

Sunday School

for

Sinners & Saints



By Rent-A-Friend 2000

Published by A Bit of Orange Books

CONTENTS

PAGE	
3	1. All Religions Are the Same, Right?
6	2. What is Christianity?
9	3. Who is God?
11	4. God and Newton
15	5. God and Charlie Chaplain
17	6. God and Henry Ford
20	7. Stars and Butterflies
22	8. God and Tolkien
25	9. "He also made the stars."
27	10. God and Bill Gates
30	11. Jesus and Prince Charming
32	12. How is God different from the gods? He Alone is GOD
36	13. How is God different from the gods? He alone is Lord of ALL
39	14. How is God different from the gods? He Alone Created EVERYTHING
42	15. How is God different from the gods? Cosmological Argument
45	16. How is God different from the gods? He Alone is the foundation for Objective Morality
48	17. What is the Trinity?
52	18. Pictures of the Trinity
55	19. Why isn't the word "Trinity" in the Bible?
57	20. Who is Jesus? He is God and Man
59	21. Why Did the Son of God Become Human?
61	22. Where does Jesus say "I am God, worship me"?
64	23. What is Salvation?
69	24. The Gospel- Part 1: Would You Like To Take a Survey?
72	25. The Gospel- Part 2: There is no "MOSTLY" Dead
74	26. The Gospel- Part 3: Snow White and the Walking Dead
77	27. The Gospel- Part 4: Say "YES!" To the Dress
79	28. The Gospel- Part 5: Peace on Earth, Goodwill to Men
82	Appendix- More Verses About the Gospel

#1. All religions are the same- right?



"All religions are basically the same."

I'm sure you've heard this said. Some of you may have believed this at some point. Maybe you still do. I used to.

For starters, all faiths agree to a few foundational concepts. We all believe in sin. Some people hate the word "sin" and prefer to say we all make "mistakes," or we store up bad Karma. But however you put it, we all know that people do bad things. WE do bad things. There is right and wrong, and we want to do right, but we- *all of us*- do wrong. We all agree to this, whatever terminology we use to express it. The world is not as it should be. It is NOT supposed to be this way. So we look for a way to fix it- and ourselves. Every religion is the search to pay for our own sins... right?

If religions are all the same, what does it matter which team you're on? Is there really a "winning" team? Aren't we all playing the same game? Many people seem to feel that religions are like picking a professional baseball team to root for. The important thing is that you keep up with the latest scores, try to attend games as often as you can, root, root, root for the home team (*if they don't win, it's a shame!*) and sometimes wear the officially licenced merch. That's basically the same as flipping through the holy writ (or

popular books based on your scriptures), attending the occasional mass/chapel/mosque/temple/etc. and wearing whatever yarmulke/kufi/temple garment is the official merch of your team. And it's not whether you win or lose, it's how you play the game.

Pick a deity of your liking, offer it whatever worship it demands, go to heaven...right?

After all, what really matters is that we believe *sincerely* and that we do good things. Love our neighbor and all of that good stuff. Give a hoot, don't pollute. Root for the home team, but practice good sportsmanship.

All religions are basically the same...right?

As popular as this concept is, and as appealing as it sounds to a modern audience, it is wrong. However, it's *almost* right. ALMOST all religions are the same. Any religion offers you the stairway to heaven- metaphorically speaking. They show you the path, the method, the series of *good to do* or *evil not to do* in order to gain your reward. They teach you the secret truths which make you enlightened. All religions show you how you can pay for your own sins and balance the scales of justice in your favor... all but one.

Christianity does not teach that we can earn our eternal reward.

Jesus does not tell us that he has come to show us the way to walk so we can make it to heaven- he tells us that *he is the way*.

Jesus doesn't tell us that he will give us some kind of secret truth which will make us the enlightened ones- he tells us that *he is the truth*.

And he doesn't point us to some righteous life to build for ourselves- he tells us *he is the life*.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." John 14:6 (ESV)

Every religion, marketing scheme, political campaign, or self help book in the world has one message: Here is what YOU can do to save yourself. Get to work.

Christianity has a very different message:

You can't save yourself, but God has made a way for Him to pay your debt and do what you cannot do.

"...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus..." Romans 3:23-24

Religion is the attempt to build a ladder that reaches to heaven so we can climb up to God. Christianity is God coming down to us.

Religion is about the things we do for God, but Christianity is about what God has done for us.

Religion is offering something to God so He will give you what you want, but Christianity is about God offering Himself to give us what we need.

Romans 6:23 says "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

We all agree that the problem is sin, and we all agree that the enemy is death, but only Jesus pays our debt to save us from sin, death, and hell. Only Christianity tells us the good news of a free gift of eternal life. Unlike any other religion, philosophy or self help book, The Gospel isn't good advice, but good news- a free gift.

We have no ladder to climb, but a gift to receive. At its foundation, Christianity is not a religion, but a relationship with God. Accept His gift. Trust Him to cleanse you of your sins and give you a new heart. And then, tell others the good news.

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

Romans 10: 9-10

#2. What is Christianity?



"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16

This verse encapsulates the heart of Christianity. It's a line spoken by Jesus to a very important religious leader named Nicodemus. Because we hear it so often we can overlook how very steeped in doctrine this single line is, but this one verse in its context tells us an amazing depth of doctrine about the Christian faith. Here are some of the key things we can learn from this verse.

1. Christianity is from the God of the Jews.

Jesus and Nicodemus are both Old Testament, Jewish Rabbis. There is no question between them that the *God* referred to here is the God who made the heavens and the earth in Genesis, who gave Moses the Law in Exodus and Leviticus, and who ruled over Israel since the time when it was only the promise of a son to Abraham. When Jesus says "God so loved the world," he and Nicodemus both know very clearly he is referring to the loving, personal God of the Old Testament.

2. God is loving.

Because we are immersed in Western culture which has been steeped in Christianity for almost two thousand years, this idea seems obvious to us. God is love. Everyone knows that! However, it is a shocking revelation which most religions and cults would reject. This notion of a personal God who not only loves His people, but who wants to be in relationship with them is not the norm. This is not the god of Islam, or the gods of Hinduism, or countless pagan cults and religions. When people invent their own gods, this idea is too great, too wonderful to believe, and so it is quickly discarded. But from the first page, the love of God has been all through the Bible.

3. God is Just.

The whole reason that the Gospel is good news is because there is bad news. **"...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..."** Romans 3:23-24 (ESV).

Jesus explains this to Nicodemus when he says in John 3:19 (NIV) **"..people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil."**

We all have sinned and God is just, which means sin must be punished. The seeming contradiction of the Bible is how a just God can be loving toward sinners. The answer is Jesus.

4. Jesus is the answer.

Echoing the Jewish temple system and calling to mind the Passover and Yom Kippur, John the Baptist calls Jesus **"the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"** (John 1:29 NIV) Starting with the passover and extending into the temple system, the lamb would die so that the sinners could live. Now Jesus, the Son of God, comes to be the Lamb who dies so that sinners can live. Sin is punished, but the punishment is taken by one who has no sin of his own. Jesus lays down his life so that we can live. God is just and punishes sin, but God is loving and takes that punishment for us. We owe a debt we cannot pay, and Jesus pays the debt that he does not owe. Jesus says **"He [God] gave his only Son,"** echoing the exchange between Abraham and his son Issaac in Genesis 22:8 where in Abraham says, **"God himself will provide the lamb."**

5. Whoever believes in Him

Separating Christianity from every other faith that has ever existed is this foundational idea. We do not earn our salvation. There is nothing we could ever do to put God in our

debt. Jesus earns our salvation and we put our trust in Him. We can do no works to pay for our sins, but Jesus has paid for our sins, and we have faith in him and the salvation he has earned for us. In every other religion, the sinner offers a gift to their gods to pay for their sins, but in Christianity, God has paid for our sins and offers us a gift- the gift of eternal life. God has provided the lamb. Ours is only to accept and believe. Instead of trusting our own goodness, we trust Jesus, and the mercy and love of God.

Other religions are like the scaling of a wall- work hard and attain righteousness. Christianity is the acceptance of a marriage proposal. You don't buy a husband. You can't. He proposes, and the bride simply says yes. She puts her trust in him and takes his name. Jesus offers us salvation, and the church- whoever believes- becomes the bride of Christ.

In a single sentence, Jesus tells us that Christianity is the plan of God from Creation, connects this plan to it's foreshadowing in a host of events and ceremonies in the Old Testament, reminds us of the justice of God and yet explains how God can be just and yet loving and merciful at the same time.

The answer is Jesus.

Jesus paid for your sins, so that you can be given eternal life. Put your trust in him today.

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." -Romans 10: 9-13

#3. Who is God?



When trying to learn about God, there are two primary places where any person can go. There is creation, and there is scripture. In a sense, you can get to know the artist by His artwork and by his biography. Genesis 1:1 offers a window into both. It is the part of His biography where the artist creates his Masterpiece.

The Bible opens with the statement, "In the Beginning GOD Created the heavens and the earth." When we are introduced to God there in the very first line of scripture, He is in the act of bringing into being all that we know- all of time, space, matter and energy. As the chapter continues, we get a small window into the creation of all things, but we've already learned a lot about God before the first day is done. Let's take a brief look into what we know by the end of the very first line of the Bible.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

The first thing we are told about God is that He CREATES. God is not a force- some energy like what is described in Star Wars. Also, He is not limited to creating one kind of thing like many pagan gods are. When men invent their own gods, they invent super men like Thor, who makes lightning and thunder, and Bacchus who makes wine, but the one true God creates EVERYTHING. He needs no help. He has no limits. The true God made EVERYTHING.

Consider what it would mean to make everything that is. Think about all of the laws of physics and chemistry which govern the universe. Those had to be created- written into law. Think about the amazing, information rich complexity of every living system, down to the workings of every single living cell. Those had to be built according to those laws of physics and chemistry, all of which can be described with beautiful mathematical formulas.

God is creative and makes a universe filled with beauty. But not merely artistic. He is BRILLIANT.

Consider also what the creation itself tells us about God. First, He made all of time, space, matter and energy. But this means He is OUTSIDE of time. God is not (as we all imagine when we are children) very, very old. God is ETERNAL. He is BEYOND time. He MADE time. God does not come to creation after vast eons of time, but time comes into being by the willing act of God.

God made matter, which reminds us that He is not a thing. He made space, which means He doesn't need to take up any space, and He is not located at a particular place. The God of scripture is not, as the gods of the Greeks and Romans, Mormons and Muslims, a God with a physical body, physical parents, and physical weakness. He doesn't live in a palace on the top of a mountain. The one true God is the creator of physical material and biology. He is not an animal form made of stuff. He did not come from parents.

And just like the gospel, this is one of the ways in which the truth of the Bible is different from any other religion in human history. The God of the Bible created the heavens and the earth. No other "god" even takes credit for having done so, and none of them have the properties it would take to do so. The universe needs a cause, and ONLY the God of the Bible is a contender. ONLY He could have made the heavens and earth, and only He claims to have done so.

Isaiah 43:10-11 fill in the picture a little more when God says,

**Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me.
I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no savior.**

From the very first line of scripture, we learn where the universe came from, and we also learn a little of what God is like. He is beyond time and space. He is the creator of matter and energy. He is unlike any other god ever imagined. He is beyond comprehension. He is brilliant. He is creative. He is worthy to be praised. He alone is GOD.

#4. God and Isaac Newton



In 1689 Isaac Newton described his thoughts on relative motion by asking his reader to imagine being inside a ship. Imagine you are inside of a large ship, sitting in a chair at a desk taking stock of the contents of the hold. Suddenly, you see an onion rolling toward you across the floor. It moves across *ten feet* of the deck *in five seconds*. How fast is the onion moving? The obvious answer is *two feet per second*.

Or is it?

You may think this is an easy question, but remember you are on a ship. The ship is moving. If so, you are moving too, even though you are sitting in a chair watching an onion roll across the floor. Maybe you and the ship are moving toward the onion at two feet per second and the onion is actually sitting still!

But sitting still in relationship to what? The ocean floor? But the ocean floor is part of the earth- a planet rotating around its axis every day, and also orbiting a star which is itself orbiting the center of the galaxy... Isn't EVERYTHING MOVING?

The Necessary Question

The necessary question Newton reveals to us when asking how fast something is moving (*or to even determine if it is moving at all*) is *"in relationship to WHAT?"* There must be a fixed point- a constant- by which we can measure movement. The fact that motion is always relative to some constant, fixed point, doesn't make that movement any less real, but the fact remains that we can only know and describe motion because of a fixed point.

Motion and Morality

Motion and morality are very similar in a lot of ways. First, because we tend to start out thinking of things in relation to ourselves. We have the instinct to consider ourselves as the fixed, constant point by which to judge the world around us because it is the perspective through which we experience things. Much like in the study of physics, however, we will eventually find that we cannot use ourselves as the moral constant. We are moving.

Not just us as individuals as we grow, mature, and learn, but cultures also change. Things which we as a culture used to consider normal, such as slavery, are now considered to be abominations, and things we used to consider abominations, such as homosexuality, are now considered normal. Has our culture improved or gotten worse? Can we even know? Not by looking to ourselves. To know if we are getting closer to or further away from "good" we have to ask the necessary question: *"In relationship to WHAT?"*

Or rather- *"In relationship to WHO?"*

The Same Yesterday, Today and Forever.

In order for good and bad to be REAL, there has to be a fixed, unchanging point by which to judge. Just as no one argues against the objective nature of motion, almost no one argues against the objective nature of morality **.

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." Hebrews 13:8(NIV)

"I the Lord do not change." Malachi 3:6 (NIV)

We know from creation that God is the maker of the heavens and the earth. He is the creator of everything that is, and even space and time itself. When considering the nature of objective morality, the only answer that makes any sense is the anchoring of objective morality in the unchanging, eternal character and nature of God. We must anchor objective morality in God because He is unchanging and eternal. He is literally the only possible fixed point.

Other "gods" will not do. This is not an argument that can be adopted by just any religion, because this is not an argument from merely having an object of worship. This is the realization that morality, like motion, cannot be understood until we find some fixed, unmoving point by which to compare the position and motion of everything else. God alone is fixed and unchanging. Other gods change their minds, or demand things arbitrarily. Other gods are under the rule of other laws, or fight amongst themselves. The god of Islam makes laws and then changes his mind and has them erased. He brags about being a deceiver. The god of Mormonism has other gods over him who have other gods over them, all of whom are evolving and learning. The gods of polytheism fight among themselves, and have no absolute foundation by which to judge, ultimately deciding authority by might alone, and whoever rules today gets to decide what is right until another takes his place. Only Jesus is that fixed and unchanging position which we need to know right and wrong.

This reality works both ways. Just as the character and nature of God is the only possible foundation for objective morality- true, REAL right and wrong- so we must conclude that IF objective morality exists (as we all know it does) then the only possible explanation is that the God of the Bible is the one true God.

Made in HIS Image

Furthermore, God has made us in HIS image. We are intended to be like Him. Just as a portrait is good because it resembles the person in whose image it was made, we are good when we reflect the character and nature of God, and we are bad when we reject His image. In an important sense, the answer to defining objective morality is literally, *"What would Jesus do?"*

God is the eternal, unchanging standard of good. God is perfectly just and loving. God is holy and wise. God is eternal and omniscient. The character and nature of God is the standard by which right and wrong MUST be determined. No other standard is eternal and unchanging. What is logically deduced by this fact is that God does and must exist, and everyone knows it as Paul describes in Romans chapter 1:19-20.

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

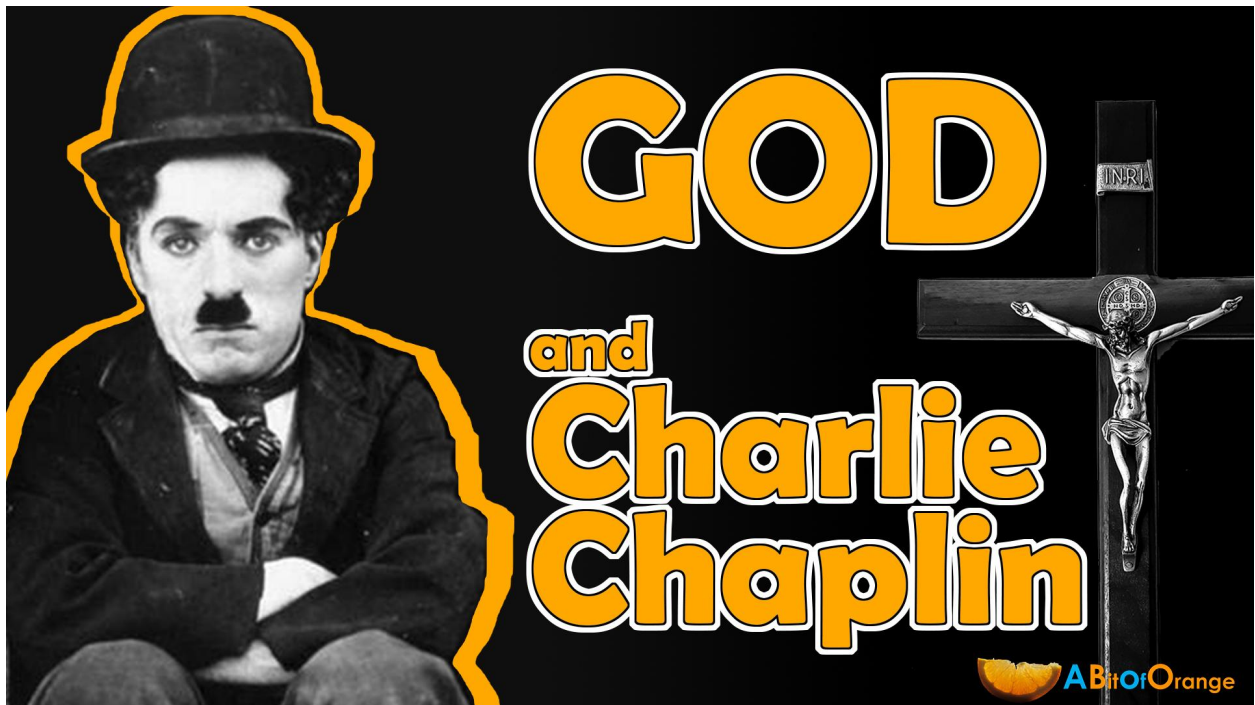
Everyone knows that objective right and wrong exist. While we may debate the proper application of these principles, the human race has always known that good and evil are real things. But right and wrong require a fixed, unchanging point of reference. Right and wrong in relationship to who? The only answer which makes objective morality possible is Jesus Christ. Because we all acknowledge that right and wrong are real, we are already acknowledging the truth of the Biblical worldview, even if we don't realize that we are.

Skeptics will question the existence of God, and demand evidence for His existence. But we all, skeptics included, already have absolute assurance of God's presence based on facts we can know first hand. In a strange sense, we all know that God exists with more certainty than we can know the speed of a rolling onion.

*Described in *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* and made public here:
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/newton-stm/scholium.html>

** (and even those that do fail to live as if morality isn't real, thus proving they know objective right and wrong by their reactions even if denying it in their words)

#5. God and Charlie Chaplain



American film star of the silent era, Charlie Chaplain, is said to have entered at least one or two Charlie Chaplain look-alike contests. Because of his fame and his unique appearance and manner of walking in his films, contests were a somewhat common occurrence during his lifetime. Having heard of such contests happening near where he happened to be at the time, Charlie entered a few to see how he would fare doing his best impersonation of himself.

He lost miserably every time.

The reason this story is funny is because we understand the failure of the judges. They looked at the fixed, constant which should have been the standard by which to judge the contestants and decided that the REAL Charlie Chaplain didn't look as much like Charlie Chaplain as the idea they had of what he looked like. They had decided that the Charlie Chaplain in their own heads was more REAL than the actual Charlie Chaplain himself. In essence, they had looked at Charlie Chaplain and said, *"You don't look as much like you as these other people do."*

Modern skeptics and atheists do this ALL the time. So often I have seen them make statements about *"the immoral character of God,"* condemning various things they have read (*and often badly misunderstood*) in the Old Testament. We are told by internet atheists that God is IMMORAL.

Naturally, when I see such comments I ask these skeptics by what standard they are judging God. Where is the transcendent, objective standard of right and wrong by which they can judge God Himself? If they ever give an answer, they will inevitably inform me that morality is chosen by the individual. We decide for ourselves what is good or bad.

When this skeptical position is lined up into a single train of thought, it goes:

*Morality is decided by the individual.
I choose for myself what is right and wrong.
God disagrees with me on what is right and wrong.
Therefore, God is immoral.*

Hopefully I don't have to explain to you why this is stupid.

Morality must be based on the character and nature of God. God alone is eternal and unchanging- holy and wise- perfectly just and loving. God alone is the standard for what goodness is.

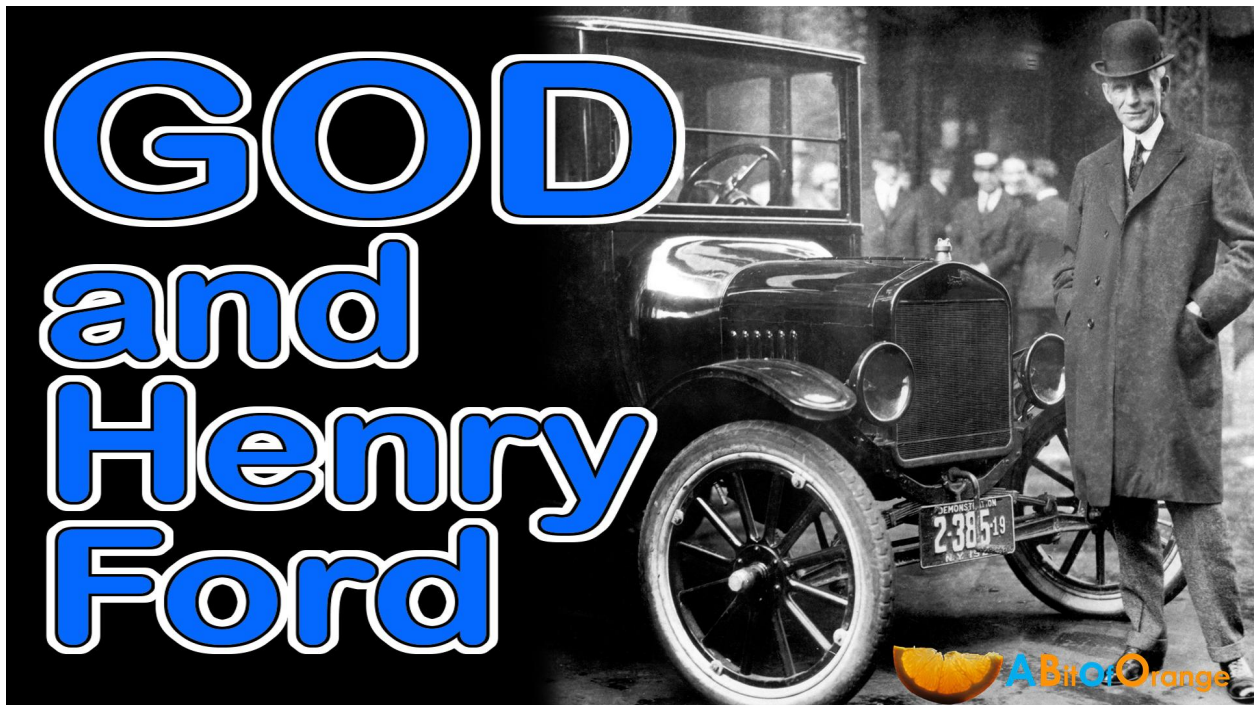
God made us in His image, yet these skeptics have decided that God needs to look more like us. What these skeptics fail to realize is that they are yet another generation of self appointed judges looking at the real standard and saying, *"You don't look as much like you as I do, so I have decided that you are failing this contest."* But when we play the judge of God, it's us who always lose.

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." -Romans 12:2 (NIV)

Several versions of this story were told over the years, but some historians have cast doubt on all of them. Even if Chaplain didn't actually lose such contests, the story makes for a good metaphor. Decide for yourself if the stories are true:

<http://www.openculture.com/2016/06/when-charlie-chaplin-entered-a-chaplin-look-alike-contest-and-came-in-20th-place.html>

#6. God and Henry Ford



In the fall of 1908, Ford Motorcompany released the Model T Ford. Over the next two decades, Ford would build more than 15 million of them. In that time, the Model T would become such a commonplace thing in America, that it was possible to not even think about where it had come from. One might instead think about who was driving it, or how fast they were going. Discussions were had about how to get cars and horses to share the same roads. Gas stations were becoming more and more common. The Model T was the cause of many conversations as they spread across the country by the million.

Every part of the Model T is natural, and perfectly explicable according to science. The metals in the car are found in the rocks in the earth. The rubber in its tires comes from trees. The gasoline running the engine is produced from petroleum found far underground. All of the components of all 15 million Model T's can be found in nature- yet nature could never explain a single one of those Model T's. To explain the existence of the Model T, there must be a Henry Ford.

Busy Highways and Teeming Oceans

Even with crowded highways and congested parking lots, one thing which will always outnumber the cars on the road is the number of living things on planet earth. Billions of living

things inhabit every ecosystem. And every living thing is composed of matter which is found all over the universe: hydrogen, oxygen, carbon and nitrogen (*with a handful of others in smaller amounts*) are the elements that make up life. These are found in the air and in the oceans, on distant planets and in every star.

Living things are always the subject of important conversations: Are they thriving or going extinct? Should we eat them or give them citizenship? How do we share the earth with them? Plants and animals are the cause of many conversations in every civilization on earth. Living things are so commonplace all over the earth that we have stopped asking the most important question of all: *Where did they come from?*

Many people believe we have answered this question with the sciences. We've discovered that life is built from hydrogen, oxygen, carbon and nitrogen. We've classified it according to its features and understood it according to its ecosystems. While an enormous amount of good information has been learned about living things over the years, we've managed to miss one glaring, obvious fact. Discovering the chemical composition of life and describing the ways in which living things behave doesn't explain its origins any more than describing the chemical composition of the parts of a Model T explains its origins. You can gain a precise understanding of every part in the Model T- how it works, what it's made of and how it relates to all of the other parts- but you won't explain a single Model T without acknowledging Henry Ford. Similarly, all of the sciences together don't free us from the need for a designer. On the contrary, they DEMAND a designer.

Design requires a designer.

The simplest living cell is a collection of machinery more complex than anything ever made by human hands. Forget the Model T; a single living cell is more complex than a modern Ford automotive factory! And unlike an auto factory, a living cell can repair itself and grow and divide into two complete factories in only a matter of hours. If a car needs a designer, imagine a car that could seek its own fuel. Imagine a car that can repair its own damage. Imagine a car that could make more cars. Would these features make a designer LESS necessary? Obviously not! The common features of life cry out for a designer more than any machine, building, instrument or appliance ever imagined.

Physics and DNA SING!

The atoms that make up living cells all obey the same laws of physics that govern the universe- laws so amazingly fine tuned for life that it's impossible to describe. From the fine-tuned laws of physics to the vast amount of information in the DNA of any living thing, to the astounding machinery that runs every living cell, all of creation sings the glory of God!

The job of science is to examine the whole machine- to measure the parts of the engine and see what they're made of, to kick the tires and figure out the relationship between fuel and exhaust. The sciences can tell us a lot of very useful information, but what science can never do is explain a single Model T without Henry Ford, or a single living cell without our creator God.

What the sciences actually do is show the amazing design which is all around us. Design that requires an amazing designer. The heavens declare the glory of God, but the study of the stars and planets, geology, astronomy, physics, biology, genetics, and every other field of study have shown us more and more that this universe is a work of art and engineering beyond anything we have ever dreamed of.

To *describe* the Model T takes science, but to *explain it* takes going back to 1908 to learn what Henry Ford did. To describe the universe takes science, but to explain it takes going back to Genesis.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." -Genesis 1:1 (NIV)

#7. Stars and Butterflies



When seeking to know and understand God, we can learn a great deal from the first chapter of Genesis. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. All of nature- the cosmos, the biosphere, the sun moon and stars- are the works of His hands. When considering the creation, we tend to think of God as an amazing designer- an artist who makes indescribable beauty in every part of the heavens and the earth. But I would suggest we also learn to see Him as a brilliant engineer. After all, if God is the painter, He is also the inventor of paint, brushes, and the canvas on which the whole masterpiece is displayed.

God makes the beauty of the stars and the birds and butterflies. A star is essentially an enormous explosion which doesn't stop exploding until it runs out of fuel. It holds together in dynamic balance as one bright place in the sky because of gravity. God designed the force of gravity to hold the stars together, but made it in a way that allows the wings of a butterfly to overcome gravity so that each butterfly can take to the sky. Gravity holds the moon to the earth, causes the tides, and yet allows birds to soar through the sky and deer to leap over the high places. Could you design a rope that ties the moon to the earth so that it never leaves, but a rope that also allows butterflies and sparrows to fill the sky? Our amazing Creator did just that.

The sky itself He made such that the sunlight begins and ends each day with a beautiful array of pinks and oranges and reds, and spends the day traversing a beautiful blue. Below that beautiful blue sky, plants are taking in the light of the sun to make sugar and oxygen. God

designed the living things such that plants make food and oxygen, which we and the animals need to survive, and then we make carbon dioxide which the plants need to survive. The intertwined design exists at every level- from our amazingly complex cells to the simple fact that plants and animals need each other.

God makes beauty, but He makes it with astounding order. He works a day at a time, but He knows the end from beginning. God makes an amazing diversity of colors and textures, plants and animals, but He does it with strict and orderly laws, each not only founded in the fabric of the universe, but each so well balanced with the others that the fine tuning of the universe is beyond what we can comprehend. The balance of the laws of physics are so precise that we barely have the language to describe it.

When we think of the creation, we should try to imagine God as the greatest engineer, the greatest artist, the greatest mathematician, the greatest musician and the greatest programmer all in one. He is all of those things and more. Our God is worthy to be praised!

Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; And His greatness is unsearchable.

Psalm 145:3 (NKJV)

#8. God and Tolkien



In 1954 J. R. R. Tolkien wrote *The Lord of the Rings*. It is a grand, epic story about a place called Middle Earth as it is threatened by the shadow of evil and the spread of oppression and war. *The Lord of the Rings* was designed to be one part of a two volume set, the second of which was to be *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien's book about the history of Middle Earth going back to the creation of the world itself.

Within these two books is an explanation for almost everything. You can learn where the elves, dwarves and orcs came from. You can learn the origin of the Ring of Power. You can learn the origin of the Nazgûl (*also known as the Black Riders and also called Ringwraiths, Dark Riders, the Nine Riders, or simply the Nine, which gives you a sense of Tolkein's writing style*) and the backstory of Gollum (*formerly and occasionally still known as Smegol*). But there is one thing you will never learn, and which you COULD never learn in the vast history of Middle Earth, and that is the origin of J. R. R. Tolkien himself.

There is no time on the timeline of Middle Earth where J. R. R. Tolkien was born. He did not come into being at some point in the distant past of Middle Earth. Tolkein simply IS in relationship to the story. He is not aged by the long ages in the history of Middle Earth. He is not made impatient by the long walk to Mount Doom, and he is not rushed by the action of the battles between the orcs and men. He doesn't have to wait to see what happens, for he knows

the end from the beginning. There is no mountain hall so deep that the Hobbits could hide from him.

But even though Tolkein is not one of the facts about Middle Earth, and even though he does not live within their history, it would be obviously foolish to therefore argue that he does not exist. Tolkein doesn't live within the story because he is MORE real than Middle Earth, not less real. Furthermore, if Tolkein did not exist, then none of Middle Earth or its inhabitants would either. Tolkein is NECESSARY to explain all of Middle Earth. Every character, place, and event is ultimately proof that Tolkein is real- MORE real than any of them.

God is the Author of Our Story

While the nature of God is beyond our understanding, I believe that the relationship of an author to his story is a good picture of God's relationship to us that can help us gain some slight understanding of our awesome Creator. When God created the heavens and the earth in Genesis 1:1, He had not waited endless eons to begin. There was no time or space or matter of any kind until the author says "*Once upon a time...*" Only when the author begins the story does the story begin. There is a first page, an opening sentence- a first moment of time.

God is not made of matter like we are, He doesn't take up space like we do, and He doesn't age with the passing of time, but that is because He is MORE real than we are. Skeptics often complain that they can't SEE God, but the Elves and Hobbits never saw Tolkein because he was not part of the story. He was its author. Similarly, we don't see God because He is not a created thing. We should no more expect to see God than the Hobbits should expect to see Tolkein.

In Isaiah 46: 9-10 God says, "*I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done...*" In Isaiah 43:10 God says, "*Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me.*" And in John 8:58 Jesus says of Himself, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.*" Like an author to his book, God stands over and above His story. Jesus does not declare "*I WAS,*" but rather, "*I AM,*" which is the name He revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:14. Unlike Tolkein, God doesn't have a lineage of ancestors going back to some other creation, but he is the eternal Father who knows the end from the beginning.

The Greatest Story Ever Told

But there is one way in which the Bible is even more amazing than the Lord of the Rings. Tolkein remained only the author- the distant cause of the world of Middle Earth. Our God declared in the first couple of pages the amazing miracle which would occur at the climax of the story- He, the Author of all, would become one of the characters in the story. Jesus was born as a human child, growing up as a normal child, becoming a Rabbi in Israel who learned and taught the scriptures. God had become a man. The author had stepped into His story.

Every Christmas we sing about this, but sometimes the wonder can get lost with the familiarity. Imagine if J. R. R. Tolkien had become a character in his own story, growing up in Middle Earth and learning and teaching the stories of The Silmarillion. Imagine if it was Tolkein who took the ring to Mount Doom and who died to destroy the power of evil and save all of Middle Earth. In a sense, that is the story of the New Testament. The author of the story was born into His own book, and gave His life to save all of the characters who lived in this vast world He had created.

Any word picture will fall short of the true nature of God, but by giving us the gift of story, I think God has given us a small glimpse into who He is and our relationship to Him. Our world was made by an amazing artist and storyteller. HE is the hero of the story, and He invites you to join Him in this great adventure. Take your place in His story today!

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." 1 Peter 2:9

#9. "He also made the stars."



Let me present for you a few scientific observations to consider:

The Earth has a circumference of nearly 25,000 miles.

The sun is so big that if it were hollow, a million Earths could fit inside.

The speed of light is 186,282 miles per second.

The sun is so far away that it takes eight minutes for its light to reach us.

The planet Jupiter is five times further from the sun than we are.

It takes sunlight almost 43 minutes to reach Jupiter.

The largest star that we know of today is called VY Canis Majoris. It is so big that if it were put in the place of our sun, it would fill ALL of the space between the center of the solar system and Jupiter. Light traveling from its core to its surface unhindered would take three quarters of an hour to reach the surface.

That's only one star. Our galaxy contains between 100 billion and a trillion stars.

That's only one galaxy. There are at least 100 billion galaxies.

In Genesis 1:16 we are told this; "He also made the stars."

Every burning star, everywhere in the universe. Billions upon billions of controlled explosions, so big we can't comprehend it, and so powerful that all of human history

combined has only used a fraction of the energy that each one gives off in a moment. Genesis tells us that God made them all, and it was no more difficult than one item on His list for a Wednesday afternoon.

The power of God is beyond comprehension. Now keep that in mind when you read these verses again:

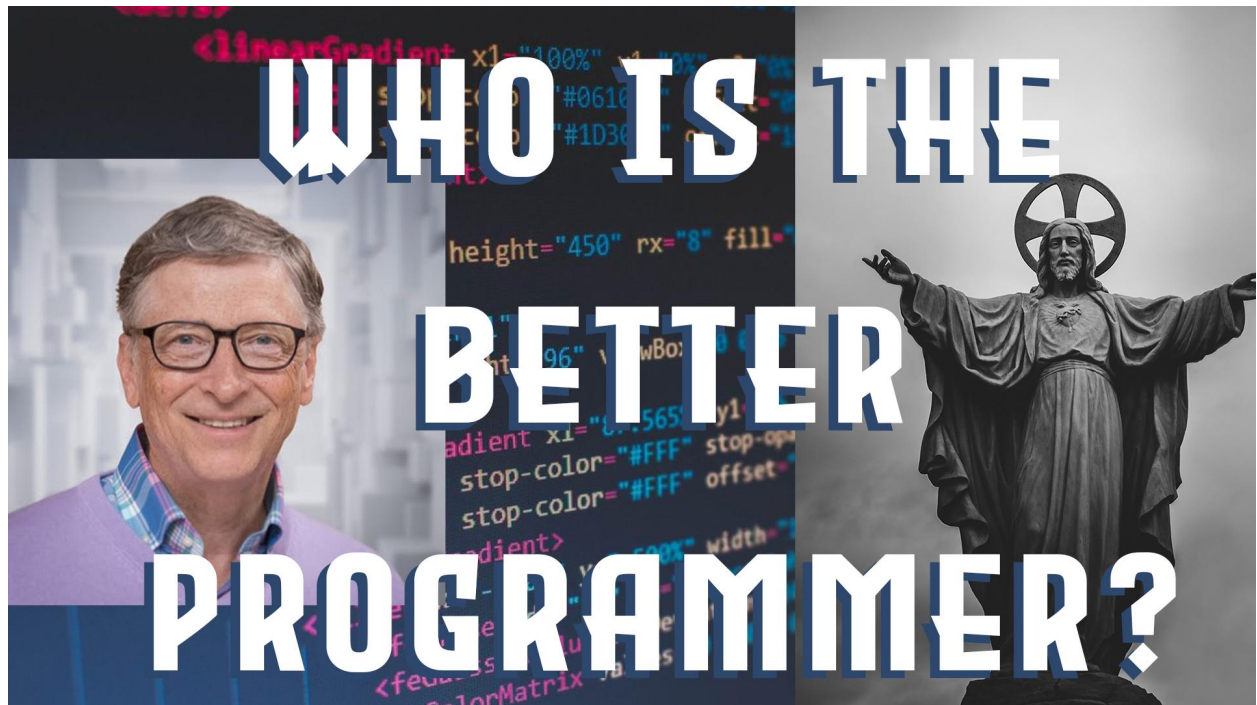
“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

John 3:16 (ESV)

***God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.***

Psalm 46: 1 and 11

#10. God and Bill Gates



In the book, "The Road Ahead, Bill Gates (co-founder and then-CEO of Microsoft) says, "Human DNA is like a computer program, but far, far more advanced than any software we've ever created."

Every living cell, including the millions and millions which make up your body, is composed of complex machinery run by the information in the DNA. If the information in the simplest cell known was printed out, it would take more than fifty pages to do so. If the information in a single one of your own cells was printed out, it would take more than a thousand VOLUMES to print it all. Each one of your cells contains a library of information! The founder of Microsoft acknowledges that the information in your cells is not random, chaotic chemistry, but a collection of information "like a computer program, but far, far more advanced than any software we've ever created." (emphasis mine)

UPGRADES

The computer I'm writing this article on is running Windows 10. Every now and then, Microsoft forces my computer to install an upgrade. A collection of computer programmers with a certain objective and clearly defined goals makes a change to the existing information which runs my computer for the purpose of improving its function. More than half of the upgrades in the past two years have forced me to begin my day by trying to restore my computer into a functional state, because the "upgrade" has made my computer incapable of even starting up.

The reason why Windows functions is because when that room full of programmers develops an upgrade, the computers which are upgraded survive, and the room full of programmers get a few thousand angry emails from users, letting them know what didn't go according to plan so that the room full of programmers can fix the most recent upgrade and try it again. But imagine a different scenario.

WINDOWS CATS

Imagine it's the 1980s and tens of thousands of home computers are running windows 3.1. Also, imagine that errors caused by upgrades didn't just make it difficult to start up, but often caused the computer to burst into flames, destroying it completely. Let's say, around 99% of the time.

Also, let's imagine that upgrades are not designed by a collection of computer programmers with a certain objective and clearly defined goals. Instead, let's imagine that your upgrades were caused by cats sneaking into your house at night and walking around on the keyboard. These cats have no objectives or goals, and they certainly don't know anything about programming. They don't KNOW they are updating your computer. They're just chasing mice (*pun intended*) and looking for somewhere to nap. If the computer doesn't burst into flames, they can come back again later and do it again.

If they hit the right collection of keys, you wake up to Windows 3.11! What a treat that would be! If this happens over and over, you might wake up to Windows 95! If you manage to be part of the lucky 1% which never has their computer burst into flames, then in only nine more system upgrades (*each comprised of many smaller upgrades*) you will have Windows 10. But not just Windows 10, a version of the software which is "*far, far more advanced than any software we've ever created.*"

Monkeying with the Operating System

This *upgrades via sneaking cats* is basically the evolutionary story. Blind, accidental chance with a 99% chance of failure is required to do what a collection of computer programmers with a certain objective and clearly defined goals seem unable to do: make upgrades to advanced software which improve the system so that it is better than it was before.

But this problem has MULTIPLE levels:

1. The original computer has to build itself from NON-functioning parts.
(*The first cell has to build itself from NON-living parts*)
2. The first operating system has to write itself (*The first DNA has to write itself*)
3. The operating system has to be compatible with the hardware
(*The information in the first DNA strand has to code for the many different parts in that first cell which built itself*)

4. The operating system has to include the information to build another computer and copy all of the necessary files for functions
(The first cell has to be able to make copies of itself including all DNA and organelles)
5. The operating system has to be upgraded by errors in copying the files from one hard drive to the next *(DNA has to have genes added by mutations)*
6. The errors in copying files has to invent a local area network *(The mutations have to result in multicellular life forms with distinct yet cooperative kinds of cells)*
7. The errors in copying files has to invent an internet to control all of the computers while they run their own functions *(Mutations have to invent a central nervous system to run the functions of the organism as a whole)*
8. Hardware and software upgrades have to happen at the same time with no programmer or computer engineer or goals
(mutations have to add additions to the body plans such as legs or eyes, while at the SAME TIME adding the programming in the central nervous system to make use of those structures for survival with no direction)
9. At every step, a coping error will destroy the hardware
(Mutations are almost always lethal)

The Clear Fingerprints of God

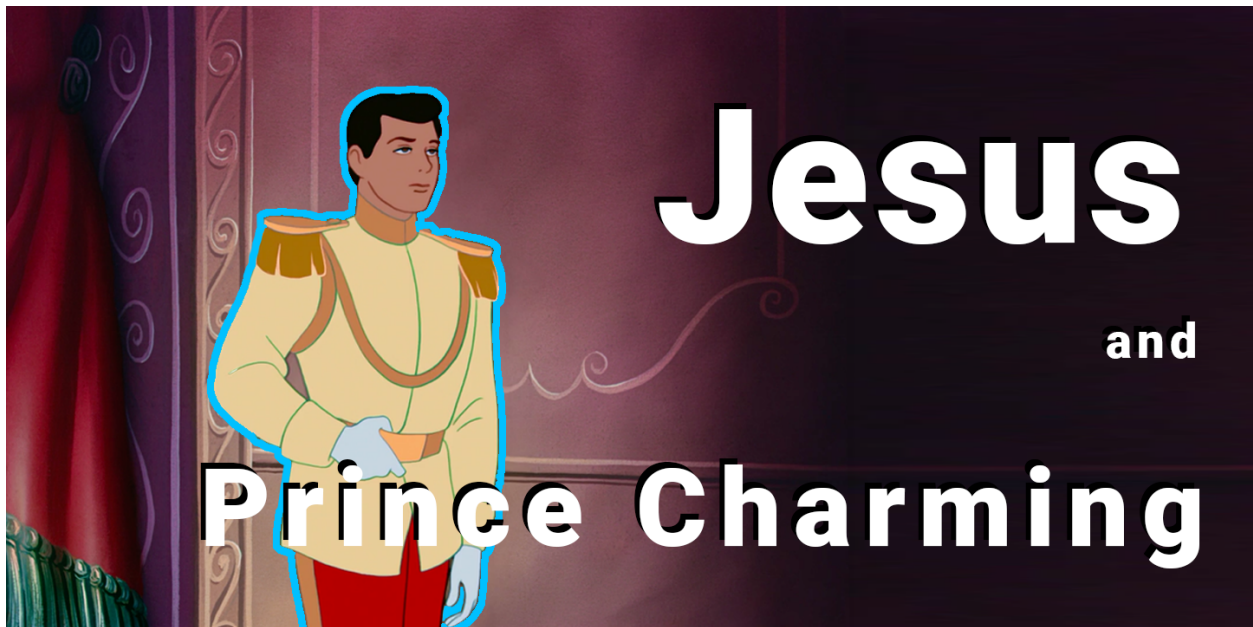
As the mere existence of computers requires the forethought, planning, and intelligent design of many engineers and programmers, the simplest living cell is obvious evidence for the greatest of all designers- our Creator God. The belief that life could arise through natural means betrays either a complete ignorance of the astounding complexity in both the hardware and software of every living cell, or a willing blindness to the clear fingerprints of God. It's not merely improbable, it's impossible. Every living thing on earth, like the heavens above, declares the glory of God.

Computers require a builder and a programmer. No one would think to argue with this obvious fact. Life is vastly more complex and full of information than any computer, machine, or operating system. How much higher than the greatest team of computer programmers is the mind that designed the brains of computer programmers and the amazing structures of life!

*"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 55:8-9

#11. Jesus and Prince Charming



There is a collection of wonderful stories of romantic fantasy and adventure, which modern audiences know mainly as classic Disney movies, such as Snow White and Sleeping Beauty. In each movie, the good princess does one simple bad thing. Snow White eats the forbidden fruit, and Sleeping Beauty touches the forbidden spinning wheel (a small act of violence which still manages to spill blood- her own). Because of the influence of an evil, selfish being and one poor choice, the good princess comes under the curse of death.

She lies, dead to the world, unable to fix her miserable fate. Her family and friends mourn her, also unable to undo what she has done. It looks as if evil has won the day.

But then the prince arrives...

A charming, brave hero, son of the King and himself full of love for the princess, comes to her aid. In Snow White he wakes her from death with a kiss. In Sleeping Beauty he first fights the dragon with the sword of truth. In each, it is the love of the Prince which wakes the princess so that she can be carried to a happily ever after that she did not earn.

This is the Gospel. The Good News.

We are made good by our Creator, beautiful and pure as new fallen snow, but we were influenced by one evil, selfish being, and we made one poor choice. We succumb to the sleep of death which results from our fall, and we are unable to save ourselves. We can only mourn the loss of paradise, unable to undo what we have done. It looks as if evil has won the day.

But then the prince arrives...

The Son of the King of Kings is born into the world on that first Christmas, and He comes to challenge the dragon with the sword of truth. The Son of the King gives more than a kiss to wake us. He gives his own blood to pay for our sins. He dies so that we can live. He goes down into the grave so that we can wake from the sleep of death.

But this story is better than any fairy tale. Three days later, our rescuer defeats not only our death, but His own. He comes out of the tomb, victorious over sin, satan, and death itself. While we were dead in our sins, he fought the powers of evil to save us when we could do nothing to save ourselves. And our happily ever after is not merely for the rest of our lives, but for the rest of eternity.

"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast."

Ephesians 2: 1-2, 4-5, 8-9

"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

John 14:3

#12. How is God different from the gods? He Alone is GOD.



The word "God" means a lot of different things to different people. To ancient Greeks it was one of the many powerful beings responsible for making lightning, or wine, or making the corn grow. To ancient Egyptians it was more like a personification of the sun and sky. To modern audiences it means something in themselves which makes their dreams come true, or any being powerful enough to destroy half of all life in the universe because of his wielding of a bedazzled left hand glove.

Islam has one god (*or four, if you count his wife and daughters*). The Romans and Greeks had twelve gods each, ancient Egyptians had 2,000, and Hindus have 33 MILLION gods. Oprah says we are each our own god, which adds another 7 billion to the pantheon. Mormonism may have an infinite pantheon of gods. With so many to choose from, what makes the God of the Bible special? Is Christianity just another Greece, Egypt or MCU?

The first thing that makes the one true God distinct from any other is the fact that He exists. This statement may seem simultaneously obvious and scandalous depending on who you are, but as the authors of the Bible (*and we readers of the Bible*) speak and write about these issues, it is important to note that we refer to the one True God as the only real, existent God. We refer to other gods as fictional characters, much in the same way we refer to the talking stuffed animals and woodland creatures of the Hundred Acre Wood. I may talk about Winnie the Pooh and Tigger too, but like the gods of ancient Egypt, they only exist in stories and artwork.

For example, when God says this in Jeremiah 25:6, **“Do not go after other gods to serve and worship them...”** He is not intending us to understand that those “other gods” are real gods which actually exist. This is made more clear in several other scriptures, such as Deuteronomy 32:17 which says, **“They sacrificed to demons that were no gods,”** and Paul explains this fact in 1 Corinthians 8 as he discusses meat sacrificed to idols:

“We know that “An idol is nothing at all in the world” and that “There is no God but one.””

God Himself confirms this multiple times throughout the Bible.

***“This is what the Lord says— Israel’s King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty:
I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God.”***

Isaiah 44:6

***“Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me.
I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no savior.”***

Isaiah 43:10-11

“I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God.”

Isaiah 45:5

While Christians often use phrases like “Our God,” the fact is that there is only one real God. He is “ours” not in the way “Our Team” is ours, but in the way that our father and mother are “our” parents. Not because you picked a random couple out of many which you might have chosen to be your parents, but rather because, as the only parents you can ever have, you belong to each other.

There are many things which make our God different from the many other imaginary gods and demons who pretend to be gods, and the first vital difference is that He is God. This is yet another reason why the name He gave to Moses makes sense:

God said to Moses, ***“I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I am has sent me to you.’” -Exodus 3:14***

He alone is God. There is no other.

The Bible tells us a lot about God in the first few chapters of Genesis, with more being revealed throughout the Bible, but before we’re more than two or three books into the Bible, we already know enough about God to know that He alone is God. In case you missed it, this theme will be repeated over and over throughout the Bible. For example:

For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God.

Psalms 86:10

LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.

Isaiah 37:16

...the Lord is God; there is no other besides him.

Deuteronomy 4:35

you are great, O Lord God. For there is none like you, and there is no God besides you...

2 Samuel 7:22

There is none like you, O Lord, and there is no God besides you

1 Chronicles 17:20

I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no God.

Isaiah 45:5

When the Bible says there are no other gods, it means two things. The first thing we usually think of when the Bible says there are no other gods is that those other gods do not exist. God alone exists, and the others are fictional replacements. We can name other gods like we name characters on cartoon shows from Nickelodeon, like Ed, Edd and Eddy, or any of the 38,000 characters from Marvel Comics. But we know those characters are all imaginary, just like the gods of the Egyptians or the Greeks. Courage the Cowardly dog isn't a real dog, and Osiris isn't a real god. They're fictional.

But when you study the characteristics of gods from other religions, including Hinduism, Islam, and Mormonism, you come to find that there is a deeper and even more significant meaning behind saying there are no other gods. The Bible tells us in the first verses that God is the creator of the heavens and the earth. He is not part of the cosmos, he MADE the cosmos. This is not true of any of the pagan gods of old, nor of any of the gods of modern religions.

Only the God of the Bible is the creator of the heavens and the earth. He alone is God.

God is eternal and does not depend on anything or anyone else for his existence. Again, this is a description which is almost entirely unique to the Biblical description of God. All other gods have parents and grandparents, or were created by something or someone else, or popped out of a flower which grew out of another god's belly button, or sprang from another god's forehead like a zit. All of them were created by something and thus depend on something before themselves for their existence. But not the one true God. He is existence and was not created.

ONLY the God of the Bible is self existent and eternal. He alone is God.

God is holy and unchanging. This is not the way other religions describe their gods. Other religions have gods which have weaknesses. Their gods evolve and grow and learn. Their gods fight among themselves. Our God has the right to judge, not merely because of the nature of his position of authority, but because of the nature of His character. Other religions don't dare to claim anything so great about their gods.

Only the God of the Bible is perfect in love, mercy, wisdom and righteousness. He alone is God.

And while every religion has gods that demand something- all religions demand a sacrifice of some kind- **only the one True God offers Himself as the sacrifice that pays for our sins.** No other religion even suggests something so amazing and wonderful as a God who loves us so much that He stoops to become a man so that he could live a perfect life and then choose to die as the sacrifice that pays for our sins. Other gods are so small that you can pay off your own debt, or you can work enough to put the gods in your debt, but only the one true God is so great that he pays the debt he does not owe, because we owed a debt that we could not pay.

Only Christianity could give us a verse like John 3:16

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

In modern culture the word “God” gets tossed around by a lot of people, and it’s applied to a lot of different beings. A lot of religions say they have gods- but once you begin to understand the God of the Bible, you start to see that all of those other gods are NOT really gods at all. They are not self-existent, but rather need to be made by someone or something else. They do not bring the cosmos into being, but rather are just another part of the universe. They cannot be the standard of holy perfection, as they are weak, changing beings who can be fooled or lied to. And they are small enough to be bought with the money of mankind or the repetitive ceremonies of disinterested and often selfish crowds.

Only Jesus is the self existent creator of the heavens and the earth. Only Jesus is the Holy and unchanging judge and king of the universe. And only Jesus loves all of us enough to pay for our sins with his own blood so that we can be forgiven and free. **He alone is God.**

#13. How is God different from the gods?

He alone is Lord of ALL



When one looks into any pagan culture, either today or in the roughly 4,000 years of recorded human history (post flood), we find that atheism is exceedingly rare. The idea that such a beautifully and well designed universe as ours could have made itself is an idea so absurd that it has only recently found a foothold in the vacuum left from westerners rejecting Christianity. All past and almost all present cultures have religions of some kind, with gods who govern and control the world. That we are governed by spiritual authority above us has always been obvious to most of us.

If one goes by the popular assumptions of media and western culture, one could easily assume that all religions are pretty much the same and thus that all gods are pretty much the same. While this is true in many instances, there is one which always stands out among the others, and that is the God of the Bible. There is no other god like Him.

One of the ways in which our God is different from the man made, imagined gods of pagan religions is the fact that He alone is God, and He is God of ALL. Other gods are merely the god of the Babylonians, or the gods of the Greeks, or the gods of the Egyptians. Small, local deities with limited powers and limited peoples. Only the one True God is God of ALL.

This is revisited many times in both the New Testament and the Old Testament.

"...God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords..." -1 Timothy 6:15 (NIV)

"...God is the King of all the earth..."

-Psalm 47:7

"The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all." -Psalm 103:19

***"Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all."
- 1 Chronicles 29:11 (NIV)***

***"...and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."
-Daniel 7:13-14***

Jesus reaffirms the fact that He is the one described in Daniel- the one who has dominion over all peoples, nations and languages- during his trial before the high priest:

***"Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."
-Mark 14:61-62***

Once again, the vast majority of religions cannot and do not make this claim about their gods. Their gods live in temples, built by human hands. In Mormonism, their god cannot be said to be god of all, even if one would grant that he is god over all of earth. Their religious cosmology has an infinite collection of gods over different planets. The Mormon god is one god of many, himself under many other, greater gods. Similarly, the god of Islam is only called 'king of the universe' because Mohammed built his religion on the distorted pieces of Christianity and Judaism which he was introduced to as a child. Furthermore, Islam itself claims that the Quran was for the Arab peoples alone, not all people and languages. Mohammed told Christians and Jews that he and his revelation were not supposed to judge them, but that they should look to the Bible (1). In addition, the Quran contains (or contained, depending on who you ask) verses affirming other deities. In what has become known as the "Satanic Verses," Surah 53 names three of Allah's daughters and other verses imply that he has a wife (just as the god of Mormonism is said to).

Never is the God of the Jews presented as ONLY the God of the Jews. He doesn't belong to them alone- ***they belong to Him***. From the first pages of the Bible, we are given the picture of God's relationship to the world. He is not one god of many, He is THE God of heaven. He is not the god of wine, or the god of thunder, He is the God of All Creation. And he is not the God of Israel alone. He is the God of all peoples, nations, and languages. This is one of the reasons why Genesis is so important. The stories of creation, the flood, and the tower of Babel explain

how all of the earth's people are one people- children of Adam and Eve- and all made by the one Great God and King of the Universe. There was one creation, one creator God, and one human race made in His image. The Bible is for all people, everywhere. Salvation through Jesus Christ is for all people from all peoples, nations and languages. There is one God, one Lord and Savior.

*"For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;
he is to be feared above all gods.
For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols,
but the Lord made the heavens."*

Psalm 96:4-5

(1)https://www.answering-islam.org/Quran/Contra/bible_or_quran.html

#14. How is God different from the gods? He alone Created EVERYTHING



Every religion, cult, and popular movie based on comic books makes use of the word “god” to refer to its most powerful characters, sometimes merely because they are powerful. When the Bible uses the word “God” it can be easy to assume that we mean the same thing that everyone else does. More specifically, when you are raised in a Christian culture (as the west still is in some aspects) it can be easy to get your notion of what a “god” is from a loose Judeo/Christian understanding of the term. The Bible refers to God by calling him the King of all Kings, the Judge of the Universe, and the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth. The Bible tells us that God is personal, and even goes as far as saying “*God is love*” (1 John 4:8). When this is the cultural background you come from, it is easy to assume that these descriptors of God apply to any character to whom the label of “god” is applied, but it simply isn’t true.

Exodus 15:11 (NIV) says “*Who among the gods is like you, LORD? Who is like you-- majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?*” The question is rhetorical, because it is understood that NO ONE is like the one true God. No religion has ever imagined a god like the true God who made the heavens and the earth- and in fact that is one of the ways in which He is different from all imagined gods. The God of the Bible created the heavens and the earth.

Only in Islam is this idea echoed, and only indirectly. In no other religion is their god given credit for calling ALL of time, space, matter and energy into being, filling the heavens with stars and filling the earth with life. The only reason why it is attributed to Allah in Islam is because Islam

assumes that Allah is the God of the Jews, and the Jews had this amazing creation story. Even still, The Qur'an says that *"the heavens and the earth were joined together as one unit, before We clove them asunder"* (21:30). While some Islamic scholars try to make this sound like the Biblical account of Creation Ex Nihilo (*out of nothing*) it instead sounds like any other pagan creation account where the creation is made by some act of violence against an existing protoworld. Instead of being given credit for creating the heavens and the earth, it most likely means nothing more than Allah is meant to have separated the sky from the ground, though he is given credit for CREATING neither.

In many pagan religions, there is a creation account where in the god or gods (*or sometimes simply mighty ancestors*) make the present world, but it is always a "creation" which is taking the prior creation and reforming it. For example, the book, *"In The Beginning- Creation Stories from Around the World"* by Virginai Hamilton describes a range of such stories, including that of the Yoruba people of Nigeria. Their creation story begins this way; **"Olorun was the Owner of the Sky and the highest Being. He lived in the sky with the other spirits. In the beginning, the earth was all watery, just a marshy place, a waste."**

These stories open with existing realms, families, skies and rivers already in place, waiting to be formed. All of these stories assume the existence of time and space and matter. There is time long before the creation events described. There are places and things, and often animals and beings very much like humans. The idea of *nothing* is somehow unthinkable. After all, we all seem to know that from nothing, nothing comes. When WE create, we need materials and space and time to do it. Surely the gods too need to walk down to the riverbed and gather clay to form into the first horse. Surely the gods too needed tools to change their environment as any builder needs to make his home out of the things he finds.

Yet, when the one true God stepped into the nothing, He was capable of making EVERYTHING. Not just the THINGS, and not just the FORM of those things, but the matter itself, and the space in which it exists, and the time it inhabits, and the different kinds of energy that makes it move. Biblical creation is unlike any other, and the God who Created is different than any we have been able to imagine.

Genesis 1 (ESV) opens with the declaration that, **"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."** In the Hebrew, the phrase *"The Heavens and the Earth"* is what we in modern english would call *the Universe*. In other words- everything that is. Very literally it is everything under your feet and everything over your head. It is not merely land and sky, but EVERYTHING. This idea is echoed across the Bible:

"For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them..."

Exodus 20:11 (ESV)

"All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made."

John 1:3 (NKJV)

“...the God in whom [Abraham] believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.”

Romans 4:17 (ESV)

“For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible...”

Colossians 1:16 (NKJV)

While many different events and beings are given credit for the existence of different parts of the universe, only one Creation account actually accounts for the universe. Only one God is capable of making the heavens and the earth. Only the one true God, the god described in the Bible, is Creator of ***everything***. Who is like The LORD-- majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? No one is like Him! He alone is Creator, and He alone is worthy of praise!

#15. How is God different from the gods? The Cosmological Argument



Christian apologist William Lane Craig is known for making popular the Cosmological argument⁽¹⁾, or as he sometimes refers to it, the Kalam Cosmological argument ("*kalam*" is the Arabic word for medieval theology). The argument is fairly simple and can be summed up in only three steps:

1. Whatever *begins to exist* has a *cause* of its beginning.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore, the universe has a cause of its beginning.

The argument is obviously logical. The significance of this argument is made clear once one begins to understand the various alternatives to Biblical Creation, as well as the modern understanding of physics. This argument is not only a powerful argument for theism, but for the Christian worldview.

Was there a Beginning?

To begin with, not all worldviews or religions believe that the universe had a beginning. Mormonism, to give one example, doesn't teach that their god created the heavens and the earth. Their god was born as an ordinary man on a distant planet under a different god, who himself was born as a man under a different god, and so on, into the infinite past. They have no creation story, and so this argument for the existence of God cannot be used to prove the existence of the Mormon god.

Many religions face the same or similar issues. Many pagan religions, cults, or tribal religions don't have a creation story where in the heavens and the earth come into being. The universe in their stories has simply always been, and at some point a god or gods begin to form our world out of what was already there. Atheism also had no concept of a first moment in time and creation of the cosmos until the middle of the last century. It would not be until after World War 2 that the Big Bang model would be popularized, and so atheism was built on some vague understanding of a universe which was eternal in its past.

Modern Physics and the Beginning of the Universe

The Cosmological argument becomes more powerful when one understands its ability to intertwine with modern physics. Our modern understanding of the universe is distinct from the ancient view, and we now understand the universe to be made of matter and energy, inhabiting space and time. Furthermore, we have several laws of physics which are not only unquestioned in modern science, but which put a point on this argument. They are known as the laws of thermodynamics, and the relevant points they make are these:

1. Matter and energy can change form, but they can never be created or destroyed.
(They cannot come into being or stop existing- they can only change form)
2. Entropy is always increasing for the entire universe.
(usable energy is being used up and changing into unusable forms of energy)

From the second law, we can see that the universe cannot be infinitely old. The universe is cooling off and running out of usable energy. However, it has not yet run out. Usable energy still exists. Logically, this means the universe has **not** had *infinite time* to use all of its energy.

To give you a picture of what this means, imagine you are exploring a cave. After walking deep into the darkness, you find a candle burning, casting its light on the wall of the cave. While you can't know for certain how long it's been there, you can determine some kind of maximum time based on the kind of wax it is made of and how hot it burns and how fast it melts. Even more certainly you can know that it has not ALWAYS been there, shining in that cave. It was lit fairly recently. Given enough time, it will burn out. What is true of that candle is true for every part of the universe. Eventually it will burn out.

Because the universe is still in motion, with stars sending great amounts of heat into the space around them, we can know for certain that the universe is not infinitely old. But that means there was a first moment of the universe- a first moment of time.

Yet, remember that the first law tells us that energy cannot be created or destroyed according to the laws of nature. This means that there can be no *Natural* explanation for the matter and energy of the universe coming into being. Also, it is logically obvious that nothing can create itself. The cause of the universe- of all of nature- must be outside of nature. Therefore, the universe needs an explanation which is *SUPERnatural*.

ONLY The One True God can be the Creator

The laws of physics tell us that the universe **MUST** have had a beginning- it began to exist. The Cosmological argument makes clear that anything that begins to exist must have a cause, and so, logically, the universe itself must have a cause. The universe cannot cause itself, and we know from the laws of physics that the cause of the universe needs a *SUPERnatural* cause, since matter and energy cannot be created by any natural means.

Yet, almost no religions or worldviews provide an answer to who or what that supernatural cause could be. Their gods do not create the heavens and the earth, and furthermore, their gods **COULD NOT** create the heavens and the earth, both because they do not have the power, and also because they themselves are part of the universe that needs explaining. So their religions offer no explanation to where the universe came from.

Genesis provides the answer. It states that “**In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.**” The God of scripture can do what no other gods can do, and he tells us that He created the universe in the very first line of the Bible. Therefore, the existence of the universe is not only evidence that God must exist, but also evidence that the God who made the universe must be the God of the Bible, and no other.

For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God.

Hebrews 3:4 (NKJV)

(1) <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/existence-nature-of-god/the-kalam-cosmological-argument/>

#16. How is God different from the gods? He alone is the foundation of Objective Morality



There is a classic argument for the existence of God called the moral argument. It goes like this:

1. If God does not exist, objective moral values do not exist
(or, If objective morals exist, then God does exist)
2. Objective moral values do exist
3. Therefore, God exists

This argument is based on the fact that all of mankind can observe the reality of objective morals, just as we can observe the reality of colors. Everyone can know that kindness is good and cruelty is evil with the same kind of first hand observation by which we can know that blue is not red.

If you discuss this with an atheist, you may be confronted with a very common objection that is built on a simple misunderstanding. Your atheist friend may respond as if this argument is stating that only religious people can be good people. However, the argument is about the objective nature of morality needing for its explanation the objective existence of God. The

argument is not saying that *your belief* in the existence of God is the foundation for objective morals and it is not saying anything about how good religious people are as compared to unbelievers. It is saying that *God Himself* is the foundation for objective morals, just as the existence of light is required for there to be colors. When we acknowledge that right and wrong are real, we are acknowledging the fact that God exists, just as we are acknowledging the existence of light when we acknowledge red and blue.

Why Not Zeus?

This argument may seem to be merely an argument for theism, prompting the skeptical retort "OK, maybe *A god* exists, but how do you know it's not Zeus or Thor? Why should we believe that *YOUR God* exists?" However, the argument only truly works for the one true God- the God of the Bible.

If I may make another metaphor- the observation of the sunset may be something any model of the earth has to contend with since it is something everyone can observe, but in fact it is an observation which can **ONLY** be used to support the globe earth model. It cannot be used to support the flat earth model and can in fact be used to disprove it. Similarly, any religion or worldview will try to explain objective morality within the context of their model, but in fact **ONLY** the God of the Bible makes sense of the existence of objective morals, and therefore objective morals can **ONLY** be used to prove the existence of the one true God revealed in scripture.

Muslims and Mormons may want to use this argument to prove the existence of their gods, but the argument cannot be used to show evidence of those gods because they cannot be the foundation of objective morals anymore than Zeus or Thor could be. Zeus and Thor are essentially men (*like comic book superheroes*), driven by selfish passions, capable of being misled and ultimately even murdered. Both have parents and so there were generations of beings before them. They do not have unchanging characters, but may change their minds or their values. They may do things which are judged by a standard above them. For many reasons, there is no way they could be the necessary foundation for morality.

The god of Mormonism is a man who was once merely human and under a different god who was himself once merely a man under a different god, etc. All of those gods were born into religious systems with already existing morals. The moral decrees of such gods are no more objectively moral than the changing laws of a government. Similarly, the god of Islam doesn't base his laws on unchanging principles, but rather chooses arbitrarily what he will decree. The only foundation for his followers is blind, unquestioning obedience. It's not about doing right, it is merely about submission. Also, the decrees of Allah are in such conflict with each other that the religion of Islam is forced to have a doctrine called "abrogation." Christian apologist David Wood (1) explains it this way:

"According to the Qur'an, no one can change Allah's words (6:115; 18:27). Yet Allah himself frequently changes his words by revealing a verse that abrogates (or cancels) an earlier verse..."

A god whose allegedly eternal and unchanging holy book disagrees with itself enough to warrant a doctrine canceling parts of it in favor of other parts cannot be the foundation for objective morality.

Unchanging Morals Require an Unchanging Law Giver

For morals to be truly objective, they need to be an unchanging moral law that comes from an unchanging law giver. Only the God of the Bible has the unchanging character and nature by which an objective moral standard can be based. As I said in the chapter on God and Isaac Newton, in order for good and bad to be REAL, there has to be a fixed, unchanging point.

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." Hebrews 13:8(NIV)

"I the Lord do not change." Malachi 3:6 (NIV)

We know from creation that God is the maker of the heavens and the earth. He is the creator of everything that is, and even space and time itself. All of creation changes. When considering the nature of objective morality, the only answer that makes any sense is the anchoring of objective morality in the unchanging, eternal character and nature of God. We must anchor objective morality in God because He is unchanging and eternal. He is literally the only possible fixed point. He is the only possible foundation for the unchanging moral law.

"How great you are, Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you..."
2 Samuel 7:22

The moral argument is just one of many philosophical arguments for the existence of God, but like the others, it cannot be used as evidence for just any being which is labeled as a "god." Objective morals can only exist if they are founded in the character and nature of the one true, unchanging, Holy God that reveals Himself in scripture.

To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. 1 Timothy 1:17 (ESV)

(1) <http://www.answeringmuslims.com/2014/03/the-quran-and-problem-of-abrogation.html>

#17 What is the Trinity?

WHAT IS THE TRINITY?



One of the simplest pieces of Biblical doctrine is the concept of Trinity. The name, of course, comes from the concept of tri-unity. And the tri (three) which are united are Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Easy peasy.

After that in depth definition, I feel I can assume that this issue is cleared up for everyone and we can just move on to other topics.

No? Some of you are still confused?

Don't feel bad. The truth is, NO ONE understands the doctrine of the Trinity. Of course, people much smarter than me can explain it in ways which are clear and non-contradictory, but much like the idea of "infinity" we can all *talk* about it (*some better than others*) but no one REALLY understands it. Our brains simply don't have the hardware, language or experience it would take to understand and then put these things into words.

That's why we come up with pictures, like that sideways 8 that people use to represent infinity. It's a sideways 8, but somehow we all just accept that it's a placeholder for "*the sum of all possible numbers.*" We have to, though, because no one can REALLY imagine infinity.

What the Trinity is Not

Let me start with a few things the Trinity is *not*, the first of which come to us from our friends in Islam or more specifically, from Islam itself (1). The Trinity is not, as the Quran seems to teach, God the Father, His Son Jesus, and Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

“And [beware the Day] when Allah will say, ‘O Jesus, Son of Mary, did you say to the people, ‘Take me and my mother as deities besides Allah?’” (Surah 5:116).

Mary is not nor has she ever been a part of the doctrine of the Trinity. If you wind up discussing this with your Muslim friends and neighbors, keep in mind that this may be something they’ve been taught.

The Quran also teaches that the doctrine of the Trinity is the belief that we have three Gods. **“They have certainly disbelieved who say, ‘Allah is the third of three.’ There is no god except one God.” (Surah 5:73).**

The Christian church has never said, *“We have three Gods, but we’re going to pretend that we have one God.”* Pretending that three is one is not an accurate depiction of the Trinity, though it is the most common misconception. It is also what Mormonism means by their own use of the word “Trinity.” In Mormon doctrine, the Father (or, Father God) is a man who was elevated to the status of godhood, and Jesus and the Holy Spirit are created beings who also somehow attained the status of godhood. But while Mormonism uses the word “trinity” to describe these three beings, they are clearly and distinctly three separate beings of different kinds. This is not a trinity, but merely a trio- three persons.

According to Mormonism, Jesus is a created being, the first spirit to be born of the Father (Mormon Doctrine, p.129) and a celestial mother (Mormon Doctrine, p.516). Therefore, Jesus could not be the eternal God or part of an eternal Trinity. Mormons also teach that both the Father and the Son are men with bodies of flesh and bone (Doctrine & Covenants 132:20; Articles of Faith, p 38); as two separate people, the Father and the Son cannot be considered “one.” (2)

In a sermon delivered in 1857, LDS President Heber C. Kimball stated: “The Holy Ghost is a man; he is one of the sons of our Father and our God; and he is that man that stood next to Jesus Christ, just as I stand by Brother Brigham.” (3)

This is not what the Bible teaches about the Trinity.

One more common error is called modalism or unitarianism, which is essentially the idea that God is one person who changes costumes. This is the belief that God the Father IS Jesus- not

in some sense of eternal unity, but just the same person using a different name, like an actor taking on a role, or like the fact that I am “husband” to my wife and “daddy” to my daughter. This idea says that Father, Son, and Holy spirit are just differing name tags and not different persons. Again, this is very clearly not what the Bible teaches.

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not three GODS and they are not merely three names for the same person, they are three PERSONS in ONE God. But how is *one* being *three* persons? How can three be one? Doesn't this violate basic math? This will be the position of any skeptic attacking the concept of the Trinity. To answer this criticism, we need to remember that God is eternal, limitless, and infinite.

What is infinity times three? It's infinity. Three infinite persons are one infinite God. When dealing with infinity, three of them is still one of them, which gives us a picture of what the Trinity is like.

Distinguishing WHAT from WHO

The simplest way of describing what the doctrine of the Trinity is intended to say is with this phrase:

The Trinity is one WHAT with three WHO.

NOT three Gods. Not three persons who are one person. Three eternal *persons*, one *God*.

Think of a triangle. Now imagine that each of the three angles represents a center of self- a first person consciousness, a person. Those three angles are distinct. They are not ONE angle, there are three of them. But they are not so separate as to be distinct shapes. Those three angles comprise a single triangle as the three Persons of the Trinity make one God. It is the unity of those three angles which makes it a triangle. Three angles, one shape.

Three persons, one God. Three WHO with a single WHAT.

We should not be discouraged by the difficulty of this or any other doctrines. Don't allow anyone to convince you to believe that the complexity is reason to doubt. The truth is always complex, and nothing real is ever as simple as it first appears. This is one of the hallmarks of truth. While the Trinity is one of the Biblical concepts which is among the most difficult to understand and also one of the easiest to misunderstand, it is still a doctrine that has been foundational to the Christian church for two thousand years, and which is clearly taught in the Bible.

“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.” Matthew 28:19 (NIV)

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Matthew 3:16-17

- (1) <https://carm.org/did-the-author-of-the-quran-understand-the-trinity>
- (2) <https://www.gotquestions.org/Mormons-believe-Trinity.html>
- (3) <https://www.ldsliving.com/4-things-we-know-about-the-holy-ghost/s/91381>

#18 Pictures of the Trinity



The doctrine of the Trinity is one of the most difficult to understand. In the Bible God reveals Himself as ONE God, but as three persons. Deuteronomy 6:4 says, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one."

Transliterated from Hebrew, it is "Sh'ma Yisra'eil Adonai Eloheinu Adonai echad."

The word in Hebrew for "one" here, is "echad." But it doesn't mean merely a single unity with no distinctions. Rather it is the word used for a husband and wife. In Genesis 2:24 we read, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." (*literally, "and be joined to his wife shall become flesh one."*)

That "one" in Hebrew is "echad".

In Matthew 28:19 (NIV) Jesus says "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." The key to understanding this doctrine is to understand that God is not THREE Gods and also ONE God, nor is He THREE Persons and also ONE Person.

God is Three Persons in One God.

There is really nothing in our experience like God, but in order to help people grasp the concept, the Church has made use of various pictures through its history to illustrate this doctrine. For instance, you may be familiar with the association of the three leaf clover (the shamrock) and

St. Patrick. In order to give a picture of the Trinity to the people of Ireland, St. Patrick explained how the three leaves of the shamrock are united in one shamrock.

The Triangle

One image that the church has used as a placeholder for the Trinity is the triangle. In a sense, the triangle is the unity of three angles. It's not three distinct objects, but three things that make up one thing. Each angle has a particular relationship to the others. There is no place where one angle ends and the next begins, so that are really all parts of the same whole, yet being distinct. An angle is not a triangle, but a triangle is made of three angles. Also, it's impossible to imagine a shape with only two angles, which is a picture of the unchangeable nature of God. As a symbolic picture it works, and it's easy to draw, like that sideways 8 we use to represent infinity.

Water

Like with infinity, there can only be pictures provided to help us grasp a concept that is bigger than our heads. While in some way they all fail, they can each help give us a sense of the bigger, true picture. The most common modern picture of the Trinity is that of water.

Water is one substance, often referenced by its chemical formula, H₂O (One Oxygen and two Hydrogen). Water can be a solid (ice), liquid (what we commonly call "liquid water") and a gas (steam). These three states have distinct relationships to each other and differ not in their substance but only in the way they appear to us. Steam LOOKS very different than ice to us, but they are the same substance. Similarly, The Holy Spirit may seem very different than Jesus to us, but they are one in substance.

The error which this picture can present is the idea that God is one person who changes form. We imagine that God in the Old Testament is like liquid water which is frozen or solidified in the person of Jesus. Then, Jesus boils away into steam as the Holy Spirit, so that there is still only one person, but now in a different form- like changing costumes. In order to accurately understand this word picture, you have to understand that not only does water exist in all three forms all over the earth, but that there is a state of water wherein it is all three states at the same time which is known as "the triple point." This picture is not meant to show God changing from one person to another, but merely to show that there can be three different appearances of the same substance. When Jesus was born, the Father didn't stop existing, and the Holy Spirit wasn't YET to be at some future time. The whole Trinity has always been, just as all three forms of water are always present on earth.

Taking Yourself To Lunch

Another picture comes from science fiction. Imagine you have a time machine. You take a trip back five years and pick yourself up. Then the two of *you* go back another five years and pick up another you, and the three of you go out for tacos.

There's the three of you sitting at a table, enjoying tacos. Which one is you? Well, in one sense, the oldest one is YOU, but in another sense, all three of them are you. But how many of you are there? At the table eating tacos are three distinct persons, but in another sense there is only one human being eating enough tacos to feed three people. There is one WHAT with three WHO.

If you go out to a movie, how many tickets would you have to buy? Best not to try to figure that out right now. Besides, ten years ago you only wants to see Avatar, and you're SO OVER that movie.

The three of you present another picture of the Trinity, but again with some failure in the metaphor. First, the three of you have different knowledge and experience. The youngest of you remembers things the oldest has forgotten, and the oldest has experiences the other two have not yet had. The Trinity has been in perfect unity for eternity. The Father didn't live alone for a while and then have a Son. The Father and Son have ALWAYS been together in that relationship. When we call them the Father and Son, we are referring to the nature of their relationship, not trying to explain the origin of the Son.

Also, the three of you may have different opinions and values. You've probably grown and changed over the past ten years. You might not even like the you from ten years ago. God is a perfect unity in love. So like any metaphor intended to explain God, this one has some flaws, but if you're a SciFi nerd like me, it can help you imagine three persons who are the same being in essence.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. -2 Corinthians 13:14

To God's elect... who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance. -1 Peter 1:1-2

#19 Why isn't the word "Trinity" in the Bible?



One of the common skeptical attacks against the doctrine of the Trinity is the fact that the word "Trinity" is never used in the Bible. This admittedly verifiable fact is intended to support the idea that the doctrine of the Trinity is, therefore, not in the Bible and is something invented by the church in the third century. While it is true that the word "Trinity" is never used in the Bible, it doesn't follow that the doctrine was invented later by the church. It is in fact the word "Trinity" which was invented in the third century to give a name to the doctrine which is clearly taught in the Bible.

A Latin theologian named Tertullian is given credit for creating the term "Trinity" to refer to the doctrine of the tri-unity of God. Tertullian, in the early third century, was the first to use "Trinity," "person," and "substance" to explain that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are "one in essence – not one in Person." In 325 AD, the First Council of Nicaea drafted wording to explain the doctrine of the Trinity, but both this council and Tertullian were finding words to describe what had already been in the Bible and the church for generations.

The doctrine is clearly taught in much of the New Testament. For example:

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Matthew 3:16-17

To God's elect... who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

1 Peter 1:1-2

What many people don't realize is that the doctrine of the Trinity, while not as clearly formulated in the Old Testament, is hinted at in many Old Testament passages that reveal a plurality in the nature of God. For example, in Genesis 1:1 as God is creating we read, "**In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.**" (ESV). The Hebrew word which we translate as "God" in this verse is "Elohim," which is a *plural* noun, yet the verb for creating is the *singular* verb "bara." In English it would be like this; instead of "he creates," or "they create," saying "they creates." This will be the normal usage though the Old Testament. Any time "Elohim" is used to indicate the one, true God of Israel, it is a plural word but it is always used with a singular verb. Somehow, the Hebrew intends to indicate that God is somehow more than one but acting as one. God is plurality and unity.

In Genesis 1:26 we have an example which is even more clear in English, "**Then God said, "Let us make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness."**" (ESV). While God alone is given credit for the creation, here the text has God saying that there is a plurality of persons responsible for our creation. Yet these persons are so alike that we are made in the image- not of one apart from the others- and not *images* or *likenesses*. Rather, God says of our creation that we are made "in our image, after our likeness." God speaks of Himself in the plural, but as a plural acting as one and who have/has a single image and likeness.

The word "Trinity" is not in the Bible. The word "Bible" is also not in the Bible. The canon of scripture is not recorded in any of the books of the Bible. These facts do not cast doubt on the validity of the Bible nor the orthodox doctrine of the church. Doctrines were clarified and named as the history of the church made it necessary. Heresies were also defined and named as the need arose. We determine the validity of doctrine according to the teaching of scripture alone, and not on trivial matters such as when different words were used to refer to them or when the first attempt to explain the doctrine was written. When skeptics attack the Christian worldview, our only concern need be what the word of God says on the matter. If it is taught in the scripture, then we can put our faith in what God has revealed to us. If it is not found in the Bible then we should examine it with wisdom, searching the scriptures to see if these things be so. As for the doctrine of the Trinity, it may have been named long after the Bible was written, but the description of God being one, while at the same time being a plurality of persons is found from Genesis to Revelation in different ways. The doctrine of the Trinity is not in doubt, and it is the clear teaching of the Bible.

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." -2 Corinthians 13:14 (ESV)

#20 Who is Jesus? He is God and man.



The Gospel according to John begins this way:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:1-3 & 14 (ESV)

Here we get an echo of the creation as told in Genesis and the beginnings of the doctrine of the Trinity. The Word- Jesus- was with God, and yet he WAS God. In Genesis we read God named with a plural noun, but ascribed action in singular verbs. If there was a plurality of persons acting in the beginning, who are They/He? Here John pulls back that curtain a little more as he begins to tell us the story of Jesus- the Son of God. He was there at the beginning when God alone created the heavens and the earth. He was with God, and He IS God. God alone creates, yet here John tells us that Jesus, the Word of God, made all things. These verses only make sense in the light of the doctrine of the Trinity. There is one God, but He is three persons. There is the Father and there is the Son, and later (John 1: 32-34) we will be told there is the Holy Spirit.

John drops the biggest surprise on us in verse 14 when he tells us that the Word became flesh. This divine creator of all things became a normal living man and lived among them! If you were raised in the church, then the shock of this statement has no doubt worn off, but imagine for a moment that you were one of the members of Hamlet’s Court in the play *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare. Imagine that Hamlet’s friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern come to him and let

him know that they have MET William Shakespeare. They tell Hamlet that they've had dinner with him! He's become one of the characters in the play and he could walk out onto that stage at any moment!

This declaration of John's is no less astounding than this, and in many ways much more so. We learn from the Bible that Jesus was born as a baby from a normal human woman. He did not descend from the heavens on a cloud, but took on full humanity, so much so that He had a birthday. He started out as a baby. He was fully human.

To clarify, Jesus is the second person of the Trinity- fully God and in scripture given credit for creating the heavens and the earth. Yet, He was born into human history as a normal human being. Well, normal biologically. But the scriptures reveal to us a Son of God who was and is fully God, and yet who also became fully man, without ceasing to be God.

We refer to this as *the two natures of Jesus*. He was and is fully God, and then he stepped into history and became fully man. This is not only a key doctrine, but its rejection has been at the heart of many different heresies over the years. Many cults deny the divinity of Christ, while others reject his Humanity. The Bible clearly states both. Jesus is the divine Son of God, fully God, and he took on humanity to live as a man for just over thirty years here on earth.

#21 Why Did the Son of God become Human?



When someone new to the Christian worldview learns that Jesus is the incarnate Son of God, both fully God and yet still fully man, they may quickly come to wonder why the Son of God would become a man. After all, the Bible does not teach that Jesus, the Son of God and 2nd person of the Trinity was always human, but rather He chose to take on humanity and be born as a baby boy in 1st century Israel. Why would he do that?

The Bible teaches us that Jesus took on humanity in multiple places. John 1:14 referring to Jesus as "the Word of God" says, "*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...*"

Philippians 2:7 says of Jesus that he "*emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.*"

Galatians 4:4-5 says, "*God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*"

This passage in Galatians gives us the answer- Jesus became a man because the end goal of God was to be able to adopt us into His family as daughters and sons- so that he could be our Father.

John 1:12-13 says "*But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*"

Philippians 2:7-11 [Jesus Christ] "*emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient*

to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This brings us back to John 3:16

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16 (ESV)

#22 Where does Jesus say “I am God, worship me”?



The short answer to the question of “Who is Jesus?” is that Jesus is God. This is not some later invention of the church as is asserted in Dan Brown’s *The DiVinci Code*, but is found all throughout the scriptures, starting with the prophecies about the coming Messiah in the Old Testament.

Even still, Muslim apologists often dismiss this claim by demanding to know where in the scripture Jesus says, “I am God, worship me.” Because this phrase is never put in the mouth of Jesus by the New Testament authors, it is asserted by Muslim apologists that Jesus never claimed divinity, but rather that this was added to church doctrine in the centuries that followed.

While it is true that this specific phrase is never said by Jesus in the pages of scripture, it can still be known with certainty that Jesus and His disciples presented Him as God from the very birth of the church, and that those who rejected Jesus also knew that He was making this claim.

For example, in John 20:28, Thomas calls Jesus *“My Lord and my God!”* In Matthew 16:16 Peter says to Jesus, *“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”* In no such case throughout the gospels does Jesus do or say anything to the contrary, but rather accepts both praise and worship, as well as the declaration that He is divine. In fact, in Matthew 16:17 Jesus not only affirms Peter’s declaration, but tells him that it was God who opened his eyes to this truth;

“Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 16:17 ESV)

In contrast, we read in Acts 14 that as Paul and Barnabas are being used by God to perform miracles of healing, the men of Lystra decide that Paul and Barnabas must be gods and begin trying to offer them worship. In Acts 14:14-15 the two find out that they are being offered worship and being called gods and, quite unlike Jesus, they rebuke the men for this and direct them to Jesus;

“But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.”

Again in Revelation 22:9 John, caught up in the vision of glory to come, falls down to worship an angel, but the angel rebukes him, saying; ***“You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”***

The New Testament is as clear as the Old that God alone should be called God, and that He alone should accept worship. If Jesus were merely a prophet, as is taught in Islam, then it would be blasphemy for Him to accept worship and be called God by others. Yet, Jesus not only accepts worship and the declaration of his divinity from His disciples, but He professes it Himself.

In John 8:58-58 we read, ***“Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” So they picked up stones to throw at him...”***

Jesus declares Himself to be before Abraham, uses the name of God revealed to Moses, ***“I am,”*** and in response the Jews pick up stones to put Him to death for blasphemy. Ultimately this would be the charge for which Jesus would be crucified. He declared Himself to be God, but they refused to believe it and it was for this that they put him to death.

One declaration of His divinity which often is missed by English readers is Jesus common name for Himself- ***“The Son of Man.”*** When Peter declares Jesus to be “the Son of the living God” in Matthew 16, he is answering this question from Jesus; ***“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”*** In the four gospels, Jesus uses this term to refer to himself more than eighty times. While this term can be used to refer to someone who is literally the son of a man, Jesus uses it to make reference to Daniel 7:13-14, which describes this ***“one like a son of man”*** as clearly more than merely a man;

“...behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.

And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

Jesus clarifies His use of this term, leaving no room for confusion or doubt, during the trial recorded in Matthew 26 and Mark 14. Jesus is asked if He is the Christ and the Son of God and he replies, ***"I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."*** (Mark 14:62, ESV).

In case there was any doubt as to what Jesus meant, the text tells us how His words were interpreted by these scholars of the law;

"And the high priest tore his garments and said, "What further witnesses do we need? You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?" And they all condemned him as deserving death." (Mark 14:63-64, ESV)

Jesus declares Himself to be the God of the Jews, His disciples declare Him to be Lord and God, and those who rejected Him understood perfectly that He was declaring Himself to be their God. While the phrase "I am God, worship me" is never said by Jesus, this attack on the Bible fails for many reasons.

First, because Jesus did not speak English, and so we cannot expect that this or ANY English phrase would have been said by Him.

Secondly, because there are many different ways to communicate an idea clearly, and so this arbitrary demand that Jesus use this particular phrase is groundless.

Third, it is just as clear that while the apostles and angels DID tell people not to worship them, Jesus never did rebuke anyone for offering Him worship. Instead He declared Himself to be the God of the Jews and the Son of God in harmony with the Trinity. He accepted worship, claimed to be able to forgive sins, and gave many signs and teachings which pointed back to the work of God in the Old Testament, to show that He truly was and is our Lord and our God!

Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. (John 14:9 NIV)

#23 What is salvation?



Here is the most important distinction between Christianity and any other religion. In every other, man made religion, their gods make demands of you which you can work to fulfill, either earning you something or maybe putting them in your debt. The one true God is bigger than man made gods. Our sin is not a parking ticket we can pay our way out of with a little effort. It is rebellion against the God, Creator, King and Judge of the Universe. Every sin is a terrible, serious matter. So, that's the bad news. But, unlike every other man made system, the Bible offers Good News! ***The GOSPEL:***

G- God made you to have a personal relationship with Him.

O- Our sins separate us from God

S- Sin cannot be removed with good works.

P- Paying the price for sin, Jesus died and rose again

E- Everyone who trusts in Him alone has eternal life.

L- Life with Jesus starts now and lasts forever

Now, if you got your theology from watching the Simpsons, you're probably asking, *"Does the Bible really teach this? Doesn't it teach that you have to obey the Ten Commandments to get into heaven? Don't you have to wear a clean sweater and have perfect Sunday School attendance?"* Oh, you poor misguided souls. Don't worry. I am going to show you some Bible verses that will astound you!

Here's Jesus talking about himself (*The Son of God*) to a religious big wig in John chapter three, verses 16-18:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."

And Paul writes about it in his letter to the Romans, chapter five:

"God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

"OK," you're saying, "love love love. Apparently that's all over the Bible, but what's all this about not being able to pay for our sins with good works? Isn't that what the ten commandments are for? Isn't that why we do good works? Aren't we buying the stairway to heaven?"

Read on, friends, and be AMAZED!

John 5:24 is Jesus talking about himself again;

"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life."

And then in John 14, verse six:

"Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

What is the way to God?

Jesus.

What is the truth that will save you from sin?

Jesus.

Where do we get eternal life?

Jesus.

It's all about Jesus.

Still think you earn your salvation? Well, my man Paul has lots more to say on this subject. Check him out in Romans 3: 21-25:

“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.”

Paul continues to explain this in Romans chapter 11, verse 6:

“But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.”

And then in Galatians 2:20 & 21 he's all:

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.”

And you can be all, OK Paul! We get it! But he keeps going in Ephesians chapter One, verse seven:

“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.”

And before you can tell him that you seriously have it this time, the Ephesians are all, “Wait, what?” and you roll your eyes, but Paul is happy to keep on going in chapter two verses eight and nine:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

At this point you might be thinking, “Woah! The Bible seems to say this over and over!”

Yes, it does. Just do a search for the word Grace over at biblegateway.com and you’ll see it pop up nearing two hundred times across the New Testament (*Depending on your translations of course*).

Heaven is discussed, mentioned, alluded to, and shown in all kinds of ways. Here’s the important things to know: 2 Corinthians 5:1

“For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

The tent is your body. God has a plan to give you something better when you are done with this tent. THAT one will last.

Ephesians 2: 4-6 says this: ***“God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”***

See? Our heavenly home is so secure through Jesus Christ, Paul talks about it in the past tense. We were SEATED with Him. We already have our eternal life and our eternal home. We’re just waiting to catch the bus to heaven. The only downside is, the bus is death- literally. But once you get there, you won’t mind. Besides, how bad is a bus ride when you are going home? Not too bad at all. Even if the bus smells funny and it’s a

long, bumpy ride, you should look forward to catching that bus. There is going to be one sweet welcome home party when you get there.

Not saved? No problem.

It's as easy as A B C.

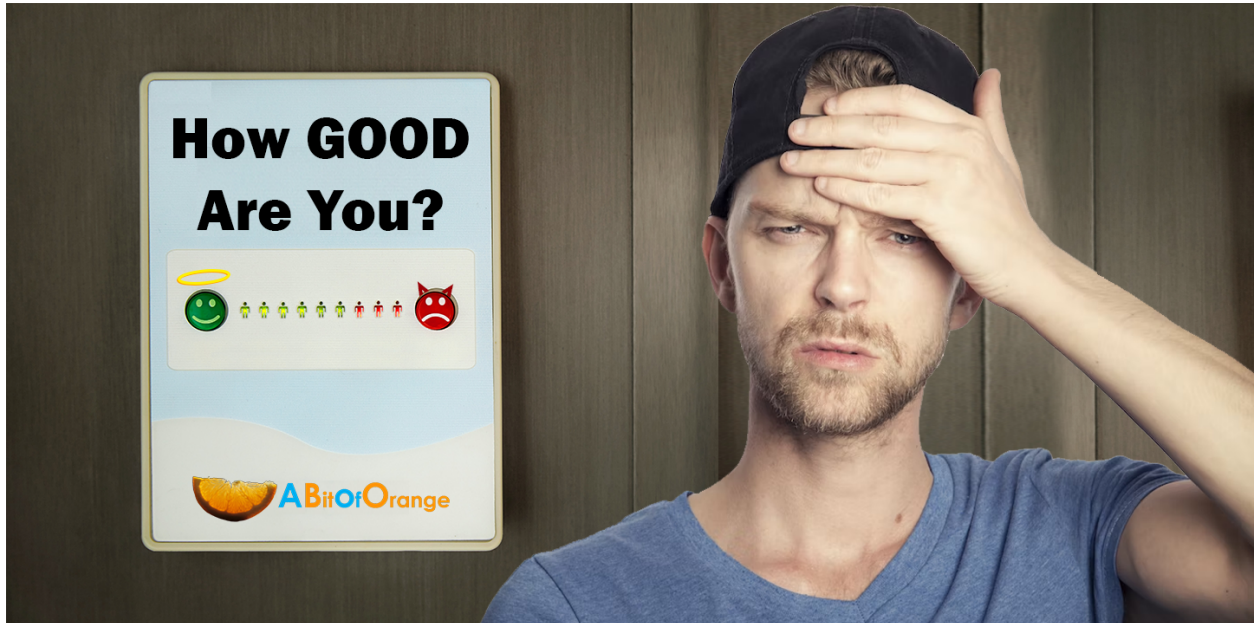
1. **Accept** that you are a sinner in need of God's Grace.
2. **Believe** that Jesus died for your sins and paid for them all, making you right with God- and rose from death.
3. **Confess** your faith. *(I suggest using Baptism AND your mouth, since the Bible tells us to do both.)*

First, confess this to God in prayer. Prayer is nothing real fancy- it's talking to God. You don't have to know any particular religious words. Just come to your creator and king and tell Him you accept, you believe, and you confess it to be true.

Commit yourself to loving and serving God for the rest of your days, and he will never leave you or abandon you. Now, like a marriage, you haven't reached the finish line once you make this commitment-you have taken your first steps into a larger world. You are saved, but that is just the beginning of a new and eternal life. You're a child of God! You have an eternal salvation and a home in heaven. God almighty has adopted you into His family, so love your Daddy and make Him proud!

And whenever our buses come for us, I'll be seeing you in heaven. THAT is gonna be sweet. The heaven part. The bus is still gonna be the bus.

#24 The GOSPEL- Part 1: Would You Like to Take a Survey?



The word "Gospel" means "Good News." It is a declaration of celebration or victory. But before I tell you the good news, I need to tell you the bad news. But before I tell you that bad news, I need to have you take a quick survey:

How GOOD are you?

On a scale from 1 to 10. Think about all of the things you do, say, think, and feel, and decide how good you are. And remember, I'm asking how good you ARE, not how good you wish you were.

- 10- I'm practically perfect in every way.
- 9- I'm almost entirely good.
- 8- I'm very good.
- 7- I'm pretty good.
- 6- I'm a little more good than bad.
- 5- I'm as good as I am bad.
- 4- I'm more bad than good.
- 3- I'm kind of bad.
- 2- I'm mostly bad.
- 1- I'm almost pure evil.

How did you rate? Be honest now, it's just us here. You're not as good as what's her name, but you're CERTAINLY not as bad as what's his face. If you're like most people, you'd rate yourself as a 7. It's a C, but it's better than passing, right? In fact, at your better moments, you have achieved 9 or 10 status, even if that isn't your average.

But... there was that one time... *you know the time I mean*. You really did sink down below 5 didn't you? I mean, I don't know if you hit as low as 1, but you could have felt it if you had reached out for it. And when you think of the things you would have done if you had the strength, or if you had known you would never have been caught...

Of course, you never would have done or said those things if HE hadn't... you remember. The Jerk. And the situation was so bad, what choice did you have? And you had been drinking, so you PROBABLY wouldn't have done what you did if you had been in your full faculties, right? So that doesn't count.

Or does it?

Imagine that Microsoft Billionaire Bill Gates has murdered Dora the Explorer. Just beat her to death in a rage with that singing map of hers. He is arrested and stands before the judge, truly sorry for what he has done.

What would a truly JUST judge do? Consider a few things. First, Dora can be kind of annoying. I think we've all wanted to at least smack her with that map of hers, even if not actually kill her.

Second, Bill Gates is the president and founder of one of the most influential companies on earth. He's a very important guy.

Third, Bill is one of the richest people on earth. He gives more to charity every year than you will ever make in your whole lifetime.

Also, as far as we know he has never killed anyone before. And he will probably never do it again. Would a good judge- a truly JUST judge really punish him for *one little homicide*?

Obviously the answer is *yes*. His money can't bring her back from the dead, and his importance doesn't undo what he has done. Doing what is right doesn't undo an act of evil. Civil law is not a scale where all of your deeds are added up, and the law of God is no different. Good deeds are not stored up to pay for future sins. They are just what you are supposed to do all of the time. THAT is how justice works.

This even works with little sins. Next time you get pulled over, tell the cop how many times you were not pulled over and see if he can still justify giving you a ticket for going 75 in a school zone that ONE time.

Another consideration is the position of the victim of your crime. Consider Mr K.

One day, his Wi-Fi went out. In a rage, he kicked his cat. What punishment will the law hand down? Nothing very severe. He may have his cat taken away.

Now imagine he kicked his wife. The law would have a more serious punishment this time. He may go to jail.

Now imagine he kicked the Queen of England. He may be executed for treason to the crown.

When you sin against God, you are committing a crime against the highest office, not in the land, or even on the planet, but in the universe. The punishment will fit the crime.

There is one more thing to consider when trying to understand what sin is. Imagine a fleet of boats. You are the captain of one boat. What does it take to be considered a good captain? What does it take to be considered a bad one?

You've been given three basic instructions from your admiral- take care of your ship, sail well with others, and reach the appointed destination. If your boat is falling apart and failing to function because you neglect your duty, you will be fired.

What's worse, because your ship doesn't work right, it will run into other ships in the fleet, causing damage to both. Finally, even if you can get your ship in shape and not run into other ships, you will all get fired if you sail to the wrong destination. You are captain of your own ship, but you are responsible to obey your admiral.

This is why Jesus says if you've lusted, you have committed adultery, or if you have hated, you are guilty of murder. What you do to your own ship affects the fleet, and allowing your own ship to fall into disrepair is still violating the instructions of your Admiral, even if it doesn't cause damage to other ships.

The bad news is, you have allowed lust, greed, and hate to damage your ship. You have crashed into other ships. You have failed to sail to your appointed destination. You have sinned against God, and your sins are not a mere kicking of the cat. You have murdered the king. Nothing you can do in a lifetime of good deeds will ever balance that scale.

Romans 3:23 says "*..all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..*"

THAT, my friends, is the bad news. But you remember that the message of Christianity is called the Gospel- the GOOD news. So your story doesn't have to end here. For a sneak peek at the end, see *John 3:16*.

In part 2, we will see how the bad news actually gets worse. But don't let that get you down, because remember, #JesusLovesYou

#25 The Gospel- Part 2: There is no "MOSTLY Dead"



The Gospel is the good news which defines Christianity. In part 1 of this series I explained the bad news- we are sinners. A lifetime of good deeds doesn't cover a single murder under the laws of man, and likewise a lifetime of good deeds doesn't cover the many sins we commit over a lifetime against almighty God.

The Bible offers another metaphor which makes more sense of this. Instead of showing us our sins as our crimes or our debts, it refers to the unforgiven sinner as being spiritually dead- dead in our sins or trespasses.

Ephesians 2: 4-5, 8-9 puts it this way:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— .. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Many people optimistically think that on a scale of 1-10, they rate a 7 for goodness, and they think most other people probably do too. Isn't MOSTLY good- good enough for heaven?

Imagine a zombie who is still fairly fresh. Isn't a MOSTLY undecomposed walking dead pretty much the same as a living person? *This* zombie isn't NEARLY as decomposed as *THAT* one. Doesn't that mean this one ought to be accepted as just another living person? I don't watch zombie shows or movies, but even I know enough to know better. Dead is dead, even if it still has more living pink than rotten stink.

Imagine you went to your doctor asking for help and he said, "On a scale of 1 to 10, you're around 7 healthy. That's good enough. You only have one or two terminal diseases, but think about all of the terminal diseases you DON'T have." Would you be content with that? Do you wish to be MOSTLY healthy, or COMPLETELY healthy? When the Bible says "Be holy just as God is holy" (*Matt 5:48 and 1Peter 1:15*), it means we ought to reject ANY sickness of spirit and heart just as we would reject any sickness of body or mind. Sin is a disease which leads to eternal death.

If you are picking a university, would you want one where the teachers told the truth 80% of the time and taught you 20% lies? Or would you insist that you have teachers who taught you NO lies at all?

Would you want a spouse who was faithful to you MOST of the time, or ALL of the time?

Do you want a taco which has only a LITTLE rat poop in it, or absolutely NO rat poop in it?

This is how God views sin- it is death, it is infidelity, it is lies. It is not acceptable in ANY amount. Sin is death.

Romans 6:23 puts it this way:

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The bad news is that you have sinned- we ALL have. God is good, and so he must judge sin, and he must punish sin as sin deserves. Sin earns you death, and heaven is locked to zombies. God leaves them in their graves forever. That is the bad news. But there is good news.

Next time we'll dive into the good news. For a sneak preview, check out John 3:16, and remember, #JesusLovesYou

#26 The Gospel- Part 3: Snow White and the Walking Dead



In the last installment, we saw how sin is death, and how there is no KIND OF dead, just as there is no KIND OF pregnant. Big sin, little sin, total dead.

People who haven't read the Bible like to say God is all fire and brimstone in the Old testament, but it's mainly because they haven't read all of it. It's there that we read this:

"Do you think that I like to see wicked people die?" says the Sovereign LORD. "Of course not! I want them to turn from their wicked ways and live."

"For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," declares the Lord GOD. "Therefore, repent and live." –Ezekiel 18:23 and 32

If we turn away from our sin and turn to God (an act the Bible calls Repentance) He will forgive us. But how can he forgive us and still be just? The debt of our sin needs to be paid, it cannot merely be ignored, so God pays that debt for us.

Romans 5:8 "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

God stepped into human history as Jesus and lived a sinless life so that he could be the perfect sacrifice whose death paid the penalty for our sins. God now gives us the offer of salvation-grace- the free gift through Jesus death and resurrection.

The blood of Jesus brings spiritual zombies back to life. If this seems like a sacrilegious metaphor, then take it from Jesus. John 6:53-57 says;

So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me."

I don't make this stuff up you know, and when you don't believe me it hurts my feelings.

Jesus is making a metaphor which we act out in communion. We eat the bread which is his body, and drink the wine (*or grape juice if you are a Baptist*) which is his blood that was given on the cross to pay for our sins. We can eat other flesh and blood all day long and it will make us nothing more than vampires and zombies, but when we accept the body and blood of Jesus Christ, he brings us back to life, and we have his life in us.

Ephesians 2: 4-5, 8-9 puts it this way:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— .. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Did you catch that last part? We can't earn it. We can't pay for it. We can't pay it back. We are forgiven merely by accepting. Zombies can drink the blood that brings them back to life, or they can turn and run away and remain dead. Those are the only options available to us.

If I may make a prettier metaphor- we are **Snow White**.

Evil found us, and it looked so good and harmless that we took a bite, but one bite was all that was needed to kill us. We lay in our coffin until the son of the king comes to bring us back to life with his love. The Story of Snow White is the gospel.

So is Sleeping Beauty. The prince slays the evil dragon and wakes us from the sleep of death, offering his hand in marriage.

In both cases, the princesses have contributed the same thing- they've helped get themselves into the mess they were in, and they can do nothing to get themselves out. The prince slays the dragon and brings her back from death while she is in the sleep of death.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Jesus himself says this in John chapter 5:20-21, 24-25

*"...the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed. For just as **the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.***

*"Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when **the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.**"*

Next time we'll take a closer look at the process of waking from death, just to make sure it's clear. Until then, just remember, #JesusLovesYou

#27 The Gospel- Part 4: Say “YES!” to the Dress



In parts 1 and 2 we looked at the bad news. We are all sinners.

"..for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.." -Romans 3:23

And we saw that sin is not some small debt we can pay off, but is death.

"For the wages of sin is death..." -Romans 6:23

But we saw that the good news, the Gospel, the main message of the bible and the central foundation of Christianity is this:

*"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."
-Romans 6:23*

At this point you may be wondering, if Jesus has paid for all of our sins, then why isn't everyone going to heaven, no matter what they believe? First off, because being saved is not merely a matter of believing what is true. This is a very common misconception which the Bible addresses:

"You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!" -James 2:19

Satan doesn't lack belief in the existence of God. Satan rebelled against God and wants to rule himself, without God. Christians, likewise, are not people who have simply come to some intellectual assent. The Bible describes salvation in many metaphors, from the paying of debt to the being released from slavery, but the one which I think sums it up best is that of a wedding. Salvation isn't knowing *about marriage*- it's **GETTING MARRIED**.

Jesus offers us the free gift of salvation as a groom offering the gift of marriage to a potential bride. He has paid for the wedding and built them a palace to live in, for happily ever after.

We are the bride-to-be. We have made many poor choices which results in our being sold into slavery to the enemies of the king. We are slaves to sin, and we cannot free ourselves. We are as lost as if we were dead. But the son of the king comes to us and announces that he has paid for our freedom, and we can be his bride and come live in his palace if we accept his hand in marriage.

At this point, she knows his word is true. She believes that he is the Son of the King, and that he is offering happily ever after. But she still has a choice. She can choose to go with him or she can choose to stay in her chains. Her freedom is paid for, her palace built and waiting, but she will not be dragged off as property. The Prince is not going to drag her from one slavery to another. He is offering, not different chains, but marriage. The Prince waits for her to come willingly.

John 3:16 says: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."

When the Bible talks about believing in Jesus, it does not mean accepting intellectually that he exists, or even merely accepting his words as true. It means putting our trust in him, as a bride puts her trust in a man when she agrees to marry him and gives her whole life to him for as long as they both shall live. She gives herself and takes his name and the two become one.

Being saved is like getting married- you accept the offer, and you profess it to the world, and from that moment on, you are not who you were. The two become one. You have his name: Christian. That's who you are now, which makes you a child of the KING.

Romans 10:9-10 says, "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. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved."

Say yes to the dress. Jesus has paid your debt and freed you from your chains. Put your trust in him, accept his love, and proclaim to the world that you have made your choice.

#Jesus Loves You

#28 The Gospel- Part 5: Peace on Earth, Goodwill to Men



The Gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ.

The bad news is, we are all sinners and we have earned death, but the good news, the Gospel, is the free gift of salvation through Jesus.

Romans 10: 9-13 says

"...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Let that last verse sink in a little. EVERYONE who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved. John 3:16 says it this way:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

WHOEVER believes in him- whoever puts their trust in Jesus- will have eternal life.

Not, whoever is good more than bad and puts their trust in him. Not whoever is kinder and more generous than average. Not Whoever is more religious than their neighbor. Not whoever believes and then does enough good for the rest of their lives or gives enough to the poor...

Just *whoever*. That's you and me.

Being a Christian is described in a lot of ways in the Bible. Jesus says you are born again and have eternal life. When you are born the first time, you are going to lose that life someday. When you are born of the spirit of God through Jesus, you are born into eternal life.

The New Testament says we are adopted into the family of God. Ephesians 1:5 says

"He predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will."

Galatians 4: 4-6 says

"God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those under the Law, that we might receive our adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"

Romans 8:15 says

"For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"

A Christian is a child of God.

You may be asking, if the Bible says salvation is free- we can't earn it and we can't pay it back, then why do we need to do good? Why not just keep on sinning since it's all getting paid for? The Bible sees this question coming and says this:

Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? -Romans 6:1-2

This is where the metaphor of marriage comes in handy. The church is called the bride of Christ, and being a Christian is likened to being married.

When a husband does the dishes, it doesn't earn his marriage. Or if he refuses to do the dishes, he isn't less married than he was the day before. A man does the dishes for his wife because he

loves her and wants to show his love by being helpful. Just as a man does good things for his wife to show his love *because he is married to her*, we do what is right to show our love for Jesus *because he has saved us*. We don't do what is right to *be* saved, we do what is right because we have *been* saved.

We've been saved FROM sin, so why would we go back to it? That would be like being cured from a disease, and then going back to the pollution which made us sick in the first place. But even more so, we are saved from sin but also saved TO righteousness. We are saved from selfishness to love God and others. We are saved from greed to generosity.

In John 5:24, Jesus says:

"Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life."

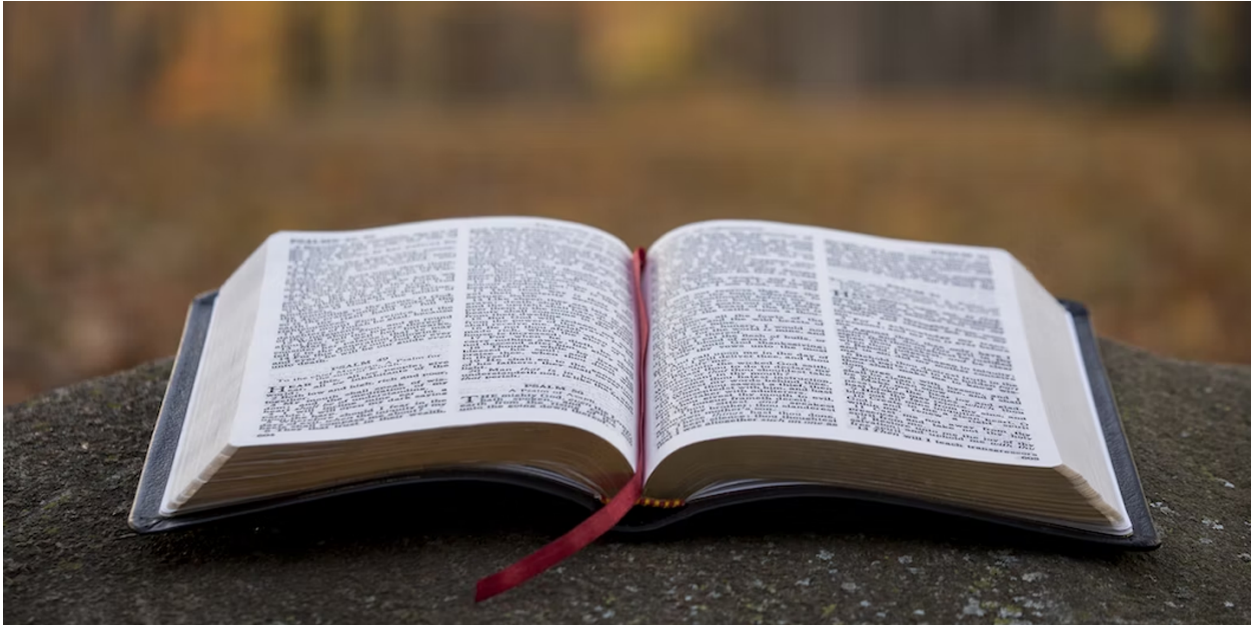
From death TO LIFE.

Jesus is the only path to salvation. Without the gospel, people live and die in their sins. When they know and accept the gospel, they are given new life, cleaned of all of their sins, and adopted into the family of God.

So what are you waiting for?

#JesusLovesYou

Appendix- More Verses About the Gospel



“Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2: 36 -38

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Titus 3:4-7

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.
Ephesians 2: 8-10

And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."
Acts 16: 29-31

...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."
Romans 10:9-13

For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."
Romans 4:2-3

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...
1 Corinthians 15:1-4

Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."
Mark 1:14-15

“Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

Isaiah 55:6-7

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

John 14:6

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

1 John 4:9-10

But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.

Isaiah 53:5

And now why do you wait?

Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins,

calling on his name.’

Acts 22:16