 9, verses 1-12. A man was born blind. One day, Jesus went to him. His disciples asked why he was blind, if it was a result of sin, and this is what resulted: "'neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life'" (NASB, Verse 3). Jesus then healed the man of his blindness, allowing him to see for the first time ever. In verse 38, the man becomes reacquainted with Jesus, believes in Him, and worships Him. This man was shown the glory of God through Jesus' miracles, and because of this He believed and was saved eternally.

Does the man have any right to be bitter towards God for making him go through the first 30+ years of life (His age isn't given) blind and helpless? Was he bitter? Not at all: he was in

awe and complete joy over what had happened. Because of his physical blindness, the man was restored to eternal life, and he got to be healed by the Lord himself while on earth. Who's to say during that man's life, he didn't think God had abandoned him by making him suffer so? But lo, it was really a blessing.

As a general picture of how it is, consider animals who are in danger and are rescued by humans. A fairly recent anecdote in the midst of the storms of January 2010 really fits. A German shepherd got caught in the rushing waters of the LA river during a storm and could not escape. Fire fighters came to rescue the dog. When one of the firefighters got to the dog and tried to grab it, the dog bit his hand! Thankfully, the dog was ultimately rescued. When discussing it, the firefighter expressed no anger towards the animal. As he put it "he was wet and scared, and in order to rescue him I had to basically tackle him, and he's a dog" (paraphrased). It made me think though. From the dog's perspective, the firefighter who was trying to rescue him was seen as an enemy. He's a dog; he doesn't know the man is a firefighter. He just knows that as he's struggling to survive, a giant beast has thrown himself on top of him! What if that is like how it is for God and us? Just as an animal does not realize that this human, who is wiser and good-hearted, is attempting to rescue him, but only knows that he is being hurt, we do not understand that God is not trying to drown us, but rescue us. It is written that God said "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts" (NASB, Isaiah 55.9).

Maybe it is just simply is part of a bigger part of God's eternal plan. Even if we have no idea why the suffering occurs, if people turn to God, then what they will receive will be good, and it will be eternal. Anything that is good and eternal will outweigh anything finite. Even the joy and comfort of knowing God in this life, which is only a small taste of things to come, will

outweigh any seemingly unfair suffering, as any true believer, even those in the lowest and saddest times of life, will affirm.

Ultimately, I cannot answer fully why, in the ultimate cosmic sense, God did not make the world so that there could be no sin or evil or suffering. However, for the many reasons I have laid about above, we can know, just by what we know about life and the things on earth, that we can trust God that He was good through it all, as even He took part in the suffering of the world He created.

XXVIII. TO YOU WHO DISBELIEVE BECAUSE OF YOUR OWN SUFFERING

This world is full of terrible suffering. Many who see the suffering of themselves, or of others, cannot bring themselves to believe – after all, how can a good God allow such a thing? In Section XXVIII, I brought up one of the most common responses.

However, philosophy only gets us so far in these cases. After all, even if free will makes it logically possible for God to be good, one might argue that free will shouldn't take precedence over what is good. After all, a good parent doesn't allow His child to do just anything, but will interfere when the child is in danger. Granted, not all people are God's children (only those who believe – which could be anyone mind you), but the point is still there.

For anyone who reads this who have suffered greatly or are currently suffering terribly, you may think God has never reached out to help you, but He has and is. At the very least, He is reaching out to help you right now, through me.

When it comes down to it, I can say with confidence that God has not been unfair to you. However, I can't blame you for thinking He hasn't. However, you're not going be healed from what hurts you if you don't let God heal you. If you really believe the things I say, if something in your heart is saying God is real and this isn't a bunch of crap, and it's resentment that keeps you saying 'God can't be real,' then please surrender. God will heal you. If you have just that much faith, God will amplify it 1000 times over. God will carry you through your heartache. He will cure you of your resentment.

You can't see how God has in anyway been there for you, how He can be good to allow this suffering. Fine. I won't try to argue against that (though you will find later God has not been in the wrong). However, the past is the past; if you want to be healed, what matters is the present,

and the present is God. Whatever happened in the past, you're definitely not going to get any better if you don't turn to God now. He's here now, so let Him in. Jesus is knocking at the door hoping you will let Him in. You may still resent Him because you feel He was never there, and in doing so, you may trick yourself into saying that He is not good and therefore not real. If you really feel that way, but have just enough God in your heart to where when I speak to you just can't feel comfortable saying "He does not exist," then I beg of you, take the leap of faith, do what you know in your heart is the right thing, and surrender to Jesus. If you blame God for your circumstances, do you not see that means you believe in Him? If you have to forgive God and swallow your resentment, so be it. You know that He's there. THEN, when you surrender, you will see why God was not wrong in the first place. Maybe the reasons for all of this will become clear soon, or maybe not until you find yourself with God after you have died. God might reveal the truth to you, or maybe He might just increase your faith enough to know that the scripture is true when it says, "**And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose**" (Romans 8.28).

Will God give you the ability to walk again? Will He heal your broken family? Will He, on earth, reverse whatever has happened to you? He might. Miracles do happen. He also might not – sometimes they don't happen.

However, this all can end in one of two ways. You can continue living life without Jesus, letting yourself be eaten alive by your own despair until you die miserable and angry and then face an eternal fiery destruction in Hell, or you can let God heal your broken heart and cleanse you of all your sin, saving you every moment for the rest of this life, and giving you eternal life in the age to come, life without pain or sorrow or death or anything that afflicts you now. The Bible promises that "**There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order**

of things has passed away” (*NASB*, Revelation 21.4). God will undo all that has happened to you, but only if you turn to Him. Now is your chance. God will not turn you away, because “if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

There’s no middle ground – you can either submit and be comforted now and forever, or be without comfort, now and forever. This is true for all peoples in all the world who suffer.

God may or may not heal your mother’s cancer, but no matter what, He is the only thing that will ultimately get you and your mother through it. God is not your enemy; He is your only hope. Do you think it is easy for me to talk about this, and to turn to God, when I have not suffered like you? The opposite is true. I have plenty to rely on other than God. I have plenty to turn to besides God, if my heart were so inclined. I have my health and living loved ones and I am not homeless or anything like that. But what, other than Jesus, do you have? Why would you turn away from the only one who can ever help you? I beg of you, don’t reject your only hope.

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