

NEW LIFE BAPTIST CHURCH

SEVEN COMMON QUESTIONS IN LIFE

“Some people spend a lifetime pondering the following questions. What say you?”

1. What About the Heathen?

“What about the person who has never heard of Jesus Christ? Will he or she be condemned to hell?”

Certain things are known to God alone.

(Deuteronomy 29:29)

On some things God has not fully revealed His plan. This is one instance. The Scripture does offer some very clear points for us to keep in mind.

- God is just. Whatever He does with those who have never heard of Jesus Christ will be fair.
- No person will be condemned for rejecting Jesus Christ of whom he or she has never heard; instead such a person will be condemned for violating his or her own moral standard, however high or low it has been. The whole world every person, whether having heard of the Ten Commandments or not is in sin. Romans 2 clearly tells us that every person has a standard of some kind, and that in every culture, people knowingly violate the standard they have.
(Romans 2:12–16)
- Scripture indicates that every person has enough information from creation to know that God exists (Romans 1:20, “. . . so that they are without excuse”). Psalm 19 confirms this fact. Matthew 7:7–11 and Jeremiah 29:13 relate that if anyone responds to the light he or she has and seeks God, God will give him or her a chance to hear the truth about Jesus Christ.
- There is no indication in the Bible that a person can be saved apart from Jesus Christ (John 14:6). Only He atoned for our sins. He is the only bridge across the chasm that separates the highest possible human achievement from the infinitely holy standard of God.
(Acts 4:12)

We, who call ourselves Christians, must see to it that those who have not heard hear the full Gospel.

- The Bible is perfectly clear concerning the judgment which awaits the individual who *has* heard the Gospel. When that person faces God, the issue will not be the heathen. That one person will have to account for what he or she, personally, has done with Jesus Christ. Usually someone will raise the question of the heathen as a smoke screen in an effort to evade personal responsibility. We need to answer the question. But then, as we terminate the discussion, we should focus on the person and on his or her responsibility. What is he or she going to do with Jesus Christ?

2. Is Christ the Only Way to God?

Neither sincerity nor intensity of faith can create truth. Faith is no more valid than the object in which it is placed. The real issue is the question of truth. For example, Islam and Christianity are very similar in the moral and ethical realms, but the two faiths are diametrically opposed on the crucial question: “Who is Jesus Christ?” Islam denies that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Both faiths cannot simultaneously be true at this point. One is correct; one is incorrect. If the crux of Christianity is false, our faith is worthless. This question has some emotional aspects. Christians are not being bigoted, prejudiced, or presumptuous when they say that Christ is the only way to God. Christians have no other option because Jesus Christ Himself has said this. We are dealing with truth that has come to us by revelation, through the invasion into human history of God Himself in Jesus Christ. Some laws and their penalties are socially determined.

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For instance, being picked up for speeding means paying a fine. But in some other aspects of life, such as in the physical realms, we find laws that are not socially determined. The law of gravity is one such law. In the moral realm, as in the physical, there are laws that are not socially determined. We discern these laws from what God has revealed about the inherent law of the universe. One such law is that Jesus Christ is the only way to God.

3. Why Do the Innocent Suffer?

“If God is all-good and all powerful, why do the innocent suffer?” Here we have to admit our partial ignorance. We do not have the full explanation of the origin and problem of evil because God has chosen to reveal only a part to us. God created the universe perfect; mankind, through free will, chose to disobey. Evil came into the universe through man’s disobedience. Because mankind disobeyed and broke God’s law, evil pervades the universe. We must not overlook the presence of evil in every one of us. If God executed judgment uniformly, not one of us would survive. Suppose God were to decree, “At midnight tonight all the evil will be stamped out of the universe.” Which of us would be here at 1:00 a.m.? After pointing out man’s personal problem with evil, we need to know that God has done everything necessary to meet this problem. He came into human history in the Lord Jesus Christ, and He died to solve this problem. Every individual who willingly responds receives His gift of love, grace, and forgiveness in Jesus Christ. C. S. Lewis has observed that it is idle for us to speculate about the problem of evil. The problem we all face is the *fact* of evil. The only solution to this fact is God’s Son, Jesus Christ.

4. How Can Miracles Be Possible?

In this scientific age, how can any intelligent person who considers the orderliness of the universe believe in them? The real issue here is whether or not God exists. If God exists, then miracles are logical and pose no intellectual contradictions. By definition, God is all-powerful. He can and does intervene in the universe that He has created. Ultimately, we are being asked, How do I know God exists? History records many arguments for the existence of God. However, these have counterarguments, and some evidence seems to negate them. So they are regarded as hints rather than as conclusive proof that God exists. The greatest indication of the existence of God is His coming into human history. I know God exists, not because of all the philosophical arguments, but because He came into human history in Jesus Christ and I have met Him personally. Our answer begins with Him. His credentials substantiate His claim. The supreme credential, of course, is the fact that He rose from the dead. In helping a non-Christian think through the intellectual basis of Christianity, our best defense is a good offense. One way to stimulate the person’s thinking is to ask, “Which of the other three possibilities about Jesus Christ do you believe, since you do not believe that He was the truth?” There are only four possible conclusions about Jesus Christ and His claims. He was either a liar, a lunatic, a legend, or the Truth.

A. **Liar.** Most people believe that Jesus was a great moral philosopher and teacher. To call Him a liar would be a contradiction of terms.

B. **Lunatic.** He thought He was doing right, but He suffered from delusions of grandeur. The hitch in this conclusion is that the clinical symptoms of paranoia do not fit with the personality characteristics of Jesus Christ. The poise and composure which He demonstrated are not characteristic of those who suffer from paranoid disturbances.

C. **Legend.** He never made the statements attributed to Him. They were put in His mouth by overenthusiastic followers in the third and fourth century. Modern archaeology, however, makes it difficult to maintain this theory. Recent findings confirm that the New Testament documents were written during the lifetime of the contemporaries of Jesus Christ. Development of an elaborate legend would have required a more significant time lag. We also need to consider with the person what it means to prove or not prove God. We can never prove God by the scientific method. But that does not mean that our case is

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lost. The scientific method as a means of verification is limited to measurable aspects of reality. No one can measure love, hatred, or justice. However, there is a science of history. As we examine the data for Christianity and particularly the evidence for the Resurrection, we find a solid case on which to base our conviction. These are the ideas we need to suggest to a person who takes the essentially materialistic position, based on rationalistic presuppositions, and claims that because there is no supernatural, miracles are impossible. When someone begins with this presupposition, no amount of evidence will convince him or her of the truth. If you started out by denying that miracles are possible, what evidence would convince you that a miracle had taken place? None. Christ dealt with this problem in Luke 16:27–31. The principle still holds today. The data we have concerning God’s visitation to this planet are sufficient grounds for us to believe. When someone refuses to accept this evidence, no additional evidence will convince that person.

5. Isn’t the Bible Full of Errors?

“How do you reconcile your faith with the fact that the Bible is so full of errors?” First, ask what particular errors the person has in mind. Ninety-nine percent of the time people cannot think of any. If the person has a specific problem and you do not have the answer, do not panic. Instead smile casually and say, “I don’t have the answer to that one, but I will be glad to dig it up for you.” If the person has not read the Bible, that is a fair indication of his or her insincerity in questioning it. But do not press this point, and never make fun of anyone or try to argue by ridicule. This only brings the Gospel into disrepute. The Bible does contain some apparent contradictions. But, time and time again, an apparent contradiction has been vindicated by the discoveries of modern archaeology. Dr. Nelson Glueck, an outstanding Jewish archaeologist, makes the remarkable statement, “No archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference.”

Evolution may be a problem if it leads to an atheistic conclusion for someone. The real issue though is not evolution, but coming to grips with Christ Himself. Ask: “What conclusion are you drawing from your evolutionary position that the universe happened by chance? Or are you saying that God created the universe and did so by using certain evolutionary processes? I am not convinced about that particular position, but let us assume for the moment that it is correct. What conclusion are you drawing?” From there, direct attention to what Jesus Christ has said and done. *How* God brought the universe into being is not so important as *that* He did it. One’s presupposition, and not the actual evidence, often determines his or her conclusion. An apparently strong case for a naturalistic position can be made by ignoring the evidence for Jesus Christ. But if a person is going to be intellectually honest, he or she must come to grips with Him. An amazing number of thinking non-Christians have never really thought about the evidence for Jesus Christ.

6. Isn’t Christian Experience Only Psychological?

Some suggest that we have faith only because we have been conditioned since early childhood. We have been raised like Pavlov’s dogs. But this is an oversimplification; Christians have been converted from every imaginable background. Thousands have had no childhood contact with Christianity. Yet each will testify to a personal encounter with Christ that transformed his or her life. The Lord, Himself, is the only constant factor. Others assert that spiritual ideals are essentially wish fulfillments. They can be traced to a person’s feeling a need for God, creating an image in his or her mind, and then worshiping the mental projection. Objective reality is totally lacking. Religion is called a crutch for people who cannot get along in life. Religious people are self-hypnotized. What is our objective evidence for our subjective experiences? Christianity differs from autohypnosis, wish fulfillments, and all the other psychological phenomena in that the Christian’s subjective experience is securely bound to an objective, historical fact, namely the resurrection from the dead of Jesus Christ. If the Resurrection is true, it makes all the difference in the world. It is confirmation of God’s revelation in Christ, an absolute truth, a historical fact

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outside of ourselves, an objective fact to which our subjective experience is tied. We need to hold the objective and the subjective in proper perspective. I need to recognize that my experience is based on the solid foundation of an objective fact in history.

7. Won't a Good Moral Life Get Me to Heaven?

A student at Duke University said, "If God grades on the curve, I'll make it." Most people will accept the philosophy that all we need to do is our best, and then everything will be all right, or at least we will be able to just get by. This attitude shows an incredible optimism about man's righteousness and an appalling ignorance of God's infinite holiness. God does not grade on the curve. He has an absolute standard, Jesus Christ. Light destroys darkness. The character of God so blazes in its purity that it consumes all evil. In God's presence, we would be consumed because of the corruption in our lives. The perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ is the only basis on which we can come into fellowship with the living God. Morality is not the answer. From the bum on skid row, to the Joe College type, to the tremendously moral person, all human effort is futile. No one could swim the entire distance to Hawaii. All would drown. No swimming instructions would help. We need someone to take us to Hawaii. This is where Christ comes in. If you can live a life that is absolutely perfect, you can make it to heaven on your own steam. But no one has ever succeeded at that, nor will anyone ever succeed. All the other religions of the world are essentially sets of swimming instructions, suggested codes of ethics for a wonderful pattern of life. But man's basic problem is not failing to know *how* to live; it is lacking the *power* to live as one ought. The good news is that Jesus Christ, who invaded human history, does for us what we could not possibly do for ourselves. Through Him we may be reconciled to God, we are given His righteousness, and we are enabled to have fellowship with Him in His very presence.