

The Big Questions.

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The following information is taken from the Fall 2009 Youth Discipleship course of Ash Creek Baptist Church. The intent is to provide a basic introduction to important issues involving the Christian faith. The topics are introduced and discussed to highlight the essential aspects of each issue. It was not the intent of this course to provide an exhaustive or even thorough summary of each issue due to class time constraints. Each issue was discussed in a manner that introduced the heart of the issue or belief providing basic information about the key elements.

Content for these discussions was found by researching the following books:

Bibliography

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C.S. Lewis, Collier Books, 1962

The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict,
Josh McDowell, Thomas Nelson, 1999

1. Can God make a stone so big that He cannot lift it?

This is a question many people have heard from others about God. The question attempts to show that there is something wrong with the concept of an All-powerful God. It attempts to set up a logical absurdity about an All-powerful God. Mainly that God, as all-powerful as He may be, cannot do something. Let's look at what this really says about God.

First, let's talk about the characteristics of God. God is Creator (Gen 1:1), All-powerful (Isaiah 40), Loving (1 John 4:8), All-knowing (Ps 139:1-4) and Holy (Is 6:3) just to name a few. These are characteristics of God we get from the Bible, which is how God has revealed Himself to us.

Let's focus on the characteristic All-powerful. This is involved in both parts of the question above. If God is All-powerful then He can certainly lift and move any physical object. In fact He is Creator and set all physical objects in their places from atoms to the largest galaxy. It would seem obvious that God can lift any material thing. Not being able to lift a physical object would be inconsistent with God being all-powerful.

Here we get to the problem in the question above. If God can lift anything then He cannot create a stone that He cannot lift. God cannot do something! This is what the skeptic tries to show as proof that there can be no such thing as God; if God *can* create a stone that He cannot lift, then He can cease to be All-powerful once He creates the stone. If God *cannot* create a stone that He cannot lift, then it seems He is already not All-powerful, i.e. unable to create.

Let's think this through based on what we know about God. The idea of being All-powerful does not mean that there are no limits to what you can do, i.e. you can do anything. For example: God cannot sin; He cannot be anything else but God (2 Tim 2:13); He cannot allow sin to go unpunished and He cannot create something more powerful than Himself. In the question either God cannot create something or He cannot lift something. The answer is to find absurdity in the question rather than in the solution.

The absurdity is that it is assumed that God CAN do ALL things. This is not true. We just listed above a few things that God cannot do because He is God. So if there are things that God cannot do and still be God then which one of the options is something He cannot do and still be God. The first option is that God cannot lift a physical stone. God has dominion over all His creation so He can lift all things created. The second option is for Him not to create the "unliftable" stone. God cannot create something greater than Himself. Not creating the stone would still be consistent with who God is and He could still be God.

So the answer to the question is that God cannot create a stone so big He cannot lift it. God is still God even if he cannot create such a stone because not creating it is still consistent with Who He is. Who is God? That is the real question we need people to answer.

2. If I have doubts then how do I know that I am saved?

I haven't felt God's presence. I don't feel like going to church today. Why is there so much going wrong in the world? Does God really care? Did I really know what I was doing when I became a Christian as a kid? These feelings and reactions are all things you may have experienced. They make you wonder if there really is a God or at least if the God you learned about and believe in could be real. Having questions and doubts is part of being human, being limited in knowledge. You need to know where to go for answers and also that the questions do not make you lose your salvation.

People in the Bible needed some reassurance as well. Moses needed some signs to show the people in Egypt. Gideon needed two tests with a fleece. Thomas needed to see Jesus after the resurrection. You are not the first to wonder about God and ask Him for some answers or reassurance.

The first thing you need to understand is how you became a Christian. You are saved by God's grace (Eph 2:8-9). You realized you were a sinner (Ro 3:23). You knew that your sins had separated you from God (Ro 6:23). You knew that God made the opportunity for reconciliation by giving his Son Jesus to pay your debt (Ro 5:8). You then confessed that Jesus was Lord and believed that He was raised from the dead (Ro 10:9-10). If you think you are a Christian because you come to church or because your grandfather was a preacher or any other reason then you do have cause to doubt. There is only one way to be saved (Jn 14:6). You cannot earn it. You can only accept it as a gift from God.

When you make this decision to be a Christian you are accepting God's forgiveness and making Him Lord of your life. He heard you and saved you when you did that (Ro 10:13; Jn 3:16; Jn 5:24). Jesus comes and makes your life His home (Rev 3:20; Jn 14:23). Like when He made Israel His people, "He will never leave you, nor forsake you" (Dt 31:6; Heb 13:5b). God will not let you go and nothing can take you from Him (Jn 10:27-28). It is a deal that cannot be broken.

How can you tell if that decision was really made? The only way to tell is to see what happens next. If Jesus is Lord of your life then you will obey Him as your Lord. You come before Him doing what He says. If and when you mess up and sin then you come before Him for forgiveness (Jn 14:23-24). The way you live your life will let you and others know what you truly believe (Lk 6:43-45). If you continue living like you used to and how the world lives then there is no change and likely no real decision to follow Jesus (1 Jn 3:9-10). You can always make that decision and change.

If you have questions about God and your faith then ask them and look for the answers. Your faith in God is not at stake. You are seeking to know God better and that is just what God wants. As we follow God's commands He has not abandoned us (Mt 28:20b). He is always with us, even if we can't feel it.....even if we doubt it. Persevere the times of doubt by following Him in spite of it. Have faith in Jesus. He does not change and will not let you go.

3. Is the Bible True? *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* Volume 1, Josh McDowell

We learn most of what we know from books. Your school books include math, science and history that was all developed or occurred before you were born. You did not learn directly from the source. In Christianity it is similar. We learn about God from what He has revealed in the Bible. God revealed who He is and what He is doing through several people in history and they wrote it down in the Bible. This is what makes the Bible so important to us.

The big question is how you know the Bible is true. Perhaps a bunch of people wrote some things down that they had simply made up. Perhaps the Bible was originally correct but has been copied so many times that it is full of mistakes. These are just a couple of the questions people, maybe even you, have wondered about the Bible. Let's look at a few things about the Bible before we discuss the truth question.

First, the Bible is unique among all religious literature. Here are a few facts about the Bible. It was: written over a span of 1,500 years; written by over 40 authors from every walk of life (king, peasant, scholar, fisherman...); written in many different places and three continents; written in three languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek); written with one overall theme (God's redemption of man). Also, the Bible is the most-published and read book in history by the billions. It has been completely translated into over 240 languages and dialects and partially translated into over 730 more. It is the only book where large volumes of prophecy are made about nations and people and the Messiah. It has unparalleled influence in literature, politics and ethics. The Bible stands unique among religious and historical writings. This does not prove it is true but it does provide reason for anyone to study and know what it says. It is not just the thoughts of one man or group.

If the Bible is that important then why don't we have the originals that were written? This is due to the perishable nature of the material. Papyrus was used for writing many ancient manuscripts. It is a reed that is woven and beaten flat into what we might call paper. Our word paper comes from the word papyrus. Being an organic product means the material would deteriorate when it became moist. It only survives in very dry conditions, like the Dead Sea Scrolls. We do have manuscripts of the Bible but not the originals. We rely on copies to know what was written.

The manuscripts that we do have are numerous. There are more than 5,300 known Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. Add 10,000 Latin Vulgate and at least 9,300 other manuscripts and there are more than 24,000 manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament. No other ancient document can compare. Homer's *Iliad* is second with only 643 manuscript copies. The first complete copy is from the 13th century. The New Testament has over 20,000 lines and the *Iliad* has over 15,600. The New Testament has only 40 lines in doubt whereas the *Iliad* has 764. The idea that the Bible is "filled with errors" is wrong.

The New Testament also has copies written closet to the original in age. The earliest substantial copy is 300 yrs from the original and there is a fragment from about 25 years from the original. The seven plays of Sophocles are the next closest to original and their earliest copy is 1,400 years after his death. This is true for all the other books of antiquity. The New Testament is the most verified book of antiquity by far according to the manuscripts that we have. If you doubt the New Testament based on manuscript evidence then you will have to throw out all the other ancient books with it. We can trust that the Bible we have today is the same one people had thousands of years ago.

The Bible has a lot to say about itself and how it was written. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says that "all scripture is God-breathed". 2 Peter 3:15-16 refers to the writings of Paul as wise just as the other scripture. Hebrews 4:12 refers to the scripture as "living and active" and able to make judgments. In Luke 1:1-3 we find that

the gospel of Luke is written after a careful investigation of the facts. 2 Peter 1:16, 1 John 1:3 and John 19:35 tell us that the New Testament writers were eye-witnesses to the events they record. Manuscript evidence from quotations by the early church fathers of the New Testament also show that the New Testament was written very soon after the events they describe. Most scholars now believe the entire New Testament was completed by the early 80's, within a generation of the events that they record.

Other people wrote about Jesus and the church that was created after his ascension. Irenaeus describes how Matthew wrote a gospel in Hebrew to the Jews, Mark wrote down what he learned from Peter, Luke wrote down his research and what he learned from Paul and John wrote his own gospel. Many other writers of the 1st and 2nd century wrote about the gospel accounts that were circulating. These gospel accounts were written before the end of the 1st century. This is important because if the Bible were myth then there would have been objections from people who were still around and who remembered what actually happened. There is no debate to be found in the 1st century church about whether these letters and gospels are the actual truth.

These books and letters were not collected into what we know today as the Bible until AD 393. The Old Testament was already established by Jesus time. It is in our Bible because it is recognized as God's revelation to man about his plan to send a Messiah through His people Israel. The New Testament was gathered and accepted at the Synod of Hippo in AD 393. This gathering did not make the books God's word, they only gathered together the books that were already considered God's word by the church. To be in the Bible the books had to be written or given authority from an apostle or brother of Jesus. If you were not one of Jesus chosen twelve, his brother or Paul then your book did not get consideration. The apostles were given authority in all truth by Jesus (John 16:13). Other gospels had been written but they were written by men not associated directly with Jesus. These gospels also supported beliefs that were different from the grace of Jesus Christ through his death and resurrection, i.e. they were heresies.

Many archaeologists have stated that much of the Bible is confirmed through archaeological. Some important findings are the walls of Jericho fell outward from the city, the Hittites being discovered in the late 1800's, Augustus started the Roman census and Quirinius was governor of Syria. Several personal references of Luke and Paul to Roman politicians have been corroborated by archaeological findings. People who say the Bible is contradicted by archaeology simply have not looked at the evidence. No archaeological findings have ever contradicted the biblical account.

Many people object to the Bible being true because it talks about so many miracles. This is especially true when talking about Jesus. The most often heard objection is that of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The disbelief in miracles really has no bearing on the truth of the Bible. If you say the Bible is not true because miracles like the resurrection do not happen then you are saying something about your beliefs and not proving the truth or falsity of the Bible. The evidence for the Bible being accurate is not dependent on whether you believe what it says. The evidence provides a foundation for trusting that the words of the Bible are accurate.

History is not a science like mathematics. The object is not to show something beyond a shadow of a doubt but to build a case for the accuracy and legitimacy of the accounts provided. The Bible has been studied and researched in history and archaeology for centuries and is better for it. It stands today as the most reliable of ancient documents through its internal and external evidence.

4. Why is there pain in the world if there is a good God?

The first thing that can be said about pain is that if there is no God then there can be nothing wrong with pain. Pain would be just as *natural* as death in the atheistic worldview, helping to eliminate the weak and allowing the strong to survive. Pain is only a problem for those who acknowledge God. Without God you should have no problem with pain. C.S. Lewis describes the Problem of Pain stating if God were good then He would want his creatures to be perfectly happy, and if God were almighty then He could do what He wanted. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore, God is either not good or not almighty or both. (*The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis, p26)

Pain is a consequence of evil. It comes from sin. God did not create a sinful world or a painful world. He created a world that was very good. Through our own choices we have sinned and brought a curse into the world (Gen 3). Pain makes us aware of something fundamental to salvation. It shows us that there is something wrong with this world. If you have a sharp, continuing pain in your abdomen then you would go to the doctor because you know something is wrong and you want to get it fixed. Pain wakes us up from the illusion that we are fine just as we are, apart from God. It shows us that we are sinners and separated from God. In that sinful separation we live in a world with pain.

The world is also full of natural disasters which cause pain and suffering. Insurance companies call them "Acts of God". What causes these calamities? Rom 8:20-22 shows us that the sin of Adam caused a curse on Adam, Eve, the serpent and all of creation. The world groans as if in childbirth awaiting the time when all things are renewed. God does not actively send calamity into the world but He does tolerate it as a consequence of sin and condition of the curse. Jesus also spoke of this in Luke 13:4.

God could stop all acts and calamities that cause pain but He could only do so by suspending the free will of those causing the pain or suspending the natural forces of the world in calamities. These will one day be changed in a new heaven and new earth but not now (Rev 21:1-4). God allows these things to happen to show us that there is something wrong in the world and in our lives. This is not the world God created. It is a corrupted world that suffers under the consequences of a curse. That suffering includes God's own son Jesus who paid the price of Sin on our behalf and provided the way to finally be free of sin and eventually be free from the curse that sin brought to the world.

So the chief aim of God is our redemption not our happiness. We may be unhappy at times but God is working these times to redeem us and purify us. His goodness and almighty power are seen in how He saves us. Our joy and happiness are consequences of our redemption but they are secondary to our salvation in God's plan.

Lamentations 3: 33, 38 "for he does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men. Is it not from the mouth of God that both calamities and good things come?"

1 Peter 2:21 "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps." We suffer as Christ suffers, for the sake of others.

Luke 9:23-24 "Take up your cross daily and follow me." We die daily that He might live through us.

Romans 8:28 "God works together all things for the good of those who love Him." Not that all things are good but that they will work for an inevitable good in those who love God.

2 Corinthians 4:17 "momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison". These present sufferings are no comparison to what God has in store for us.

God Permits what He hates to accomplish what He loves – Steve Estes.

5. How can a good God send people to Hell?

When we are in anguish or tormented we may say that we are in hell. Hell is universally understood as a place of horrible pain and torment. Why would Christians believe in such a horrible place? The answer is simple: Jesus taught that it was a real place. If we cannot trust Jesus regarding this teaching then how can we trust the rest of what He tells us? Let us look at the reason Jesus spoke of Hell.

The word Jesus used for hell is *geenna* or *gehenna*. (Mt 5:22, 29-30; Mt 10:28; Mt 18:9; Mt 23:33; Mk 9:43-47; Lk 12:5; Lk 16:19-31) This referred to a valley south of Jerusalem that was like the city dump where refuse was continually burning. He also referred to a place where there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Mt 8:12; Mt 13:42, 50; Mt 22:13; Mt 24:51; Mt 25:30; Lk 13:28) Revelation 20:14-15 teaches us about the "lake of fire" where the false prophet, the beast, Death and Hades and all those whose name is not written in the book of life will be thrown. Jesus taught that such a place is an ultimate consequence for those who reject God. It is what they want; a place without God. If there is no hell then everyone goes to heaven or those who reject God simply cease to exist when they die. Neither of these alternatives is found in the Bible or even in church tradition. Many cults have accepted this, like Jehovah's Witnesses, but they do not believe it from the Bible. It is something they have made up.

Many people use the truth that "God is Love" to argue against there being a place like hell. A famous verse can refute this idea. John 3:16-18 shows us that God loved the world by sending His Son to be sacrificed in our place and that we are not condemned by Jesus but are condemned already. If we are not in danger of hell then what motivation prompted Jesus to die for us and how do we know God loves us (Ro 5:8)? Because the Bible tells us? The Bible also tells us there is a place called hell. You cannot have it both ways. God loves us and wants to keep us from being separated from Him and going to hell. He gives us an escape through Jesus.

To understand this better let's define hell. Hell is called the "outer darkness" by Jesus and is also associated with being cast out. This is a place that never was supposed to be but is made necessary by our being separated from God by our sins. God designed us to be with Him and we could have lived with Him if we had not sinned or committed evil acts. Evil is not necessary for God to exist as good. Evil is the absence of good just as darkness and cold are the absence of light and heat. Evil, darkness and cold are not real things but are descriptions of the lack of real things. Hell was not always necessary. It became necessary at the Fall of Man when sin entered the world and we were separated from God. It is the place where God is not.

If people are sinful and reject God in this life then why would they want to spend eternity with God in heaven? Perhaps you have been in a class or a seminar that was so boring that you thought it would never end. You would do anything to get out of there. In a similar way, I think people who reject God and choose their own way of life would not feel heaven is bearable. We were created to be with God eternally in Heaven. Hell was never meant for us but Hell is where we would choose to be if we reject God. God cannot condone evil. He must pay for it and forgive it. If you choose not to be forgiven then you are left to yourself, without God.

"He has his wish- to live wholly in the self and to make the best of what he finds there. And what he finds is hell." (*The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis, p123)

6. Is there really right and wrong?

In today's world there is a sense that nobody can know anything for sure. People should be tolerant of other cultures and lifestyles because you cannot really judge whether someone is right or wrong in what they believe. You cannot know things for sure but can only know they are probably true to some extent or simply true for you. We call this a post-modern society.

Christians believe that there really is right and wrong, that truth exists whether we acknowledge it or not. This is called objective truth; Truth outside of yourself. It is truth established by God as a standard for judging right and wrong. This truth is revealed in the Bible, His Word. We have already discussed the authority of the Bible and this is why Biblical Authority is so important. If the Bible is not true then how can we know about God since the Bible is the only recorded revelation we have from God. For the Christian, the Bible defines objective truth.

The other ways of talking about truth are subjective. That means that they can change from person to person. The truth is only the truth for that person. Popular versions of this are Pragmatism (Truth is what works), Empiricism (Truth is what we discover through our senses), Rationalism (truth is what we reason it to be) and Emotionalism (Truth is what feels right). You can see that each of these is based on some human characteristic that is different for each person. This leads to definitions of truth that are different for each person. These philosophies have no universal truth.

Over the last few decades we have seen people giving up on knowing anything. This is called skepticism. The funny thing is that skeptics "know" that you "cannot know" anything. They are sure about not being sure about anything. Make sure to point this out the next time somebody tells you that you cannot know anything for sure. They probably do not even know they are being contradictory.

Many people do believe we can know things like math and science objectively and universally but they believe that religious and spiritual matters can never be known for sure. "Jesus is true for you but not for me" is the phrase that summarizes this belief. This is to say that nobody is really wrong in what they believe. Again, they believe this is true for all people and thus are contradicting their belief that it need only be true for them. All forms of subjectivism are based in an objective truth, namely that their philosophy is right about being subjective.

The question to ask somebody about truth is "How do you that is true?" That question forces the person to think of the reasons for their belief. When they give an answer then ask again, "And how do you know *that* is true?" until they finally realize that at some point they believed simply because they assumed something was always true. That something is God and the objective truth that He established in the universe. Christians reason back to the beginning where God established creation, laws and reason itself. God is our foundation for thinking whether you believe in God or not.

Without a belief that God upholds objective truth people would be living in potential anarchy. For those who do not believe in God or truth you can demonstrate their unconscious foundational belief in objective truth by a simple test. Let them know that you believe it is acceptable to take from others whatever you want. They will either say that is wrong (an objective truth) or say whatever you believe is fine (subjective truth). If they say that is wrong then keep asking why until they get to the point where they realize they are trusting in something beyond themselves to establish truth, which is God. If they say it is fine then take their wallet or car keys and thank them. If they really respect "your truth" then they will let you go. Otherwise they will appeal to objective truth and say "That is wrong! Give that back". If they do, then start asking them why. If they don't you should give it back anyway. There really is right and wrong and we all live as if there is right and wrong, whether we acknowledge God or not.

7. If God knows the future then how can we have free will?

You are reading this now. God, being all-knowing, knew that you were going to read this. God is never wrong. Since God is never wrong and He knew you were going to read this then did you really have a choice in reading this? If we do not have a choice in our lives then we do not possess freewill. Life simply happens, just as God knew it would.

The issue at stake is the tension between our own freedom to make choices and God's flawless character and knowledge of the future. This is sometimes discussed as predestination. "For those He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son." (Ro 8:29) God's foreknowledge described in this verse is often confused with selectively choosing those He wants to be Christians and the rest of the people.....oh well. This verse does not suggest only a few are pre-destined. That idea comes from the fact that not everyone chooses to become Christians. Some people choose to reject God and live their lives in their own way. This is not what God wants. "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come into repentance." (2 Pe 3:9, also see Heb 10:10) God wants all to come to know Him and He could do just that if He could control how we made decisions. The fact that some do not become Christians is evidence for our freewill. Pre-destination seems to be about *how* he will save us and not *who* he will save.

We need to go all the way to the beginning to start to unravel this problem. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Gen 1:1) "In the beginning, God..." tells us that there was an existence before time and space where there was only God. He acted to create time and space. Because He did that He is not confined by time and space. In fact, He exists outside time and space. "God is spirit and his worshippers must worship him in spirit" (John 4:24) The problem is not that God knows what we will do but that we unknowingly place God within our time, as if He lived in time with us and saw time as we see time. We see time as linear, moving constantly in one direction toward the future (except for Light-speed travel, sling-shotting your spaceship around the sun and flux capacitors). God does not see time as unfolding in that manner. He is outside it. God sees time as a panorama. God knew all of history, from "Let there be Light" to the great judgment, in the moment of creation.

The issue is that if God knows the future then are we destined to do what God knows we will do. To help us think about this let's look at the history of when Abraham took Isaac up the mountain to sacrifice him because God commanded it. He then ended up not sacrificing Isaac because at the last moment God stopped him and had him sacrifice a ram instead. If God knew that Abraham would obey then why would He make Abraham go through such a horrible ordeal? C.S. Lewis described this kind of thinking in this way, "If God knows something then the thing that God knows need not exist". With this line of logic, if God knows all things then nothing really needs to actually occur. The answer is that even though God knew, Abraham did not know. Abraham needed to know that he could trust God completely as he followed God on his mission to create a nation of God's people. That is why God tested him.

Just because God knows something about our future does not mean that we should stop making decisions or that our decisions do not matter. You might think of it this way: God sees history like we watch movies. Think of a movie you have seen many times. When you watch it again you know what is going to happen. You did not direct the movie, or act in the movie or produce the movie but you still know what will happen next. You have seen it before. God does the same thing. We live our lives and make our decisions. Just because God has seen our life before does not mean we have not made our choices with complete freedom. He is outside of time and can view all of time at once. We are within time using our free will to decide our destiny one day at a time. God knows who will choose to follow Him but that does not destroy the power of our decision to follow. It is still our decision.

8. Is there really only one way to Heaven?

“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)

“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”. (John 14:6)

“I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.” (John 10:9)

“He will save His people from their sins”. (Matthew 1:21)

“All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” (Acts 10:43)

“For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men...” (1 Tim 2:5-6)

Several verses in the New Testament clearly tell us that Jesus is not just one way to heaven; he is the only way to heaven. The authority of the Bible was discussed earlier with question 3. “Is the Bible true?”. The short answer is yes, the Bible tells us that there is only one way to heaven.

Let’s look at the long answer. To discuss this completely let’s start with this question; what keeps us out of heaven? It is sin. It started in the Garden of Eden and it separates us from God. It separates *all of us* from God. (Ro 3:23) We chose our own path and rejected God’s way. Our sins separate us from God. In fact they sentence us to death. (Ro 6:23)

How do we get around the fact that our sin separates us from God? Think of some ways you might solve this problem and get yourself into heaven. Most solutions that have become religions rely on doing enough good things to get you into heaven. The problem with this is that God is not a “pretty good” or an “almost perfect” God. He is a holy and completely perfect God. How can we ever be seen as perfect in His eyes even if we do *most* of the things good in our life? New good deeds do not erase old past sins. They may balance them in some scenario but sins can never be erased by what we do now or in the future. On our own, we can never present ourselves as acceptable to a holy and perfect God.

God’s solution was to pay the price for sin Himself. (Ro 5:8) We may accept the gift of his forgiveness because He has paid the “un-payable” price on our behalf. (Ro 10:9-10) Think of any other religion. Do any of them offer a way to heaven through the grace of God? Christianity is in a league of its own when it comes to salvation and getting into heaven. There are no other religions, not even one, that have a similar theology regarding salvation and eternity with God in heaven. They all, without exception, either dodge the problem of sin or try to use good works to balance it.

God stepped into history and revealed to us through scripture what the problem is in our life and also how He has fixed it. We need only accept His gift of grace and allow Him into our lives to help us live His way. Without this we are lost in our sins. There is no other way to make our sin go away except through the cleansing sacrifice that Christ Jesus made on our behalf. Other religions offer other ways but they fall short of solving this singular problem of humanity; man’s sin. There is only one way to heaven.

9. Did God create the world? If so then how?

The first question is rather simple for Christians. The very first verse of the Bible tells us that “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Gen 1:1) If you do not believe God created the world then you have a biblical problem from the very first verse. The controversial question is *how* did God create the world?

The rest of Genesis 1 tells us that God created light; atmosphere and seas; Land and plants; Sun, moon and stars; fish and birds; animals and people in six days and chapter 2 tells us that God rested on the seventh day and gives us more detail on the creation of man Adam and Eve. Many people question whether the word day in Genesis 1 really means a 24 day like we think of today. Some people say that 2 Peter 3:8 tells us “with the Lord a day is like a thousand years” and so the days could represent much longer time periods. The very next part of that verse states “and a thousand years is like a day” but nobody really believes that the world was created in about 1.5 seconds. They try to make the creation account longer *not* because the Bible leads to this belief but because secular science outside the Bible tells us that the universe is 15 billion years old.

The word day (*yom* in Hebrew) has many meanings. We know the intended, specific meaning of a word by the context within which the word is used. The word *yom* in Genesis is modified by a number (*first day, second day, etc...*) and further modified by the phrase *evening and morning*. In every single instance the word *yom* is modified in such a way (over 300x in the OT) the meaning is a 24 hour day. Further, the fourth commandment (Ex 20:8-11) tells us that since God created in six days and rested on the seventh then we should work six days and rest on the seventh. If a day is not 24 hours then this commandment would mean we might still be in the first “week” and not be able to rest for thousands of years (using 2 Peter 3:8 conversion ratio). Reading Genesis in context, it is very clear that the writer intended to communicate that God created in six 24 hr days.

Here are some things you can discuss with people who might disagree with, or even ridicule, the belief that God created the world in six days. The two views of creation and evolution are ways of explaining an event or process that was not observed or measured; our origins. Because we cannot go back and observe how things happened we must make inferences and interpretations from present day observations. You can make predictions based on your beliefs in order to test whether what you believe is true and consistent with our observable world today. First with fossils, if creation is true then you would expect distinct animal groups since God created things to reproduce after their kind. If evolution is true you should find many transitional forms of how animals and plants changed from one form to another. Looking at the fossil record we find that there are many distinct types of animals and plants that can be grouped according to modern classifications. There are no undisputed transitional forms in the fossil records.

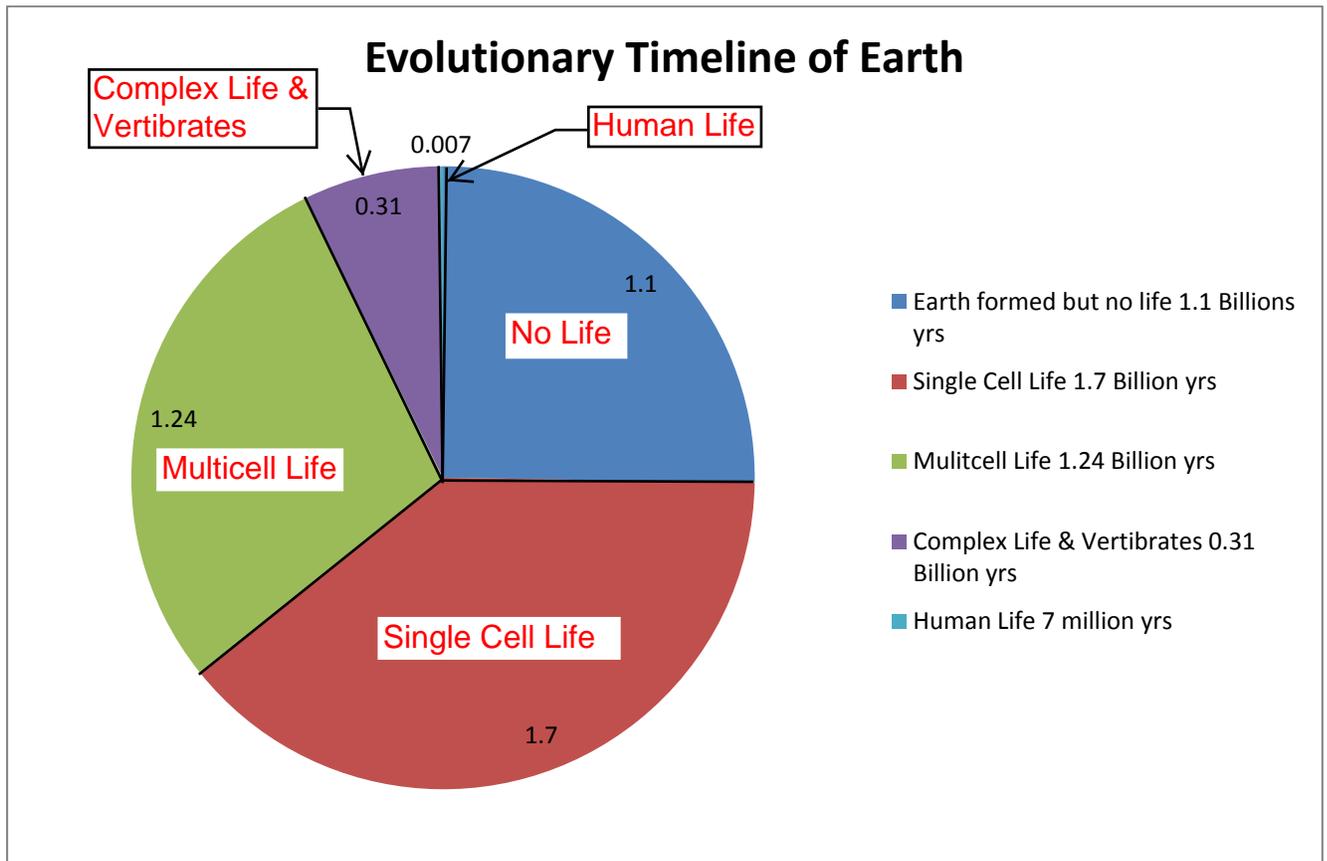
Second with geology, if the Bible is true then creation was followed by a huge global flood which would have buried things rapidly and laid down huge amounts of sediment very quickly. If evolution is true then the layers we see in the earth were laid down very slowly over millions of years. When you look in the present day world we find fossil trees that are set vertically in the rock through up to ten feet of distinct layers (polystrate fossils). During the flood these trees would have been buried quickly in sediments making creation consistent with the data. Evolution would require the tree to stand vertically for hundreds of thousands of years while being slowly buried and experiencing no deterioration. This is not consistent with the data.

Let us look at the consistency of evolution. If evolution is true then you would expect that the time needed to evolve would correlate directly to the complexity of the organism being evolved. So-called “simple” things like amoebas would evolve more quickly than the most complex things, humans, due to the number of

mutations that would be involved. Looking at the time line from any science book you will find something like the chart below. The earth is supposedly 4.6 billion years old according to evolutionists. As you can see, for approximately one fourth of Earth history there was no life. Another third of Earth history only the “simplest” of life evolved. The next fourth multi-celled organisms begin forming. Then in the last tenth of the Earth’s history *all* of the complex forms of life including humans have evolved. According to the interpretations of time by evolutionists it is difficult to believe evolution has occurred as they theorize, slow steady mutations that have built up over long time periods. Evolution is not internally consistent.

The Bible is the authority we have looked to in our discussions thus far answering the Big Questions. When we look to the Bible we see that it tells us God created the world and that he did it in six days. It also describes the judgment of a global flood. When we look to the world of the present we see things consistent with that view. Organisms reproduce after their kind. The fossil record shows no signs of transition between forms (the missing links are still missing). Polystrate fossil trees indicate rapid, catastrophic burial. Remember these things the next time you talk with someone about creation and how it makes sense of the things we see in the world. Then remember the Evolution of Earth timeline and discuss with them how evolution does not make sense of its own slow mutation theory.

These are just a few things that can help you in supporting the Biblical view of creation and discussing the problems of evolutionary theory. There is much more that can be found at web sites like Answers in Genesis (www.answersingenesis.com), Institute for Creation Research (www.icr.org) and Creation Ministries International (www.creation.com). If you have further questions and curiosity try them out.



10. Does God Exist?

We have come to the end of our list and here is the biggest question of all. Historically, people have wondered about this question and dedicated a good portion of their lives to proving or disproving God's existence. Some of the arguments for the existence of God are very compelling. Let's discuss a few of them here.

The first one we'll discuss is called the cosmological argument. This basically says that everything that has a beginning must have a cause. The universe has a beginning; therefore the universe has a cause. The universe did not come out of nothing by itself. At one time it did not exist and now it exists. Something outside of the natural world must have caused it to exist. That cause we call God. Some will then ask, "who caused God?" but from the argument only things that have a beginning need a cause. God is eternal, without beginning or end. He needs no cause. Science now tells us that the universe is expanding at incredible speed and that it did indeed have a beginning. Knowing that all things that have a beginning must be caused, we must conclude that there is a cause beyond the universe (nature). That cause is our supernatural God who created the world out of nothing (Heb 11:3).

The next argument is also very powerful. The teleological argument, or Designer argument, tells us that all things that show evidence of design must have a designer. We see the universe and its fine order and intricate machinery. We see the amazing structures of the human cell and the clockwork precision of the Earth's solar orbit and can know that someone placed all these things here in such a way as to allow life to exist. There are 15 constants in the universe (gravitational, weak and strong nuclear force, etc...) any one of which could vary by one part in a million and life could not exist (<http://www.icr.org/article/design-nature-anthropic-principle/>). We look at how special the Earth is in its placement from the sun and its rotational tilt and can see how it looks like someone made the Earth for us to live here. You can look at the phone in your hand and know it was made by a designer, it did not just happen. You can look at the hand holding the phone and all its bones, nerves and muscles working together to help you manipulate things. That hand is far more complicated than the phone it holds and therefore must also have a designer.

The final argument comes from our morality. Ask someone to tell you something they think is really, really wrong. For example: stealing from the poor. God certainly tells us not to steal and tells us to care for the poor. Without God, what tells us that stealing is wrong? Why in fact is anything wrong if there is no God, no lawgiver? We live as if things are right and wrong and we do so assuming that there is something that gives the Law and will ultimately uphold the Law. Aren't there people in the world that are doing things that you believe are wrong? Things that you believe they should stop doing regardless of what they believe about the correctness of their behavior? Without an objective standard of behavior there is no right for anyone to impose their beliefs on others. You cannot rightfully stop someone from doing what is wrong without an objective moral standard. God exists because we cannot explain our moral conscience without Him (Ro 2:14-16 "The Law written in their hearts").

Each of these arguments are powerful ways to explain how God exists but each of them stop just short of the proof that we need to show that the God revealed in the Bible is the one, true God. The universe may need a first Cause but why should that be God? The complexity and design in our world appears to require a Designer but why should that be Jesus? We feel moral obligation and compel others to abide by our morality but why should the biblical God be the

Law-Giver? These are definitely clues that there is a God. We will next discuss why the God of the Bible is the First Cause, Designer and Law-giver.

All people have a worldview through which they analyze, interact and interpret the world around them. There are no neutral positions. Everyone has a set of beliefs, or biases, they work from in making decisions and interpreting data. This worldview is formed by a foundation of beliefs that most everyone takes for granted. In order for a worldview to be correct or legitimate it must satisfy some basic requirements; be logically consistent and provide reasons for the pre-conditions of intelligibility. Pre-conditions of intelligibility are those things we take for granted. A few of them are 1) our memory is reliable, 2) our senses are reliable 3) there are laws of logic, and 4) there is uniformity in nature. Without these things we cannot truly know anything.

First let us discuss the distinction between Christian and atheist. The Christian believes that God is Creator, Law-Giver and Lord. 1) and 2) are explained in the fact that we are made in the image of God. We are not intended to be faulty, though this can be a consequence of sin and the curse. We can trust that what we remember and sense is real. 3) and 4) are explained by seeing the order that God has placed in the world He created. These laws of logic reflect the mind of God (Prov 1:7). We can reason based on our faith in God not in spite of it. We can know the universe and study it because God set up constants and laws for the natural world to obey. He is a God of order as reflected in Genesis 1, not a God of accident and chaos. We can trust that the future will be like the past because He sustains the world by His power (Col 1:17). Atheists cannot rely on God for any such explanation. They can provide no reason why our memory or senses should be trusted. It is perfectly possible in their worldview for our memory and senses to be programmed rather than experienced (see *The Matrix*). They have no reason for explaining why the laws of logic are valid. The laws may work here but do they work everywhere? The same is true about the uniformity of nature. They can give no reason for trusting that the future will be like the past or that what we know here in America is valid in other places in the world and universe. Atheists know about the past but know nothing of the future. They can make no claims regarding the nature of the future but depend on a uniform nature in every scientific experiment they conduct. They trust in the *repeatable* nature of what they observe but do so without justification.

Christians have a worldview that explains the pre-conditions of intelligibility and is consistent in doing so. In order for the atheist to perform a scientific experiment, or even expect to have toothpaste come out of the tube when it is squeezed, he must borrow from the Christian the assurance of a uniform nature and the rationale for laws of logic. A consistent atheist should not see a problem if the toothpaste does not come out since strange things happen in a random, chaotic universe and who knows what the future will hold. Instead, the atheist searches for reasons why the toothpaste did not come out showing that they hold securely to the uniformity of nature. The atheist insists on a uniform nature which abides by the laws of logic but has no reason to support such insistence. The proof that the Christian worldview is true and the God of the Bible exists is that without God you cannot know or prove anything.

If we need a God to help explain our basic presuppositions of life then some may ask why the Christian God and not some other religion's god. We find that the answer is because Christianity is in a league of its own. Other religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, polytheistic religions and pantheistic religions do not give explanations for a creator God that would provide reasons for 1) through 4) above. They have no personal God who has revealed Himself to

mankind. No person can speak for God unless God allows it or approves it. The only way to trust someone who talks about God is if they speak with authority from God, as Jesus did (Mt 7:28-29; 28:18). The other world religions do not make such claims about God or the nature of reality.

Some may then ask about Mormons, Muslims and others who do believe in a personal, creator God. In these instances we find that these religions have borrowed from Christianity in order to legitimize their claims. They are heresies of Christianity. They also do not solve the one problem of mankind, sin. If we must have a God to rationalize our worldview then only the Christian God provides all the requirements for supporting a rational worldview as well as providing a solution to sin. All other religions seek to attain salvation, heaven and a restored relationship with God through the performance of good works. None of them offer a solution for the sins already committed. They offer a way to heaven but cannot consistently or reasonably provide it. Only Christianity offers the solution of grace through faith in Christ to forgive the sins of the past and present ourselves clean before our God. Christianity is in a league of its own. Christianity alone can explain the world and meet our deepest need.

This proof for the existence of the God of the Bible is a simple summary at best and does not capture the full thrust of the argument as provided by Dr Greg Bahnsen in several debates with atheists as well as his other works

(<http://www.cmfnow.com/argumentsfortheexistenceofgod.aspx>). The adaptation of the argument by Dr Jason Lisle to the Creation/Evolution debate (*The Ultimate Proof of Creation*) is also a good resource for studying this issue. Please continue to study this further through a YouTube search of Dr Greg Bahnsen and by reading and listening to his work available at www.cmfnow.com. His Transcendental Argument for the existence of God is intellectual and effective and concludes that without God we cannot know or prove anything. Christians can explain the world around them through the Bible and its revelation of God. No other worldview can provide the rationale for logic, science, morality and the solution to our sinful predicament.