

WHAT'S IN YOUR SAFE?

Asking the RIGHT Questions in Troubled Times



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INTRODUCTION:

We live in precarious times. The value of the dollar is shrinking, taxes have been constantly on the rise and unemployment has remained at record highs for longer than any period since the great depression. Our private enterprise system is choking on government regulations and overwhelming increases in health care costs. At the same time, our government has been spending and wasting record amounts of money. And scientists warn us that a major solar flare would knock out all of the electronic devices on which our economy depends for banking, transportation and business and predict chaos and riots when our store's five day supply of food is exhausted as a result. On top of that, rogue regimes are busy acquiring nuclear weapons and threatening the west (including the united states) with destruction. And foreign and home-grown terrorists seem to constantly be in the news.

It's no wonder then, that Americans are buying guns and ammunition in record amounts and we are constantly being bombarded by commercials selling silver, gold and other precious commodities. And we increasingly watch more movies and television in order to escape reality.

Why? Because we have placed our trust in the wrong place. We have put our trust and our security in the gods of material possessions, our nation and our government instead of the One True God, The Father, The Spirit and The Son. And when things come along that shake the things in which we've placed our trust, we become nervous and fearful.

And so abound the commercials offering us protection from the possible coming calamities. As one commercial asks "What's in your safe?"

So what should be in our safe? What provides a Christian with security? 1. Can we know that God is real? 2. Can we know the Bible is true? 3. Can we know that Christianity is God's revealed will for man? 4. Can we know that God is good? 5. Can we know that we are saved? The answers to these questions are a Christian's security if God is real and His Word is true. Then the answer to all these questions is a resounding YES!

In precarious times we need a secure faith. Isaiah and Peter preached to those facing precarious times in their lifetimes. They wanted the people to whom they preached to have a secure faith and they pointed to the evidence supporting what they preached. As Peter said in II Peter 3:13-16 "Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me. Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance. For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty."

This study will examine convincing Biblical and extra-Biblical evidence (evidence outside of the Bible) that will secure our faith. Evidence that points to a real creator who has revealed his love and plan for us in the pages of what we know as The Bible.

I. CAN WE KNOW THAT GOD IS REAL?

In 2004, Dr Anthony Flew renounced his atheism in favor of theism (the belief in God) and stunned the world. He had long been regarded as the world's leading evolutionist.

As one online article notes: "This dramatic conversion has been likened by AstroPhysicist and now one of the world's leading Cosmologists, Dr Hugh Ross, as having the same impact on the academic world as an announcement that Billy Graham had renounced Christianity would have on the Church!"

One of the reasons cited by Prof. Flew was "the evidence." He admitted that for a long time the growing problem of Evolution's inability to explain how life began, or for that matter, how anything began, led him to the inevitable conclusion that it was an inadequate answer in the face of the evidence. Then when the DNA Genome code was unraveled the evidence for Design became "undeniable". These two pieces of evidence (1. the existence of life demanding a Life-Source, and 2. the scientific evidence of an extremely complex code in the make-up of that life- DNA) were enough for Prof. Flew to renounce atheism.

But did Dr. Flew prove that God Existed? No. Not any more than we can prove that wind exists. But we can see the evidence that wind exists when we see tree branches rustling in the wind. The evidence Dr Flew was able to see for God as the creator of everything became too great to allow for any other explanation. Jesus talks about this very thing in reference to those born of the Spirit. In John 3:8 He says: "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." (NKJV)

This study is concerned with the evidences of God's existence, as that needs to be our starting point in the discussion of the 5 questions we asked in the introduction. It will of necessity be an extremely *light* discussion of this question. I want us simply to be aware in this part of our study that these evidences exist and point to God as our creator. For times' sake we will not be doing much more than going through a list of the types of evidence that exist and giving at least one example of each.

A. From where does the idea of the existence of God originate? (Ontological)

Solomon said in Eccl. 1:9 "there is no new thing under the sun." Man has never invented anything that was not already in existence. Radar was already being used by bats, sonar by porpoises and squids used jet propulsion. Whatever we have "dreamed up" that we did not have before we have found through study and research of those things that already exist around us.

So where did the idea for the existence of God originate unless God already existed? As the great Greek philosopher Descarte said: "God must exist in order to cause the idea of a perfect God to enter our minds."

B. From where does my conscience originate? (Moral)

According to the theory of evolution, everything we do is part of the struggle to survive. And yet, as J.D. Thomas noted in his book Facts and Faith: "Our sense of oughtness differs greatly from our own personal desires, wishes and self-interest. Many times we as persons would preferentially and selfishly choose differently, except that our conscience requires us to act contrary to our personal choice."

C. **From where does my appreciation for beauty originate?** (Aesthetic)

There can only be one answer. Man has been created with more than is necessary to just “get by” in the world. If evolution was responsible for our existence we would not need to be able to experience color or have the ability to enjoy music or have an appreciation for the beauty we see in the world around us.

As the late Dr. Raymond Kelsey asked: “Whence the appreciation for poetry, art, and music? As we survey the universe, we see it saturated with beauty. With almost negligible exceptions, everything in nature from the vast and starry heavens down to the infinitesimal, microscopic diatom discloses itself to man either as gloriously sublime or exquisitely beautiful...If there is no God, we would not expect to find this sense of appreciation in man. On the contrary, if there is a God, then the aesthetic experience is just what we would expect to find.”

D. **What caused the universe?** (Cosmological)

It is a scientific axiom that something cannot come from nothing. When it comes to the existence of the universe, this presents a problem for those who deny the existence of God. At one time, it was proposed that matter was eternal and that eliminated the problem. As our scientific knowledge grew, however, we discovered that matter is not eternal and we not only were able to tell that the universe had a beginning, but were also able to determine that the universe was like a clock that had been set in motion and was winding down. (The second LAW of Thermodynamics) This led atheists to adopt the view that there was a breach in our universe that caused the big bang and created our universe. Unfortunately, this does not explain where the energy or matter came from in this other universe. There still needs to be an explanation of an ultimate origin for all things. Therefore, you are still faced with the problem of explaining the origin of the universe. Something or Someone had to have originally **created** it. The universe itself cannot have existed forever.

As J.D. Thomas put it in his book “Facts and Faith” “Our present scientific knowledge about the second law of thermo-dynamics, or entropy, establishes rather conclusively that the universe has not always been, but had a beginning, at which time it began the function of radiating or emanating energy, which has been going on constantly since that time. It is thus the conclusion of a consensus of scientists that the universe is running down and if this be true, then the assumption that a non-material first cause is not needed does not stand.”

All of the great philosophers came to the conclusion that the only solution to the question of a first cause was the existence of a self-sufficient, eternal being – God.

E. **Did chance or God design the universe?** (Teleological)

The argument that chance could not have produced the universe has been around for a long time. William Paley was the first one to liken the universe to the complexities of a watch and state that since the universe was much more complex than a watch that just as we know that the watch must have had a creator, the universe, also, must have had a creator.

Modern teleological arguments based on the universe and nature have now gone far beyond this simplistic example. For example, the design inherent in DNA that allows it to carry vast amounts of information instructing each cell to perform it’s necessary function is what convinced Dr. Anthony Flew to abandon atheism and to declare that the only explanation for life is a creator.

Dr. Terry L Miethe and Dr. Gary R Habermas wrote this in the book "Why Believe? God exists!: "Yockey found the mathematical pattern represented by the letter frequency, etc., of a written language when compared to that know to exist in living systems to be exactly the same. Yockey says: 'It is important to understand that we are not reasoning by analogy. The sequence hypothesis applies directly to the protein and the genetic text as well as to written language and therefore the treatment is mathematically identical. Thus, if the mathematic relation between information in a DNA and information in a written language are identical, then we can conclude that what we observe to be the cause for information in a language will have to be posited for the source of information in the DNA too. Intelligence is always the cause for information. Thus it is scientifically necessary to posit intelligence as the cause of the first living cell. If it takes intelligence to produce the information in a single sentence, then it also takes intelligence to create the first simple form of life, to say nothing of the infinitely more complex human brain. Many scholars feel that with the discovery of the relation between information theory and DNA, we are witnessing the scientific collapse of atheistic explanations of origin. The DNA code, in even the simplest organisms has been clearly shown, by NASA computers among other sources, to represent not just a high level of complexity, but a language which could only have it's origin in intelligent being! Thus the scientific evidence is clearly and decisively against materialism.

One final argument by Gange about the design existing in the universe deals with cytochrome C. Cytochrome C is made up of several amino acids, but only one combination of those amino acids will allow for life. Gange's argument puts the final seal on the question of a designer behind it: "When scientists calculate the probabilities showing that CYTOCHROME C could not have been produced by an accident, it's a little more complicated than just asking the question, 'How many ways can we assemble a train?'" Gange goes on to say "Of course, many technical details must be carefully taken into account...including the fact that not all 'railroad cars' are equally available (residue probability) or significant (codon degeneracy). Likewise, when selecting the 'railroad cars,' it is necessary to distinguish among those choices that are selected from comparable locations (homologous protein lineage) and the extent to which they may be similar (synonymous amino acid residues). But all this has been carefully done and the resulting calculations published in the scientific literature." According to Gange: "The result is staggering...The certainty that we know chance did not produce cytochrome C is so vast that to communicate it in simple terms is not easy. Picture an 8 ½ X 11 inch sheet of paper with letters printed on both sides. Let's allow eighty columns by 66 lines of letters, giving us just under 5,300 letters on each side of the paper, or 10,600 letters per sheet. Putting the sheets into piles, we can stack about 320 sheets per inch, giving us just over 36,000 letters in a cube one inch on a side. Now, what volume of space do we need to store enough sheets whose total number of letters equals the certainty that chance did not produce cytochrome C? When I first did the calculation the answer astounded me. We need the space of almost forty thousand universes, each 30 billion light years wide!"

F. **What about the alternative – Chance created all we see?** (Materialistic view)

There are acknowledged conditions that evolutionists agree would need to be met in order for a materialistic explanation for origins to be plausible: 1. The universe must be old. 2. Spontaneous Generation must have occurred. 3. Evidence of evolution should be evident.

1. The argument proposed by evolutionists is that if a group of gibberish typing monkeys type long enough, they will, by chance, produce Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire."

This is a typical statement by evolutionists as quoted in "After its Kind" by Byron Nelson: "So that if we had amino acids, we then would have proteins, and if we had proteins we would be well along the road to life. Given trillions of possibilities for chemical combinations, given a few million years for it all to happen, the components of life would have appeared. And once that had been accomplished; once the bricks and the stones and the lumber for the building of life were present, then all that would have been required were a few more million years for life to actually appear."

The current most widely accepted estimate for the age of the universe is 10 billion years. Is this enough time for such a process to take place?

Quoting again from "After its Kind" by Byron Nelson: "In the case of Insulin, Asimov estimated that there are 8×10^{27} (8 followed by 27 zeroes) different possible combinations of an insulin like protein. For the sake of argument, let us assume that each second the universe has existed, a different combination of an insulin like protein is produced. After 10 billion years, we would have approximately 3×10^{17} (3 followed by 17 zeroes) different combinations, or approximately one ten-billionth of all the possible combinations of insulin. To be positive that the one combination which the body uses is produced, we would need to wait an additional 10 billion times the presently supposed age of the universe. ***In the case of hemoglobin, the chance formation of life is even less probable. Asimov estimates 135 followed by 165 zeroes as the different combinations of hemoglobin. *****Examples like this are easy to find. It doesn't take much imagination to realize that the chance formation of even the simplest virus is out of the range of mathematical probability."

Since this is designed as a single class summation of the topic of knowing whether God is real, we do not have time to go into the evidence that exists for a much younger age for our universe. Suffice it to say that an even younger age for our universe exponentially compounds a problem for a materialistic explanation of origins that was already outside the realm of all mathematical probability.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR 'CAN WE KNOW THAT GOD IS REAL?

1. Why do people doubt the existence of God?

- a. We have trouble believing in something we cannot see
- b. We see evil in the world and believe that if any God exists, He must be evil; therefore, we choose to believe that there is no God.
- c. They falsely believe that science proves there is no God.
- d. We think scientists who do not believe in God have examined all the philosophical and material evidence for and against the existence of a creator and have been led by the evidence to conclude there is no God.
- e. We want to do "our own thing" with no restraints.

2. Can we know that God is real?

Psalm 19:1-3 "1 To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David. The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork. 2 Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. 3 There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard."

Couple Hebrews 11:1 with Exodus 10:1-2:

Hebrews 11:1 "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

Exodus 10:1-2 "1 And the LORD said unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh: for I have hardened his heart, and the heart of his servants, that I might show these my signs before him: 2 And that thou mayest tell in the ears of thy son, and of thy son's son, what things I have wrought in Egypt, and my signs which I have done among them; that ye may know how that I am the LORD."

Just as we believe in and can KNOW that there is such a thing as wind because there is incontrovertible evidence of its existence, God tells us that OUR faith is not based on some "blind leap" as some in the religious world claim. It is based on incontrovertible evidence that is the "EVIDENCE of things not seen."

II. CAN WE KNOW THE BIBLE IS TRUE?

When we first consider this question, it seems like a simple question. We have always had 1) those who look on the Bible as simply a collection of myths (those who do not believe in the existence of any God) and 2) those who followed some other religion. Those individuals, of course, do not accept the Bible as the true and living Word of God. But in our modern world, we now also have groups that consider themselves Christians who believe 3) that Bible *contains* the words of God within it along with other things men wrote, 4) contains revelations individuals have had from God that they imperfectly wrote down, 5) who believe that errors have crept into the Bible over the centuries of copying and 6) still others who accept books that are not included in the Bible accepted in the “Protestant” Biblical tradition.

Paul said in Ephesians 3:2-5 “If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is **now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.**”

Paul affirms that God revealed His will to the apostles and prophets and we have that will recorded in the pages of God’s Word as God intended that we should.

The purpose of this part of our discussion is to reaffirm that the Bible is indeed authored by God, is true, complete and has been transmitted to us virtually as it was given to those to whom God revealed His Word. The importance of doing so cannot be understated. If we cannot be sure that we have the complete and unaltered Word of God, then our Christianity rests on a shaky and unreliable foundation.

As we stated before, it is not the purpose of this study to thoroughly examine each question put forth in the introduction. Entire books have been written about each of the five questions we’re examining including the question of whether the Bible is true. We can, however, sum up the overwhelming arguments for the Bible’s authenticity and reliability.

A. The Old Testament Canon

The word, canon (κάνων), comes from Greek. It comes from the root word “reed” and came to mean a rule or standard of measurement. Sometime in the fourth century AD, it came to mean those books that should be included in the Old Testament or the New Testament.

There has been a great deal of debate over the centuries as to what should and should not be included in the canons of both the Old and New Testaments. Some groups accept certain books that others do not. So the question has to be asked: “What qualifies a book for inclusion in the Old or New Testament?”

A very good and succinct answer to this question is found in “The Origin of The Bible” by F.F. Bruce, J.I. Packer, Philip Comfort and Carl F.H. Henry: “What qualifies a book for a place in the canon of the Old Testament or New Testament is not just that it is ancient, informative and helpful, and has long been read and valued by God’s people, but that is **has God’s authority for what it says.**”

The canon of the Old Testament was “open” for a long period of time. God revealed His will first with the giving of the Law. After this period of time, God revealed His will through the prophets and other writers. As R. T. Beckwith writes: “Not all of the writers of the Old Testament books were prophets, in the narrow sense of the word; some of them were kings and wise men. But their experience of inspiration led to their writings also finding a place in the canon. The inspiration of psalmists is spoken of in II Samuel 23:1-3; I Chronicles, 25:1 and of wise men in

Ecclesiastes 12:11ff. Note also the revelations made by God in Job (38:1; 40:6), and the implication of Proverbs 8:1-9:6 that the book of Proverbs is the work of the divine Wisdom.”

The canon accepted by Jews includes all of the books in our “Protestant” Old Testament although they are arranged differently. Josephus writing during the time of Christ stated that these books had all been accepted as scripture from time immemorial.

From where, then, did the books of the apocrypha come? After the close of the Old Testament, the Jews went through many hard times. There was a natural desire for a message from God and a desire to record their history. This gave rise to a number of writings including the rise of a type of literature known as apocalyptic literature. Some of these writings claimed to be from God and others did not. These writings include such books as I and II Maccabaeus, I and II Esdras, etc. These writings existed outside of and apart from the accepted Hebrew Bible and were NEVER included in the Hebrew Bible or canon. When the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek in Alexandria, they also translated these other writings. Whether they believed them to be part of the Hebrew Bible or whether they simply considered them “other” inspirational literature, they came to be accepted as part of scripture. When the Latin version was translated from the Greek, they were carried over into the Latin.

Whatever the reason for the inclusion of the apocrypha in non-protestant Bibles, there are three important things to remember: 1) The Hebrew Bible has always included only those books accepted in the “Protestant” versions, 2) Jesus quoted from and accepted all of the books in the Hebrew Bible and used the divisions of scripture as found in the Hebrew Bible as Luke 24:44 states: “And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.” And 3) Jesus never quoted from any of the apocryphal books.

B. The New Testament Canon

When it comes to the Old Testament canon, we have the endorsement of Christ himself giving it all authority as scripture and endorsing it as authored by God. But what about the New Testament? Aside from the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, the New Testament consists mostly of letters written to various groups and churches. How do we know that it not only carries the same weight as Old Testament scripture, but what we should include as part of God’s Word?

The answer to the first part of that question HAS been answered for us by Christ. In John 14:23-26 we read “Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, **he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.**”

The Apostles also understood that the things they taught were to be considered scripture and intended that what they wrote should be copied and carry the same weight as Old Testament scripture. Consider the following four passages: 1) II Tim. 3:14-17 “But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” 2) I Thess. 2:13 “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as **it is in truth, the word of God**, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.” 3) I Thess. 5:27 “I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren.” 4) II Peter 3:15-16 “And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.” *Note that Peter has counted Paul’s writings as scripture alongside of the Old Testament scriptures.

So we see that Christ stated that the Holy Spirit would guide the Apostles and that the Apostles understood that what they wrote was to be considered scripture. How then, did we receive those writings and how do we know that the 27 books of the New Testament are the canon of the New Testament?

According to “The Origin of the Bible,” there are five periods of time leading up to the establishment of a canonized list of the New Testament books: 1. The first century (the period in which the books were written) 2. The first half of the second century (the period in which the books became more widely known and began to be cited as authoritative) 3. The second half of the second century (the period in which they took their place alongside the Old Testament; being translated into regional languages and made the subject of commentaries) 4. The third century (the period in which the books were collected into a recognized “set” of books that comprised the whole of New Testament revelation) and 5. The fourth century (the period in which the canon became “fixed).”

“The Origin of the Bible” tells us “There is evidence that within thirty years of the Apostle’s death all the Gospels and Pauline letters were known and used in all those centers from which any evidence has come down to us. It is true that some of the smaller letters were being questioned as to their authority in some quarters for perhaps another fifty years, but this was due only to uncertainty about their authorship in those particular locales. This demonstrates that acceptance was not being imposed by councils but was rather happening spontaneously through a normal response on the part of those who had learned the facts about the authorship.” It also states that “around A.D. 140 (*Note: this is less than 100 years after the death of Paul*), the recently discovered “Gospel of Truth” (a Gnostic-oriented work probably authored by Valentinus) makes an important contribution. Its use of canonical New Testament sources, treating them as authoritative, is comprehensive enough to warrant the conclusion that in Rome (at this period) there was a New Testament compilation in existence corresponding very closely to our own.”

So from whence came the apocryphal books of the New Testament era? They came from a desire by individuals to “fill in the gaps” in the life of Christ, to embellish the Gospel accounts and to bolster and propagate false doctrines such as those of the Gnostics. Some of these writings are so fantastical that they could never be accepted by an intelligent reader while others were so clearly heretical in nature that they were gathered and burned by church leaders. R. K. Harrison notes that “Comparative studies have shown without doubt that the New Testament apocryphal writings preserve at best a series of debased traditions about the Founder and teachings of early Christianity. At worst, the narratives are entirely devoid of historical value and in some respects are totally alien to New Testament spirituality... Sometimes the compositions are so trivial and inconsequential that it is difficult to account for their survival.”

Milton Fisher states: “The generation that followed that of the apostles themselves received the witness of those who knew that the apostles had the right to speak and write in the name of Christ. Consequently, the second and third generation of Christians looked back to apostolic words (writings) as the very words of Christ. This is what is really meant by canonization – recognition of the divinely authenticated Word. Hence, the believers (the church) did not establish the canon but simply bore witness to its extent by recognizing the authority of the Word of Christ.””

Regarding the closed state of this canon, Milton Fisher writes: “In his *Festal Letter for Easter*, 367, Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria included information designed to eliminate once and for all the use of certain apocryphal books. This letter, with its admonition, ‘Let no one add to these; let nothing be taken away,’ gives us the earliest extant document which specifies our twenty-seven books without qualification.”

There are three important things to remember about the New Testament canon: 1) Christ and His Apostles both attested to the fact that what the apostles wrote carried the weight of scripture, 2) The authorship was attested to by individuals who had known the apostles and 3) There has been no serious scholar who has called for inclusion of any of the New Testament apocryphal book’s inclusion into the canon of New Testament scripture.

C. Have the Old and New Testaments been accurately transmitted?

Charlie Campbell writes: “The late Sir Frederic Kenyon, former director and principal librarian of the British Museum, was one of the leading authorities on the reliability of ancient manuscripts. He said this about the Bible: “The interval then, between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant [existing] evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established.” The evidence for the reliability of the Biblical text is so strong you would have a hard time finding an informed scholar who would be willing to debate this point. So then, what kind of proof is the Muslim or Mormon able to offer to prove that the text of the Bible has undergone corruption, or even lost? None. To demonstrate or prove that the Bible has been corrupted, the Muslim or Mormon would need to be able to hold up ancient copies of the Bible and say, “Look, here’s what the Bible used to say, and here is what the Bible says now. It has been changed.” But that is exactly what the Mormon and the Muslim, and even Shirley MacLaine, cannot do. Why? When you examine the older copies of the Bible you quickly see that the text of the modern Bible has not undergone corruption.”

So what about textual variations? David E Pratte writes: “What is the nature of these variant readings?

1. Different spellings which in no way affect the meaning of the text

These account for fully one half of the variant readings! This would be like the difference between “Elias” and “Elijah” in our English versions. No diligent student could ever misunderstand God’s word because of such variations.

2. Differences in word order which in no way affect the meaning

Examples might be “the Lord Jesus Christ” as compared to “Jesus Christ the Lord.” No one could be misled by such instances. And due to the grammatical structure of the languages, such variations in word order are of enormously less significance in Hebrew or Greek than they are in English.

3. *Insertion or omission of a word, or use of a different word, but the meaning is not affected*

Examples might be "God your Father" compared to "God the Father," or simply "the Father."

4. *Variations in which whole phrases or sentences are inserted or omitted.*

These may seem to be real problems. But in fact none of these variations affect our understanding of God's word, because the teaching in the questionable texts can be found clearly taught in other passages which are unquestioned. Often a questionable phrase (for example, perhaps a phrase in Matthew's account) can be found word-for-word in a parallel account which is beyond question (such as perhaps in Mark's account).

In other cases, the teaching may not be found word-for-word elsewhere, but the concept is unquestionably taught elsewhere. Men who study these problems say these "significant variations" make up less than 1/1000 of the text of the New Testament. If all of them were put together, they would take up less than half a page. And none of them affect the total content of teaching of God's word!"

D. Is the Bible inspired?

If the Bible is indeed inspired, we would expect to see a number of things that we do not see in other ancient religious literature: 1) that it is historically reliable, 2) that it is consistent and 3) that there is evidence of fulfilled prophecy in history.

1. As to the Bible's historical reliability, Nelson Glueck, the renowned Jewish archaeologist, wrote: "It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference." He continued his assertion of "The almost incredibly accurate historical memory of the Bible, and particularly so when it is fortified by archaeological fact."

2. As to its consistency, Josh McDowell in *Christianity, hoax or history?* had this to say: "A representative of the *Great Books of the Western World* came to my house recruiting salesmen for their series. He spread out the chart of the *Great Books of the Western World* series. He spent five minutes talking to us about the *Great Books of the Western World* series, and we spent an hour and a half talking to him about the Greatest Book.

I challenged him to take just ten of the authors all from one walk of life, one generation, one place, one time, one mood, one continent, one language, and just one controversial subject (the Bible speaks on hundreds with harmony and agreement).

Then I asked him: 'Would they (the authors) agree?' He paused and then replied, 'No!' 'What would you have?' I retorted. Immediately he said, 'A conglomeration.'

Any person sincerely seeking truth would at least consider a book with the following unique qualifications. Here is a book: 1. Written over a 1,500 year span, 2. Written over forty generations. 3. Written by more than forty authors from every walk of life, including kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, poets, statesmen, and scholars... 4. Written on three continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe. 5. Written in three languages: Hebrew..., Aramaic..., Greek. 6. Treating hundreds of controversial subjects with harmony and continuity from Genesis to Revelation."

3. As to evidence of fulfilled prophecy: Josh McDowell in *Evidence that demands a verdict* has this to say: "Striking examples of fulfilled prophecy include the fate of such magnificent cities as Babylon, Tyre and Nineveh. Babylon was one of the greatest cities of all time. It had many modern characteristics such as an elaborate irrigation and canal system, paved streets, apartment houses, street lights, and running water. Encircling the city was a wall wide enough for driving three chariots abreast on the top. The hanging gardens of Babylon are well known as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

But because of Babylon's idolatry and because it would invade Israel and persecute God's people, God pronounced Babylon's doom through the prophet Isaiah who wrote: "And Babylon...shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorra. It shall never be inhabited...neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there...but wild beasts of the desert shall lie there..." (Isaiah 13:19-21)

Isaiah wrote his prophecy around 700 B.C.. Just as Isaiah had predicted, the Medes led by Cyrus attacked Babylon in 539 B.C. and destroyed most of the city. It was also later plundered by Xerxes (Cyrus' son-in-law), and Alexander the great, who tried to restore the city but gave it up as a hopeless task.

Interestingly, Babylon's ruins created a chemical reaction in the soil, and the once fertile land was turned into an arid waste, exactly as God had predicted in Isaiah 13. By the First century A.D. Babylon was a foul-smelling, decaying ruin inhabited only by wild animals. By the twelfth century the ruins of the original city palace were impossible to reach because there were too many poisonous snakes and scorpions in the area. The prophecy has been fulfilled even to the exact detail that "...neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there..."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR 'CAN WE KNOW THE BIBLE IS TRUE?'

1. What difference does it make to you if the Bible is truly the Word of God or not?

It means that I can be assured that I am not following something false, it means that I'd better pay attention to it, it means that all the promises are true and it means that I can know that I am saved.

2. What Biblical prophecy (and its fulfillment) most impresses you?

One of the reasons that Alexander the Great left the Jews alone when he was conquering other nations is that the rabbis of the time came out to greet him and showed him the prophecy of Daniel announcing his empire.

The prophecies of Isaiah predicting the crucifixion in Isaiah the 53rd chapter. Giving knowledge of details of a form of punishment that did not yet exist.

3. If we believe the Bible is the Word of God, how will that affect our individual Bible Study.

We will take it seriously, we will apply it to our lives and we will study to be sure that we are following God's word correctly.

4. Does the time we as individuals spend in the Word reflect this belief?

Sometimes.

III. CAN WE KNOW THAT CHRISTIANITY IS GOD’S REVEALED WILL FOR MAN ?

I have yet to hear of any religious group that states that their religion is a false one. All of the adherents of all of the religious groups in the world believe that their religions are true. If they did not, they would not be followers of their particular religions. There are those, of course, who claim that there are many paths to God and that an individual should choose the one with which they are most comfortable. That has a certain appeal of the “Can’t we all just get along?” variety. But in reality, this is like the scene in the movie “Fiddler on the Roof” where Tevya tells an individual “You are right.” Another individual says something that is the opposite of what the first person said and Tevya tells them “You are right.” A third individual says “Wait, they can’t both be right!” and Tevya says “You are also right!” Conflicting “truths” cannot both be true. Either one is right and the other is wrong, or both are wrong. But they cannot both be true.

So how do we determine if Christianity is true or if that honor belongs to some other world religion? We do so by examining each religion and 1. determining what each religion claims, 2. what their religious texts teach (if they have written texts), 3. whether the things taught are consistent with scientific fact (this includes whether their god or gods can meet the test of being a “first cause” for the universe’s existence and the “no ‘truth’ contradicts another ‘truth’” test.) and 4. whether there are internal and external proofs of divine origins in any written texts they may possess.

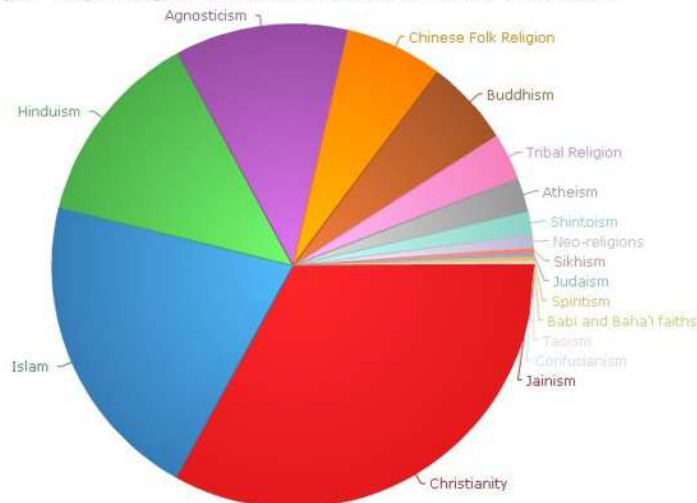
Jesus said in John 14:6 “I am the way, the truth and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me.” If Jesus is who He claims to be we need to follow Him, but if He is not, we need to keep looking.

For the purpose of this study, I intend to examine each faith system based on which of 6 groups they fall into: 1. animism and spiritism, 2. polytheism, 3. Eastern Religions including Hinduism/Buddhism, 4. the four monotheistic faiths which include Sikhism and the three Abrahamic faiths: Judaism, Christianity and Islam (including the Babi and Baha’i adherents), 5) the transtheistic religion of Jainism and 6) atheism/agnosticism (we will consider the religion of Darwinism at the same time as that of Agnosticism and Atheism as most statistics include Darwinism in with Atheism). The pie chart below shows the percentage of the world population that follows each religion:

(Pie charts from chartsbin.com)

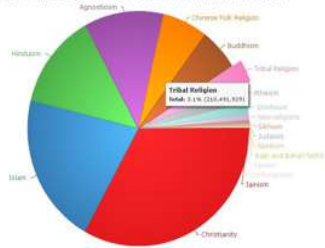
Major Religions of the World Ranked by Number of Adherents

Religion - Major Religions of the World Ranked by Number of Adherents



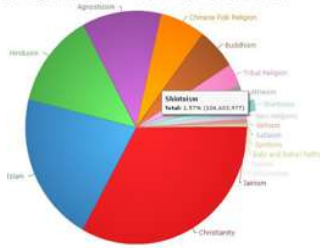
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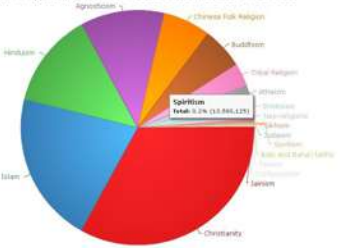
Major Religions of the World Ranked by Number of Adherents

Religion - Major Religions of the World Ranked by Number of Adherents



Major Religions of the World Ranked by Number of Adherents

Religion - Major Religions of the World Ranked by Number of Adherents



A. Animistic and spiritistic religions

Wikipedia defines animism as “the belief that there is no separation between the spiritual and physical (or material) world, and souls or spirits exist, not only in humans, but also in all other animals, plants, rocks, geographic features such as mountains or rivers, or other entities of the natural environment, including thunder, wind, and shadows.” Sacred-texts.com states “Animism is basically non-ethical and non-moral. The aim of the animist is not to have his character transformed or changed. It is to create the proper atmosphere so that spirits will comply with the will and wish of the animist. Therefore he does not hesitate to utilize any means which will provide him the protection which he desires, since these are merely means whereby he may relate to his world in a meaningful manner.”

Three groups, Tribal religions, Shintoism and spiritism, fall into this category.

The first, Tribal religions, conceive of spirits existing in all objects around them but do not usually have a concept of a higher deity or deities over the world.

Shintoism differs from other animistic religions in that it is a purely Japanese religion. The three features of Shintoism are that 1) Japan and her people are favored above all other lands and people, 2) that there are gods and spirits in nature (animism) and 3) that the Japanese people are descended from these gods and spirits (the kami). This probably accounts for Shintoism’s lack of popularity as a world religion.

Spiritism is the belief in spirit beings which exist in a spirit world coexisting with our own. In spiritism, mediums are often used to contact these spirits in order to gain knowledge or to influence the future.

Animism and spiritism as religions do not have prophets, sacred writings or any authoritative doctrines. Beliefs are passed on from adherent to adherent. (although there are a few Shinto sects that have written belief systems).

Are animism and spiritism the way to God?

Since this belief system does not acknowledge that there is a God who created all things, it fails to meet the first test – that of a God who exists outside of this physical world who is the cause for the existence of this physical world. Remember in section I of this study we discussed that science has determined that this universe is like a clock that was wound up and has been running down ever since. This is the major stumbling block of any belief system (including Atheism, Agnosticism and Darwinism) that does not acknowledge a creator. Simply stating that the matter in our universe came from the implosion of matter in another universe only pushes the problem of a first cause further back. This question MUST be answered by ANY belief system in order for it to be valid. Animism and Spiritism fail to meet that test.

B. Polytheistic religions

Wikipedia defines Polytheism as “the worship or belief in multiple deities usually assembled into a pantheon of gods and goddesses, along with their own religions and rituals.” It describes Polytheism as “a religious construct and a type of theism. Within theism, it contrasts with monotheism, the belief in a singular God.”

Wikipedia states that Polytheism “is well documented in historical religions of Classical antiquity, especially Greek polytheism and Roman polytheism.”

Strictly speaking, animism and spiritism are simply less developed polytheistic religions and some also include Hinduism and Buddhism in the class of Polytheistic religions. But even though Hinduism and Buddhism contain polytheistic elements, they also include pantheistic elements (the belief that God is in all things – this is *somewhat* echoed by Paul in Acts 17:28 addressing those gathered on Mars Hill: “For in him we live, and move, and have our being”) and Hinduism and Buddhism also include a somewhat monotheistic element in that they recognize Brahman as god who also takes the form of Brahma, the creator, Vishnu the preserver and Shiva, the destroyer. For the purposes of this study we will consider Hinduism and Buddhism in a separate category as they do not truly worship stones and inanimate objects as gods nor do they have a well-defined pantheon of gods as that of the Greeks.

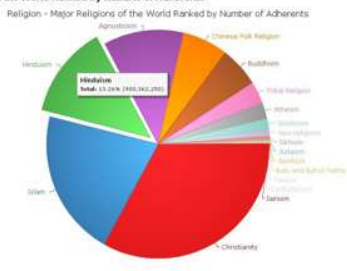
Is polytheism the way to God?

Polytheism fails to meet the test of God being a creator and not part of his creation. Polytheism also contains elements of idol worship. The foolishness of this type of religion is probably best shown in a quote from Isaiah 44:16-17 “Half of it he burns in the fire - over that half he cooks meat; he roasts a meal and fills himself. Yes, he warms himself and says, 'Ah! I am warm as I look at the fire.' With the rest of it he makes a god, his idol; he bows down to it and worships it. He prays to it, saying, 'Rescue me, for you are my god!'”

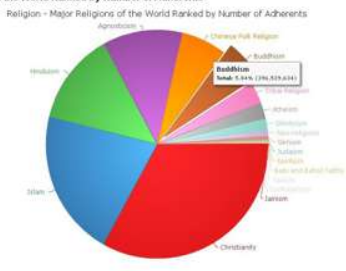
Anthropologists have also determined that Polytheism is not the first religion of any traceable society but that cultures started out as Monotheistic and later devolved into Polytheism. As an article in Bible.org states: “Anthropologist Wilhelm Schmidt studied numerous cultures and concluded that man’s first religion was monotheism, which then corrupted into polytheism. This would concur with Paul’s timeline of man’s rejection of God that he lays out in Romans the first chapter.

An example comes from the folk religion of China. Long before Confucianism, Taoism, or Buddhism, the Chinese worshipped Shang Ti, the Lord of heaven. He alone was worshiped until the Zhou dynasty, which began in 1000 B.C. From then on, only the emperor was allowed to pay homage to Shang Ti, and the knowledge of Shang Ti among the common people was lost. The worship-starved Chinese eventually embraced the religions of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism that provided spiritual knowledge and worship. Numerous stories like these abound throughout the world. In Korea, the supreme God is called Hananim. The Gedeo people of Ethiopia call Him Magano. Missionaries use this belief of a high God to point people to the God of the Bible.”

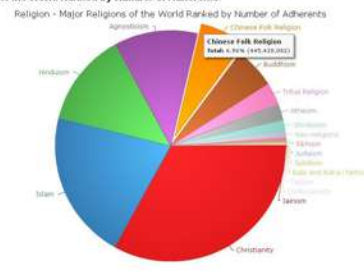
Major Religions of the World Ranked by Number of Adherents



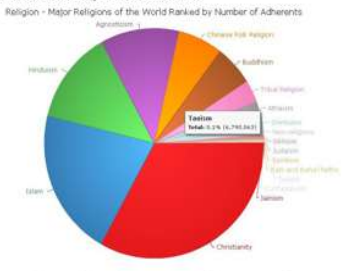
Major Religions of the World Ranked by Number of Adherents



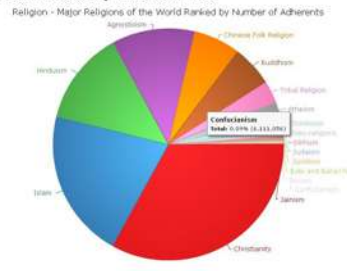
Major Religions of the World Ranked by Number of Adherents



Major Religions of the World Ranked by Number of Adherents



Major Religions of the World Ranked by Number of Adherents



C. Eastern religions including Hinduism and Buddhism

Hinduism has developed into many religions and has many offshoots. The most well known is Buddhism, but there are other less well known offshoots.

Derek Cooper in the book “Christianity and World Religions” traces Hinduism’s origins back to a people that occupied the region of India, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan. They shared a border with Persia - the Indus river. In Sanskrit, the river is called Sindhu. The Persians, being unable to pronounce the word properly called the river Hindu and gave that name to the people living on the other side

It is not easy to define the Hindu belief system as it encompasses almost as many belief systems as its number of devotees. Derek Cooper quotes Stephen Knapp: “Hinduism is not organized in the way we see most religions in the world. It does not have a particular founder, savior, book, leader, or holy place. It has no specific day of the week to observe, or call to prayer, or certain ritual that everyone must observe. It is decentralized and localized in a way in which it allows anyone to observe the basic principles that are best for him or her.”

Contenderministries.org sums up the most commonly held beliefs of Hindus:

“there is not a strict orthodoxy in Hinduism. There are however, several principles that share a commonality among the various sects. Virtually all Hindus believe in:

- The three-in-one god known as “Brahman,” which is composed of: Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the Preserver), and Shiva (the Destroyer).
- The Caste System.
- Karma. The law that good begets good, and bad begets bad. Every action, thought, or decision one makes has consequences – good or bad – that will return to each person in the present life, or in one yet to come.
- Reincarnation. Also known as “transmigration of souls,” or “samsara.” This is a journey on the “circle of life,” where each person experiences as series of physical births, deaths, and rebirths. With good karma, a person can be reborn into a higher caste, or even to godhood. Bad karma can relegate one to a lower caste, or even to life as an animal in their next life.
- Nirvana. This is the goal of the Hindu. Nirvana is the release of the soul from the seemingly endless cycle of rebirths.”

Hindus do not have one creation story; they have many different ones. Hindus do not see this as a contradiction but explain that each is a different part of the same reality and that as the world is recreated by Brahma, sustained by Vishnu and destroyed by Shiva in unending cycles, each may be a separate but true creation story.

Derek Cooper notes in “Christianity and World Religions:” To an outsider, one can get the impression that anything goes with Hinduism. Although not exactly true, the religion does have different scriptures, different gods, different worship practices, different postures toward one’s purpose or goal in life, and different ways to pursue whatever goal of life one wants to observe. As history of religions scholar Huston Smith writes: ‘If we were to take Hinduism as a whole – it’s vast literature, it’s complicated rituals, it’s sprawling folkways, it’s opulent art – and compress it into a single affirmation, we would find it saying: you can have whatever you want.’”

Derek Cooper in his list of core beliefs omits The Caste System, Karma and Nirvana and adds 6 other “core” beliefs:

- A belief in the divinity of the four Vedas, their most ancient scripture along with the Agamas, a collection of scriptures dealing with temple construction and the creation of idols. They also deal with the worship of deities, doctrines, meditation and yoga.
- That the universe goes through cycles of creation, preservation and destruction.
- That all of the sacraments and rituals of temple worship create a communion with devas and gods that exist in unseen worlds around us
- That a satguru is essential to know the Transcendant Absolute
- That all life is sacred, to be loved and revered and therefore practice *ahimsa*, non-injury. In thought, word and deed
- No religion teaches the only way to salvation above all others.

The one thing that sets Hinduism apart from animism and polytheism and makes it a separate class is that although Hindus may worship many different gods or any god they choose, Hindus believe that each, including Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are all simply manifestations of Brahman.

Buddhism is the most well-known offshoot of Hinduism but is entirely distinct from it. Buddhism finds its source in the teachings of one individual – Siddhartha Gautama. Siddhartha first studied under two Hindu gurus then later joined a group of ascetics. In a period of deep meditation, he came to the perception of the universe that is the center of Buddhist teachings. According to Buddhist history, after his enlightenment, The Buddha (or awakened one), sat for another 49 days until urged by two of the principal Hindu gods, Brahma and Indra to share his revelation with others. Buddhists believe that Buddha achieved Nirvana at the time of his death.

After Buddha’s death, a council was convened to recall and record the teachings of Buddha. A second council met a century later to address the issue of those who interpreted Buddha’s sayings in a strict approach and those who did not. A third council still another century later addressed what to do with the huge numbers of converts to Buddhism due to the conversion of the emperor of northern India, Ashoka, to Buddhism.

Derek Cooper notes in “Christianity and World Religions”: “Buddhism, like its parent religion, Hinduism, is extremely diverse...Some, for instance, do not believe in a god, while others worship gods. Some believe that the Buddha was a great human teacher, while others believe that the Buddha was divine.”

We have only briefly discussed Hinduism and Buddhism. We could spend at least one entire class studying Buddhism with its “Four Noble Truths,” and its path to the elimination of suffering by following the “Noble Eightfold Path.” But this class is not, primarily, a religions class. Our purpose is just to highlight the main features and

principles of the various religions in an effort to answer the question can we know that Christianity is God's revealed will for man?

Taoism (also spelled Daoism) is another of the Eastern religions. According to gotquestions.org, "Tao deals with the flow of the universe, or the force behind natural order that keeps all things balanced and in order. It is considered to be a source of existence and 'non-existence.' Some Eastern religions refer to this as the 'yin and yang' of the universe, which can also express itself as the equal forces of 'good' and 'evil.'

Most adherents of Taoism believe anything from polytheism (belief in many gods) to ancestor worship. Taoists tend to worship mostly on holidays in their calendar when food is set out as a sacrifice to the gods or the spirits of departed ancestors. Other forms of sacrifice include burning paper money so it will rematerialize in the spirit world for a departed ancestor to use."

Confucianism cannot properly be called a religion. According to religionfacts.com, "The main principle of Confucianism is ren ("humaneness" or "benevolence"), signifying excellent character in accord with li (ritual norms), zhong (loyalty to one's true nature), shu (reciprocity), and xiao (filial piety). Together these constitute de (virtue).

Confucianism is characterized by a highly optimistic view of human nature. The faith in the possibility of ordinary human beings to become awe-inspiring sages and worthies is deeply rooted in the Confucian heritage (Confucius himself lived a rather ordinary life), and the insistence that human beings are teachable, improvable, and perfectible through personal and communal endeavour is typically Confucian.

Confucius regarded Heaven (T'ien) as a positive and personal force in the universe; he was not, as some have supposed, an agnostic or a skeptic.

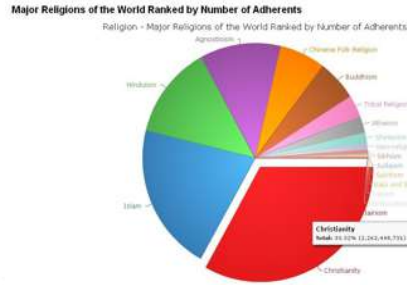
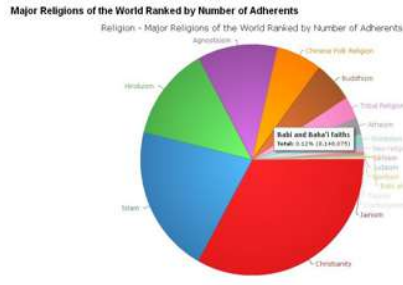
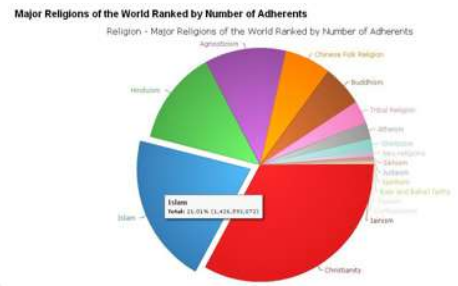
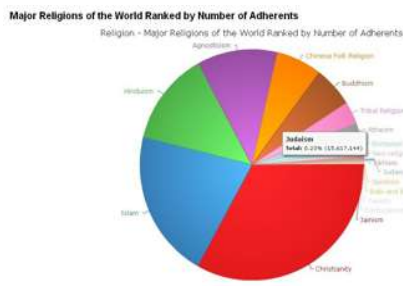
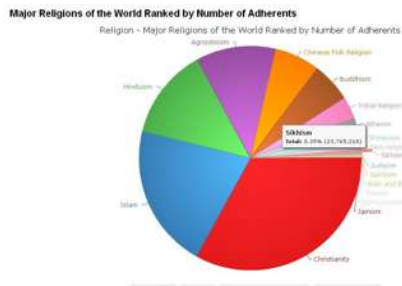
Aside from its important ethical principles, Confucianism does not prescribe any specific rituals or practices. These are filled by the practices of Chinese religion, Taoism, Buddhism, or other religion which Confucians follow."

Chinese folk religion is a designation describing the common religion of the majority Chinese culture: a combination of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism.

Confucianism along with Buddhism and Taoism operate within the same world view. Buddhism and Taoism are best viewed as complementary to Confucianism rather than in competition with it. While Confucianism concerns itself with the social and moral side of life, Taoism and Buddhism concern themselves with the spiritual side of life.

Are the Eastern religions the way to God?

Eastern religions with their fanciful creation stories and conflicting beliefs, fail to meet the test of revelation from God. In addition, they do not have an answer for what to do with man's sin. One cannot balance out the wrongs in life by the good they do. If I was in court because of a murder I committed, I would not be any less guilty if I had given a million dollars to charity. One may do good works, but they do not remove sin. Only the God of the Bible has an answer for sin.



D. The Four Monotheistic Faiths

Sikhism is the only one of the four religions considered monotheistic that is not one of the Abrahamic faiths. It is rather, a combination of one of the Abrahamic faiths (Islam) and Hinduism.

Gotquestions.org provides a history of Sikhism's origins: "Sikhism arose, historically, as an attempt to harmonize Islam and Hinduism. But such harmonization, while historically accurate, does not capture the theological and cultural uniqueness of Sikhism. To call Sikhism a compromise between the two would be taken as an insult akin to calling a Christian a heretical Jew. Sikhism is not a cult or a hybrid but a distinct religious entity.

The recognized founder of Sikhism, Nanak (1469-1538) was born of a Hindu father and a Muslim mother in India. Nanak is said to have received a direct call from God establishing him as a guru. He soon became known in the Punjab region of Northeast India for his devotion and piety and his bold assertion, "There is no Muslim, and there is no Hindu." He accumulated a considerable number of disciples (*sikhs*). He taught that God is one and he designated God as the Sat Nam ("true name") or Ekankar, combining the syllables *ek* ("one"), *aum* (a mystical sound expressing God), and *kar* ("Lord"). This monotheism does not include personality nor should it be blurred with any kind of pantheism (God is all), the latter being a characteristically Eastern tendency. However, Nanak retained the doctrines of reincarnation and karma which are notably Eastern, such as with Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, and others. Opposed to legalistic ritualism, Nanak taught that one can escape the reincarnation cycle (*samsara*) only through mystical union with God, namely through devotion and chanting. Nanak was followed by an unbroken line of nine appointed guru successors maintaining the line of leadership into the 18th century (1708).

While Sikhism was originally pacifist, it could not stay that way for long. Its rejection of the supremacy and completion of Mohammad the prophet was taken as

blasphemy and inspired much opposition from the historically warlike faith of Islam. By the time of the tenth guru, Gobind Rai, also known as Gobind Singh ("Lion"), had organized the Khalsa, a world-renowned class of warriors, conspicuous and brave, zealous and deadly.

Despite pacifist roots Sikhism has come to be known as militant, which is unfortunate because such militancy stems largely from geographical issues outside of Sikh control...Extreme measures have been taken by terrorists to establish a Sikh state, Khalistan, but the majority of Sikhs are peace-loving, gentle people.

Judaism is the first of the three Abrahamic faiths. Gotquestions.org has this to say about Judaism: "There are five main forms or sects of Judaism in the world today. They are Orthodox, Conservative, Reformed, Reconstructionist, and Humanistic. The beliefs and requirements in each group differ dramatically; however, a short list of the traditional beliefs of Judaism would include the following:

- God is the creator of all that exists; He is one, incorporeal (without a body), and He alone is to be worshipped as absolute ruler of the universe.
- The first five books of the Hebrew Bible were revealed to Moses by God. They will not be changed or augmented in the future.
- God has communicated to the Jewish people through prophets.
- God monitors the activities of humans; He rewards individuals for good deeds and punishes evil.

Although Christians base much of their faith on the same Hebrew Scriptures as Jews do, there are major differences in belief: Jews generally consider actions and behavior to be of primary importance; beliefs come out of actions. This conflicts with conservative Christians for whom belief is of primary importance and actions are a result of that belief. Judaism affirms the inherent goodness of the world and its people as creations of God. Jewish believers are able to sanctify their lives and draw closer to God by fulfilling mitzvot (divine commandments). No savior is needed or is available as an intermediary.

The 613 commandments found in Leviticus and other books regulate all aspects of Jewish life. The Ten Commandments, as delineated in Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21, form a brief synopsis of the Law.

The Messiah (anointed one of God) will arrive in the future and gather Jews once more into the land of Israel. There will be a general resurrection of the dead at that time. The Jerusalem Temple, destroyed in A.D. 70 by the Romans, will be rebuilt."

Islam (or Mohammedanism) was founded by Mohammed in 610 A.D. Islamic scripture parallels and reflects Mohammed's circumstances. Truthnet.org provides a very good description of the origin and structure of Islamic scriptures:

"About 4/5 the length of the New Testament. Muslims believe the identical book is in Heaven and Allah sent the angel Gabriel to Mohammed to reveal his "Word". The Quran is divided into 114 chapters or Surahs. The Surahs are revelations given to Mohammed during his 23 years of "Prophethood" from 610 AD to 632 AD.

The Quran, composed during Mohammed's lifetime corresponds to the time and circumstances of his life. The Surahs or chapters can be divided into three time periods.

Early Meccan The earliest Surahs are the shortest and known as **Early Meccan**, and date from 610 to 622 AD. Composed in Mecca, prior to Hejira where Mohammed fled to Medina in September 622 AD.

Median The **Median Surahs** were composed during the time Muslims controlled the city of Medina. They date from 622 to 630 AD. The doctrine of Jihad was introduced

as war was waged against Mecca and its idol worshippers. Animosity toward the Jews and Christians increased as they rejected Mohammed as a prophet from God.

Late Meccan Late Meccan Surahs were between 630 and 632 AD. The last 2 years of Mohammed's life after Mecca surrendered to his authority.

Surahs were at this time not collected in one book but were memorized and collected on various items. In the battle of Yamamah in 633 AD many of the Hafiz died. The Hafiz were Muslims who had committed much of the Quran to memory. With the urging of Umar, Zayd ibn Thabit, one of Mohammed most trusted secretaries was appointed to the task of collecting the Quran into one book. Still later after different versions of the quran began to appear Zayd was put in charge of collecting all the Qurans throughout the Muslim world and issuing an authorized copy in the place of ones collected.

The Hadith After the death of Mohammed, his followers collected his sayings and actions in books to guide and direct their beliefs. They give additional meaning behind the Surahs and help interpret their meanings.

The Five Pillars of Faith:

1. **"The Confession"** "La ilaha illa llah" "There is no God but God." And The Shahada, (Testimony) Kalima There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah.

2. **Salat** Prayer 5 times a day facing Mecca

3. **Zakat** Almsgiving

4. **Fasting** during the month of Ramadan, from sun-up till sundown.

5. **Hajj** Pilgrimage to Mecca once a lifetime

The Beliefs of Islam

The Five Articles of Faith

1. **God:** There is only one true God and his name is Allah. Allah is all knowing, all-powerful and sovereign judge. Yet Allah is not a personal God, for he is so far above man in every way that he is not personally knowable. The emphasis of the God of Islam is on judgment and power, not grace and mercy. To the Muslim mind, calling God father means God had sexual relations in order to create man.

2. **Angels:** Angels in Islam serve Allah's will such as Gabriel delivering the Koran to Mohammed. Angels do not perform any bodily functions as they are created of light. Angels serve different purposes; each person has two recording angels who record his/her good or bad deeds.

Jinn : Are spiritual beings created out of fire....who are ranked between angels and men and can be either good or bad. Satan was a Jinn and not a fallen angel according to Islam.

Satan: A Jinn who refused to fall prostrate before Adam after he was created. He is the leader of evil ones in the world.

3. **Scripture:** There are four inspired books in Islam: Quran, Torah, Ingil and Zabur. The Torah, Ingil and Zabur: "Books of Moses, The Gospel of Jesus, and Psalms of David" These are books mentioned in the Koran as God's Word but most Moslems feel the current books are corrupt. For this reason Allah gave Mohammed the "Quran". Many Muslims try to find Mohammed in the Bible and feel he is referred to in Deuteronomy 18:16, John 14:6.

4. Prophets: In Islam God has spoken through numerous prophets down through the centuries, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. The greatest prophet and the last prophet is Muhammad, he is the seal of the prophets.

5. Last Days: The last days will be a time of Resurrection and judgment.:

Resurrection: Everybody will be resurrected to stand before Allah to be judged in the Last Day. Those who follow Allah and Mohammed will go to Paradise others will go to Hell. Everybody will pass through Hell and even some Muslim will spend time in Hell till their sins are burned away and Mohammad intercedes for them.

Hell: Hell is a place of Allah's judgment where Muslims will spend some time before entering paradise, unbelievers will have no escape. Muslim's believe Mohammed will intercede for them and deliver them from Hell.

Christianity and Islam

Jesus: Jesus is just a prophet and not the Son of God. He is only a prophet to the Jews who was not crucified but was caught up into Heaven. God placed a substitute in his place on the cross. Many Muslims feel the substitute was Judas. Jesus is the Messiah who is coming at the end. He will kill all the Jews, Christians and pigs; break all crosses; get married and die 40 years later and be buried in Medina next to Mohammed. The Resurrection will follow.

Holy Spirit: The angel Gabriel is recognized as the Holy Spirit within Islam, or as some commentators think angels in general.

Salvation: The Muslims believe in salvation by obedience to Allah. Mohammed will intercede on the behalf of Muslims before Allah. In a scale, Allah will weight the sins and good deeds to determine the punishment. Time in Hell will be necessary to pay for sins that outweigh good deeds. After which the "Muslims" will be accepted into Paradise. Non-Believers will go to Hell with no hope of escape. Those who die in Jihad or Holy War will go directly to Paradise where 72 virgins will be awaiting him.

Sin: Man is born sinless and all people are Muslims at birth. But lack of obedience to Allah is sin. Sin is by action only and not by nature.

Sources of the Quran:

Where did the Quran come from? The Quran claims Allah is the source of the Quran and that there is an identical copy in Heaven that was given Gabriel to give to Mohammad in intervals.

Jewish sources of the Quran

1. Visit by the queen of Sheba to Solomon as recorded in Sura 27:17-30

17 And before Solomon were marshalled his hosts, of Jinns and men and birds, and they were all kept in order and ranks.

18 At length, when they came to a (lowly) valley of ants, one of the ants said: O ye ants, get into your habitations, lest Solomon and his hosts crush you (under foot) without knowing it.

Sura 27:17-18

This same story is recorded almost verbatim in the Talmud work II Targum of Ester 1,2

2. Abraham saved from Nimrod's Fire as recorded in the following Suras 2:260, 6:74-84, 21:52-72, 19:42-50, 26:69-79, 24:15-16, 37:81-95,

We bestowed aforetime on Abraham his rectitude of conduct, and well were we Acquainted with him.

52 Behold! he said to his father and his people, what are these images, to

which ye are (so assiduously) devoted? 53 They said, we found Our fathers worshipping them.

Sura 21: 52-53

The source for this story is from the Midrash Rabbah on Genesis

3. Cain and Abel Sura 5:30-35

Then Allah sent a raven, who scratched the ground, to show him how to hide the shame of his brother. Woe is me said he; was I not even able to be as this raven, and to hide the shame of my brother? then he became full of regrets

-Sura 5:30

The source of this story can be found in the book

Pirke Rabbi Eleaszer in the Midrash. The only difference being that the crow shows Adam not Cain how to bury Abel.

4. Harut and Marut The two angels of Babylon.

They followed what the evil ones gave out (falsely) against the power of Solomon: the blasphemers were, not Solomon, but the evil ones, teaching men magic, and such things as came down at Babylon the angels Harut and Marut.

Sura 2:109

This same story is taken from the Midrash Yalkut the only difference being the two angels named are Shamhazi and Azael. But the names of Harut and Marut were two idols worshipped far back in Armenia. They were assistants to the female goddess Aspandaramit. The Zoroastrians regarded her as the spirit of the earth.

Heretical Christian Sources

5. The Seven Sleepers, or Companions of the Cave. Surah 18:9-26

9 Or dost thou reflect that the companions of the cave and of the inscription were wonders among our Signs?

10 Behold, the youths betook themselves to the cave: they said, our Lord bestow on us mercy from thyself, and dispose of our affair for us in the right way

11 Then we draw (a veil) over their ears, for a number of years, in the cave, (so that they heard not): Sura 18:9-11

The legend is Greek and is found in the Latin work of Gregory of Tours. Seven men of the city of Ephesus take refuge from persecution in a cave during the reign of Decius (249-251 AD) they wake in the reign of Theodorus II 447 AD. Christianity being the faith of the empire. This was a mere story to illustrate the rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire.

Zoroastrian Sources

6. Quranic view of Paradise Sura 55:72, 56:22

Round about them will (serve) youths of perpetual (freshness),

18 With goblets, (shining) beakers, and cups (filled) out of Clear flowing fountains:

19 No after ache will they receive therefrom, nor will they suffer intoxication:

20 And with fruits, any that they may select;

21 And the flesh of fowls, any that they may desire.

22 And (there will be) Companions with beautiful, big, and lustrous eyes

Sura 56:18-22

The picture of Paradise with beautiful virgins waiting for men is not found in any of the Old or New Testament but can be traced to the Zoroastrian concept of Paradise Paries or Fairies –spirits in bright array and beautiful, to captivate the heart of a man. The name Houry is derived from an Avesta or Pahlavi source. As well as jinn for genii and bihvisht (Paradise) signifying in Avestic “The better land”.

Shia, Sunni, Babi and Baha’i sects in Islam

The Shia and Sunni sects arose after the death of Mohammed because of a dispute over the succession in leadership after Mohammed’s death. One group followed Shi’atu Ali, a cousin and son-in-law of Mohammed from whom they get their name, Shia and the other group did not follow a single leader but rather Mohammed’s companions called the Sahaba. Both follow traditional Islamic scripture although they interpret it differently in some cases.

The Babi and Baha’i sects arose later when a Persian merchant named Siyyid Mirza Ali-Muhammed claimed to be a new prophet of Islam. He claimed that the promised one (the Qa’im)’s coming was imminent and he took on the title of the gate (Bab - so his followers are called Babi – gateists). Later, he claimed to be the Qa’im himself. He was arrested and executed on 07/09/1850. Later, in 1866, Baha u llah claimed to be the messiah. The majority of the Babi followed him and became Baha’i, but some of the Babi did not accept him resulting in two distinct groups. The two groups have scriptures in addition to the Qu’ran and are mostly underground sects of Mohammedanism as both Shia and Sunni sects consider them apostates from Islam.

Is one of these four monotheistic faiths the way to God?

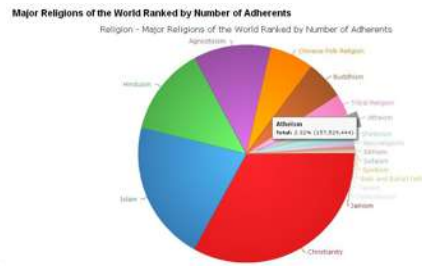
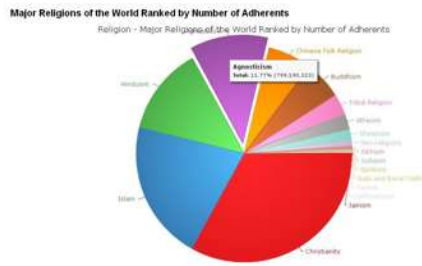
The four monotheistic faiths all claim God as their origin. There are several problems with this claim when it comes to Mohammedanism. Mohammedanism can clearly be seen to include content from a variety of outside sources. Its claim that The New Testament is a later creation and is not an accurate record of the life of Christ can also be shown to be false (See section II C above). It also does not adequately deal with the problem of man’s sin.

If Mohammedanism is false, then, by necessity, Sikhism must also be false as it is a combination of both Mohammedanism and Hinduism.

The Jewish scriptures meet the test of inspiration (see Sec II D). They are accepted by both The Jews and Christians. If the Messiah did not come at the time foretold by Daniel in Daniel 9:24-27, but has yet to come, then we would all do well to convert to Judaism. But it can be established through outside sources that Jesus came at the time predicted, that he fulfilled prophecies found in Jewish scripture and

that His tomb was found empty. He proclaimed a New Covenant as foretold in Jeremiah 31:31.

Christianity meets all of the criteria as the Word of God. Its agreement with science, its lack of contradictions though written over vast periods of time, fulfilled prophecy and the only religion that contains an answer to the problem of man's sin – a substitutionary sacrifice mark it as what it claims to be. Yes, we can know that Christianity is God's revealed will for man.



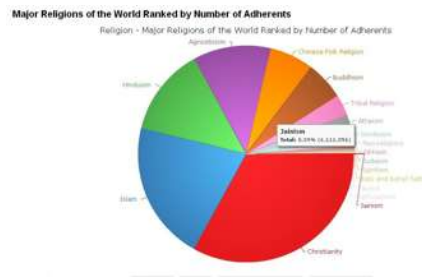
E. Agnosticism and Atheism

Agnosticism is the view that the existence of God is impossible to be known or proven. The word “agnostic” comes from the Greek word $\alpha\gamma\nu\omega\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$ (meaning ignorance or lack of knowledge – it is the negative form of the Greek word $\gamma\nu\omega\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$ meaning knowledge). Agnosticism is a less intellectually honest position than atheism because agnostics base their position on the existence of God being unknowable and unprovable rather than simply denying God’s existence. In reality, the agnostic bases decision on things that are “unknowable” and “unprovable” every day. We cannot prove that gravity exists, for example. We can see gravity’s effects on the world around us, however, and we believe and operate on that belief because we can see the evidence of the operation of this force. To say this is the only area of life in which you will not make a decision based on evidence is atheism while trying to avoid argument.

Atheism is the view that God does not exist; that there never was nor could there ever be a God. Darwin’s theory of evolution was an attempt to account for part of Atheists’ problem – from where did life come? Before Darwinism, Atheists had no explanation for the wonder of life and the variety of life that we see around us. Dinesh D’Souza in the book *What’s so great about Christianity* states: “In his book *The Blind Watchmaker*, Dawkins writes that ‘Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist. He points out that the universe and its creatures show irrefutable evidence of design. Before Darwin, there was no plausible explanation for that design other than to posit a designer. Atheists now have an alternative explanation for why fish have gills, why birds have wings, and why human beings have brains and arms and lungs.’”

Are Agnosticism and Atheism the correct world view when it comes to God’s existence?

In lesson I, sections E – F, we covered the evidence for design and discussed the possibility of chance being the answer and saw that that possibility has been thoroughly discredited. And as far as the existence of life is concerned we noted from the book *Why Believe? God exists!* That “Many scholars feel that with the discovery of the relation between information theory and DNA, we are witnessing the scientific collapse of atheistic explanations of origin. The DNA code, in even the simplest organisms has been clearly shown, by NASA computers among other sources, to represent not just a high level of complexity, but a language which could only have its origin in intelligent being! Thus the scientific evidence is clearly and decisively against materialism.”



E. Jainism

Jains do not believe that the universe was created by a god. They have been called atheists by some because they do not believe in any god in a traditional sense. The term transtheistic was coined by Heinrich Zimmer to describe their belief system. They believe that Jinas (the spirit or soul inhabiting a bodily container) can become liberated from their version of the cycle of reincarnation and become pure souls that are eternal, omniscient and happy and they venerate them. To me, this is very similar to the Mormon belief that we can all become elevated and become equal to God.

Central to Jainism is the concept of non-violence. One thing that makes Jains distinct from other groups when it comes to non-violence is their application of this concept even to food. Not only are they vegetarian, they make considerable effort to not harm vegetation as well. They believe that although eating plants is necessary in order to sustain life, it is still an evil. Because of this, their religious literature includes instructions designed to minimize harm done to plants while performing this necessary evil. Jains do not go outside at night because you are more likely to accidentally injure or kill an insect.

Jains make several vows. The first is called Ahimsa; meaning non-violence. The second is called Satya; meaning truth. This is always subject first to ahimsa. So if telling the truth to someone will result in violence, a Jain will remain silent. The third vow is called asteya – not taking anything that is not willingly offered. They will not exploit another individual for gain; considering that theft. The fourth is called brahmacharya and involves controlling the senses. Interestingly enough, this vow includes mentions of God: “I understand, and fully accept, that the true purpose of life for all human beings is to seek God.” Another part of this vow states “I renounce attachment to things, people, places, and all self-definitions — except one: I will define myself always as a child of God, and will obey whatever guidance He gives me.” The fifth vow is called aparigraha. This vow entails detaching oneself from people, places and things. In its fully realized form, it entails completely renouncing all property and social relations. All Jains take these vows. Those in monastic orders carry these vows to their logical extremes. Of the two major sects of Jainism, Digambara and Svetambara, only Svetambara accords women full status as monks. As Digambara monks renounce even clothing and do not allow women to be nude, female monks are restricted from full participation in monastic life.

Jainism like other false religions not only does not have an answer for how the universe came to be, it maintains that the universe has always existed. This contravenes the known fact that our universe had a beginning point. Jainism also holds no answer for the problem of sin.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR
'CAN WE KNOW THAT CHRISTIANITY IS GOD'S REVEALED WILL FOR MAN ??

1. What's the difference between a religion that came from man and one from God?

It's the only one that has authority for what we do with our lives.
It's the only one that provides an answer that comes from outside ourselves.
It's the only one that shows us what love really is.

2. How important is fulfilled prophecy as verification of Divine origins?

It's key because it will be the only one that shows that it came from outside our human existence.
As the song says "Many things about tomorrow I don't seem to understand, but I know who holds tomorrow and I know who holds my hand."

3. How can we determine a false prophet?

If the things they say don't come to pass.

4. Is the study of other religions beneficial? Why or why not?

Yes. Because when you see how illogical some other religions are, it reinforces our faith and helps us appreciate God's way of doing things much more.
It points out the uniqueness of God's love and His plan for man which is different from anything the world has ever come up with on its own.
It makes us aware of the influences of other religions on our society. Untrue concepts from other religions have been making their way into our society. Such as Karma – a great deal of the pressure for tolerance for other religions has come from Hinduism for example.

IV. CAN WE KNOW THAT GOD IS GOOD?

It is a fact of life that both good and evil exist in the world. Because of this, some believe that 1. God is not good. Others believe that 2. God is good and that suffering is just an illusion. While still others believe that 3. God is good, but He is limited. The vast majority of Christians, however, believe that 4. God is a good, all-powerful God but allows the existence of evil in the world.

I distributed a questionnaire by hand and on FaceBook about the existence of good and evil in the world and asked for people to express their views. Everyone who responded held this majority view, but very few could offer any concrete reason supporting this view of God. That is what I hope to address in this portion of this study as I believe there are very good answers to the problem of evil in the world and that the evidence for God's goodness is overwhelming.

There are three things at which I feel that we need to look: One is the external evidence we have to establish God's goodness. Another is what the Bible has to say about the goodness of God. And the last is how we reconcile God's goodness and omnipotence with the existence of evil in the world.

A. Evidence for the goodness of God apart from the Bible

In earlier sections we established the existence of a creator of the universe whom we rightly call God. We established that the Bible is the only document that fits all the criteria that a message from God must exhibit. But is this creator who He claims to be in His Word? Is God good?

1. The very fact that we wonder about the goodness of God is one of the proofs that He is, indeed, good.

Ravi Zacharias at apologetics315.com framed this proof of God's goodness in a humorous yet insightful and logical way:

"When you say there's too much evil in this world you assume there's good. When you assume there's good, you assume there's such a thing as a moral law on the basis of which to differentiate between good and evil. But if you assume a moral law, you must posit a moral Law Giver, but that's Who you're trying to disprove and not prove. Because if there's no moral Law Giver, there's no moral law. If there's no moral law, there's no good. If there's no good, there's no evil. What is your question?"

J.D. Thomas in his book "Facts and Faith" states:

"No animal has ever displayed a sense of religion or moral consciousness or ethical responsibility. These qualities are found only in human beings who are distinct from animals in having rational personality. On the strength of empirical and scientific observations that 'something does not come from nothing' and that 'life comes from life,' it seems to be a valid conclusion that the source of the sense of moral responsibility must be moral, rational personality! Certainly it is far more logical and more reasonable to believe that man's moral consciousness derived from a God who is Himself a moral and rational person, than it is to believe that these highly sensitive and highly developed qualities were derived by pure chance out of thin air."

"The human conscience thus demands a God, somewhat like the stomach calls for food. It takes both to explain the existence of either. Unless there is a moral, knowing God to whom man must someday give an account for his choices and his conduct, the presence of the conscience is Unexplainable.

Our sense of oughtness differs greatly from our own personal desires, wishes and self-interest. Many times we as persons would preferentially and selfishly choose differently, except that our conscience requires us to act contrary to our personal choice. Conscience is not that by which we learn the difference between right and wrong things – this is done by education. But conscience is the faculty which prods us into doing that which we believe to be right, even though we might be mistaken about what the ‘right’ is. Saul of Tarsus persecuted Christians in good conscience but he was misinformed about what right conduct was in the matter.”

From birth we have what some would call *moral intuition*. As I have observed in some of my lessons before, no one needs to instill this moral sense of oughtness in a child. They seem to have it from birth and can become very angry when things go contrary to what they see as right. They will loudly declare “that’s not fair” and they have a desire for someone to step in and make things right.

By doing this, children make the argument that evil is the absence of good because they are expecting the good and are disappointed when that expectation is not met.

Here is the truth of the matter (a preacher during his sermon would ask at this point “Are you listening?”) and I want you to pay close attention to what I’m saying: Anytime we posit something as the absence of something else, we point to that something as the reality and its absence as a lack of that reality.

Ok. Gary, you’re being wordy. What did you just say?

Let me put it this way: We can imagine a world in which there is only truth. But we cannot imagine a world in which there is only lying because lying requires that there must be some kind of truth! That means that good is the reality. If good is the reality it is an ontological (having to do with the source of the existence of a thing) necessity for God, Himself, to be good.

One might argue that there are some good things that exist only because of evil. For example, God’s mercy cannot exist without the presence of sin (evil). But this brings us back to evil being the absence of good as sin can only be sin if there is some good that one has fallen short of. Mercy, therefore, is God’s goodness filling a hole created by a lack of that goodness on the part of man.

So what can be the only reality based on the existence of good? God, Himself, therefore cannot be anything other than good.

2. Another proof that God is good is found in the beauty of the world and the universe around us.

David said in Psalm 19 “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.” And this principle of the heavens declaring God’s glory and His handiwork is a very real thing.

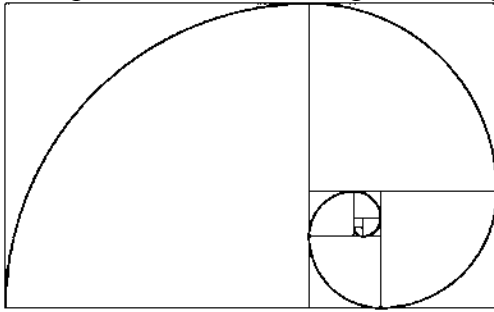
In a TED talk given by Physicist Murray Gell-Mann in 2007, Murray Gell-Mann stated in his slide show presentation that “What is especially striking and remarkable in fundamental physics (*is that*) a beautiful or elegant theory is more likely to be right than a theory that is inelegant.”

He illustrated his point by relating how he and three or four of his colleagues published a theory in spite of experimental evidence that seemed to the contrary – simply because the mathematics of the theory were so beautiful. As he related in his slide show presentation: “In 1957 some of us put forward a partially complete theory of the weak force, in disagreement with the result of seven experiments. It was beautiful and so we dared to publish it, believing that all those experiments must be wrong. In fact, they WERE all Wrong.” He went on to say that, contrary to what some say (that this is just

part of our perception of the universe and not a fundamental truth), that this elegance and beauty is a real thing; not just part of our perceptions.

One such example of this beauty is the abundance of structures in the universe and the natural world based on the Fibonacci sequence (also called the Golden Ratio). The Fibonacci sequence starts like this: 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55 ($0+1=1$; $1+1=2$; $1+2=3$; $2+3=5$) and continues infinitely on from there. Each number is the sum of the two numbers that precede it. Using this sequence creates objects that are visually quite beautiful.

The unique properties of the Golden Rectangle provides an example of the use of Fibonacci progression. This shape, a rectangle in which the ratio of the sides a/b is equal to the golden mean (ϕ) (≈ 1.618), can result in a nesting process which takes on the form of a spiral. It's called the logarithmic spiral, and it abounds in the universe and nature.



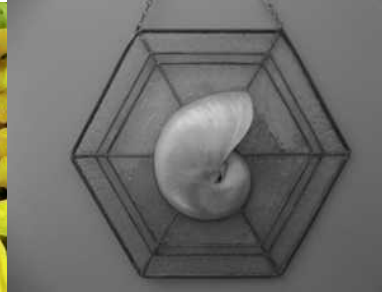
Below are three such examples of the use of the Fibonacci sequence in the universe and in nature:



A spiral Galaxy



A sunflower



A Chambered Nautilus
hanging on the wall of our home

There is nothing in nature that demands that structures follow this numerical progression. But the use of it results in structures that are visually quite beautiful.

What but a good God would design such beauty into the universe and the world we see around us?

3. Another proof that God is good is found in the effect of God's Word in the lives of those who follow it and the effect God's Word has had on civilization.

Before we get into a discussion of this proof that God is good, I want us to understand that it is commonly argued by atheists that Christianity has been responsible for some of what they claim are the worst atrocities in world history: The Crusades, The Inquisition, religious wars and The Salem Witch Trials. These aberrations are, indeed, blights on the face of Christianity. However, three things should be noted about these incidents: 1. They pale to insignificance in the face of crimes that have been practiced on humanity by those who held to secular, non-religious values. 2. They fly in the face of Christian teaching and values. And 3. Even those incidents can be shown by historical record to

have been greatly exaggerated. The truth is that man has only himself to blame for his inhumanity. I intend to address some of these issues at the end of this section.

So what effect has The Bible and Christianity had on the world in which we live?

The effect that Christianity has had on the world is astounding. The ideals embodied in Christianity are so powerful that they caused a change in the western world from paganism to Christianity in an astonishingly short space of time. Sociologist, Rodney Stark in his book "The Rise of Christianity" (Princeton University Press 1996) points to a number of advantages these ideals gave Christianity. John McCloskey, in his review of this important work, states:

"In 165, during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, an epidemic struck that carried away during the course of fifteen years up to a third of the total population of the empire, including Marcus Aurelius himself. In 251 a similar epidemic, most likely of measles, struck again with similar results. Historians generally acknowledge that these epidemics produced a depopulation which led in part to the decline of the Roman empire, more than the normally attributed cause of moral degeneration. Stark points out that these epidemics favored the rapid rise of Christianity for three reasons. One, that Christianity offered a more satisfactory account of "why bad things happen to good people," based on the centrality of the suffering and Cross of Christ than any form of classical paganism. Second, "Christian values of love and charity, from the beginning, had been translated into norms of social service and community solidarity. When disasters struck, the Christians were better able to cope, and this resulted in substantially higher rates of survival. This meant that in the aftermath of each epidemic, Christians made up a larger and larger percentage of the population even without new converts." Last, these epidemics left large numbers of people without the interpersonal bonds that would have prevented them from becoming Christians, thus encouraging conversion. He says, "in a sense paganism did indeed 'topple over dead' or at least acquired its fatal illness during these epidemics, falling victim to its relative inability to confront these crises socially or spiritually, an inability suddenly revealed by the example of its upstart challenger."

Stark underlines the fact that Christianity brought a new culture capable of making life in Greco-Roman cities more tolerable: "To cities filled with homeless and the impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachments. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family. To cities torn by violent ethnic strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity. And to cities faced with epidemics, fires, and earthquakes, Christianity offered effective nursing services." Can it be that the very fact that any of our cities are livable today is due in large part not to technological progress, but to the Christian virtues and ideals lived by their inhabitants, and that the answer for those cities afflicted by the same ills as ancient Antioch is simply more lived Christianity?"

I want us to look at ten ways in which the world has benefited from Christianity. Although I do not agree with all the things Dinesh D'Souza has to say in the book "What's So Great About Christianity," his research into the ways in which Christianity has benefited the world is extremely good and so we will be using his book as the basis for this section of our study of the question "Can we know that God is good."

First, contrary to what is commonly believed, Christianity did not usher in the Dark Ages, but rather raised civilization out of them. In What's So Great About Christianity D'Souza notes: "In The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire Edward Gibbon accuses Christianity of replacing classical civilization with religious barbarism. But classical civilization was itself infused with barbarous practices like pederasty and slavery. Moreover, the Christians didn't destroy Roman civilization, The Huns, Goths, Vandals, and Visigoths did. These barbarians who came from the pagan regions of northern

Europe, smashed a Rome that had long been weak and decadent. Fortunately, they eventually converted to Christianity. Over time it was Christianity that civilized these rude people. Christianity didn't overrun and lay waste to a learned civilization. Christianity found a continent that had already been laid waste. The "Dark Ages" were the consequence of Roman decadence and barbarian pillage. Slowly and surely, Christianity took this backward continent and gave it learning and order, stability and dignity...If Christianity had not been born out of Judaism, Rodney Stark writes, we might still be living in the Dark Ages."

Second, because Christians understand that human beings exist in two realms, Christianity gave the world the ideas of limited government and the separation of church and state. We do not find this idea expressed in other government systems or in other religions. Bernard Lewis in writing about the difference between Islam and Christianity states "in classical Arabic and in the other classical languages of Islam, there are no pairs of terms corresponding to 'lay' and 'ecclesiastical,' 'spiritual' and 'temporal,' 'secular' and 'religious,' because these pairs of words express a Christian dichotomy that has no equivalent in the world of Islam."

As D'Souza says "Augustine's great work The City of God argues that during our time here on earth, the Christian inhabits two realms, the earthly city and the heavenly city...It means that the earthly city need not concern itself with the question of man's final or ultimate destiny. It also implies that the claims of the earthly city are limited, that there is a sanctuary of conscience inside every person that is protected from political control, and that kings and emperors, however grand, cannot usurp authority that rightly belongs only to God...Here we see, in its embryo, the idea of limited government... Society encompasses the whole range of people's activities, while state refers to the specific and delineated sphere of government authority."

Third, Christianity affirms the ordinary life as Charles Taylor called it. As D'Souza says "It is the simple idea that ordinary people are fallible, and yet these fallible people matter...The nuclear family, the idea of limited government, the Western concept of the rule of law, and our culture's high emphasis on the relief of suffering all derive from this basic Christian understanding of the dignity of fallible human beings...Christian exaltation of the low man, the common man, and the underdog. These groups were not favorites of the world of ancient Greece and Rome. Homer ignored them in his epics, concentrating entirely on life among the ruling class. Lesser men appeared, if at all, as servants...Charles Taylor notes that as a consequence of Christianity, new values entered the world. For the first time people began to view society not from the perspective of the haughty aristocrat but from that of the ordinary man."

Fourth, Christianity gave us our modern system of capitalism. Capitalism has been much maligned in recent years, but as Dinesh D'Souza notes: "capitalism satisfied the Christian demand for an institution that channels selfish human desire toward the betterment of society. Some critics accuse capitalism of being a selfish system, but the selfishness is not in capitalism – it is in human nature...The effect of capitalism is to steer human selfishness so that, through the invisible hand of competition, the energies of the capitalist produce the abundance from which the whole society benefits. Moreover, capitalism encourages entrepreneurs to act with consideration for others even when their ultimate motive is to benefit themselves. So while profit remains the final goal, entrepreneurs spend the better part of each day figuring out how better to serve the needs of their actual and potential customers."

Fifth, Christianity gave us the idea of compassion for our fellow men. As D'Souza states: "The Christian legacy of human fallibility and ordinary satisfaction (gave us) our culture's powerful emphasis on compassion, on helping the needy, and on alleviating distress even in distant places...The ancient Greeks and Romans did not believe this. They held a view quite commonly held in other cultures today: yes, that is a problem, but it's not our problem...It was the Christian spirit of mutual love and communal charity"

that astonished and impressed the pagans and the Romans....Christianity has also produced many great figures (of compassion) from Vincent de Paul to Mother Teresa, who have dedicated their lives to the service of the poor and sick. Nowhere else – not in other religions nor in secular society – do we find anything like this.”

Some may argue that this idea of compassion is present even in those in our society that are secular, but this is but an enduring remnant of Christianity in our society. If our country continues down its current path, our society will eventually embrace non-Christian values and the values learned from Christianity will be forgotten.

Sixth, Christianity taught us the preciousness and equal worth of every human life. As D’Souza says “In ancient Greece and Rome, human life had very little value. The Spartans left weak children to die on the hillside. Infanticide was common, as it is even today in many parts of the world, Fathers who wanted sons had few qualms about drowning their newborn daughters. Human beings were routinely bludgeoned to death or mauled by wild animals in the Roman gladiatorial arena. The greatest of the classical thinkers, from Seneca to Cicero, saw nothing wrong with these practices. Christianity banned them, and Christianity introduced the moral horror we now feel when we hear about them.”

Seventh, Christianity elevated the status of women to one of equality with men. This is something that is unsurprising to us in our day and time, but it bordered on being scandalous in the world of The Apostle Paul’s day and time. The view of women in ancient times was expressed by Aristotle who stated that in woman, reason is present but unused.

D’Souza states that “Christianity did not contest patriarchy, but it elevated the status of women within it. The Christian prohibition of adultery – a sin viewed as equally serious for men and women – placed a moral leash on the universal double standard that commanded women to behave themselves while men did as they pleased. Unlike Judaism and Islam, which treated men and women unequally in matters of divorce, Christian rules on the matter were identical for women and men. So dignified was the position of the woman in Christian marriage that women predominated in the early Christian church, as in some respects they do even today. As a result, the Romans scorned Christianity as a religion for women.”

Eighth, Christianity is the first group in history to have started an anti-slavery movement.

As D’Souza writes: “Steven Weinberg notes that ‘Christianity...lived comfortably with slavery for many centuries.’ These atheistic writers are certainly not the first to fault Christianity for its alleged approval of slavery. But slavery pre-dated Christianity by centuries and even millennia. It was widely practiced in the ancient world, from China and India to Greece and Rome, and most cultures regarded it as an indispensable institution, like the family. For centuries, slavery needed no defenders because it had no critics. Even the Bible does not condemn slavery outright, with Paul in Ephesians 6:5 and other passages urging slaves to obey their masters and urging masters to be kind to their slaves....Even so, Christianity from its very beginning discouraged the enslavement of fellow Christians....How can a slave also be a brother? Christians began to see the situation as untenable. Slavery, the foundations of Greek and Roman civilization, withered throughout medieval Christendom and was replaced by serfdom, which was not the same thing. While slaves were ‘human tools,’ serfs were human beings who had rights of marriage, contract, and property ownership that were legally enforceable. Medieval feudalism was based on a hierarchical system of reciprocal rights and duties between lords and serfs....The debate over slavery in America was essentially a religious debate....Throughout history people have opposed slavery for themselves but have been perfectly happy to enslave others,. Indeed there were several thousand black slaveowners in the American South. What is remarkable is for a group to oppose slavery in principle.”

Ninth, Christianity gave us the idea of “just” and “unjust” wars. As D’Souza states “The Christian ‘just war’ principles say that even in war you should not deliberately kill civilians. It also says that war should be waged defensively: you should not attack first. A just war should be a last resort undertaken only when other measures have been exhausted and when there is a reasonable chance of success. Moreover, retaliation should be proportionate to the original offense.”

Tenth, Christianity gave us the modern concept of science. D’Souza notes that “science as an organized, sustained enterprise arose only once in human history. And where did it arise? In Europe, in the civilization they called Christendom...An unbiased look at the history of science shows that modern science is an invention of medieval Christianity, and that the greatest breakthroughs in scientific reason have largely been the work of Christians. Even atheist scientists work with Christian assumptions that, due to their ignorance of theology and history, are invisible to them.”

D’Souza notes that “Faith is not a highly acclaimed word in the scientific community. ‘I do not believe that the scientist can have that same certainty of faith that very deeply religious people have,’ writes physicist Richard Feynman in *The Meaning of it All*. Neil deGrasse Tyson complains that ‘the claims of religions rely on faith’ and boasts that ‘the claims of science rely on experimental verification.’ Feynman and Tyson seem quite unaware that at the heart of their cherished scientific enterprise is a faith-based proposition no less mysterious than any religious dogma. This is the presumption, quite impossible to prove, that the universe is rational...Christianity reinvigorated the idea of an ordered cosmos by envisioning the universe as following laws that embody the rationality of God the creator.”

But aren’t the ten things we’ve listed universal? What about such things as the “Declaration of Human Rights” found in the charter of the United Nations? D’Souza notes what Nietzsche said about these values and concepts: “The life of the West, Nietzsche said, is based on Christianity. The values of the West are based on Christianity. Some of these values seem to have taken on a life of their own, and this gives us the illusion that we can get rid of Christianity and keep the values. This, Nietzsche says, is an illusion. Our Western values are what Nietzsche terms ‘shadows of gods.’ Remove the Christian foundation, and the values must go too.”

The values, ideas and ideals that have been introduced into the world by Christianity - so different from those of the rest of the world - reveal the mind of God and show His goodness.

B. What does the Bible have to say about the goodness of God?

I said earlier that we were going to look at what the Bible has to say about the goodness of God. In this section I want us to understand what the Bible actually has to say about the goodness of God and what it means as far as our understanding of His goodness. We too often misunderstand the goodness of God. This is part of the reason that many question His goodness. God is not a genie god granting wishes if we rub the magic lamp of prayer. That attitude carried to its extreme is what is behind the “Health and Wealth gospel.” This attitude is mocked by a song whose lyrics go “Give me this, give me that, help me Lord, I pray. Give me what I think I need to get me through the day. Make me wealthy, keep me healthy, give me what I miss on my never ending shopping list.”

In one sense, as one person put it, God is a gentleman. He will not force anyone to do anything. Because of that, there is real evil in the world. Real evil began with the world’s first family and the horror of murder that was introduced into the world by Cain when he murdered his brother, Able. We want our freedom. We don’t want to be robots forced to do things we do not want to do as we look helplessly on. And our freedom is exactly what God has given us. God wants us to come to Him because it’s our choice and not something we are forced to do. We forget, however, that with that freedom to choose, there is, as happened with Cain and Able, the possibility of unspeakable evil. God is not responsible for the evil; mankind is. And even the destruction that exists in nature came about because of choices that began in the Garden of Eden. Because of choices made in The Garden of Eden, death also entered into the world. And we also forget that the only thing we are promised in THIS life IS death as Heb 9:27 tells us “it is appointed unto men once to die.”

Does this mean that God is unconcerned with our welfare and does not answer our prayers? No. God cares deeply and hurts whenever we are hurting. God in His wisdom answers many prayers with a yes, but also many with a no. I don’t always agree with the answers I get to my prayers, but I understand that God is God. And in the movie “Bruce Almighty,” the point is made that many of our prayers may even conflict with the prayers of others. God’s concern with our pain and suffering is very real. This is highlighted by Jesus’ reaction to the grief of Lazarus’ family in John 11:32-35 “Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept.” We know from the Gospel account that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. And yet, Lazarus did not live forever. At some point in his future, he saw death again and was raised, that time, in the heavenly world. That is the only thing we are actually guaranteed.

So let’s look at what the Bible says about the subject of God’s goodness:

First, the Bible affirms the goodness of God. There are many passages affirming the goodness of God. But what does The Bible mean when it tells us God is good? The Bible, which often equates light with goodness and darkness with evil, tells us in I John 1:5 that “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” This is an affirmation that God’s goodness is absolute. It is an affirmation that there is NO evil in God at all.

This idea of God’s absolute goodness is something we too often fail to grasp. C. S. Lewis in his book, *Mere Christianity*, frames this fact about God goodness in a way that should be somewhat frightening to us. After establishing that there must be a moral law in existence in the universe, he states: “The Moral Law does not give us any grounds for thinking that God is ‘good’ in the sense of being indulgent, or soft, or sympathetic. There

is nothing indulgent about the Moral Law. It is as hard as nails. It tells you to do the right thing and it does not seem to care how painful, or dangerous, or difficult it is to do. If God is like the moral law, then He is not soft. It is no use at this stage, saying that what you mean by a 'good' God is a God who can forgive. You are going too quickly. Only a person can forgive. And we have not yet got as far as a personal God – only as far as a power, behind the moral law, and more like a mind than it is like anything else. But it may still be very unlike a Person. If it is pure impersonal mind, there may be no sense in asking it to make allowances for you or let you off, just as there is no sense in asking the multiplication table to let you off when you do your sums wrong, You are bound to get the wrong answer. And it is no use either saying that if there is a God of that sort – an impersonal absolute goodness – then you do not like Him and are not going to bother about Him. For the trouble is that one part of you is on His side and really agrees with his disapproval of human greed and trickery and exploitation. You may want Him to make an exception in your own case, to let you off this one time; but you know at bottom that unless the power behind the world really and unalterably detests that sort of behaviour, then He cannot be good. On the other hand, we know that if there does exist an absolute goodness it must hate most of what we do. This is the terrible fix we are in. If the universe is not governed by an absolute goodness, then all our efforts are in the long run hopeless. But if it is, then we are making ourselves enemies to that goodness every day and are not in the least likely to do any better tomorrow, and so our case is hopeless again. We cannot do without it, and we cannot do with it. God is the only comfort, He is also the supreme terror; the thing we most need and the thing we most want to hide from. He is our only possible ally, and we have made ourselves His enemies. Some talk as if meeting the gaze of absolute goodness would be fun. They need to think again. They are still only playing with religion. Goodness is either the great safety or the great danger – according to the way you react to it. And we have reacted the wrong way.”

Second, The Bible tells us that God is good TO us. **This is a different kind of goodness than what we deserve.** Both types of God's goodness are referred to in Exodus the 34th chapter. As it tells us in Exodus 34:6-7 God “is abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.” This is something we often misunderstand about the goodness of God. God's goodness is abundant and it is absolute. If it were not for His forgiveness of our sins, His goodness TO us, we would not be able to stand before His goodness. His goodness without His goodness TO us (His mercy) would leave us with no hope at all. God will bring into judgment all the evil that is committed in this world. This is a judgment that will include us unless we accept His offer of forgiveness. He will not force you to accept Him.

C. How do we reconcile God's goodness and omnipotence with the existence of evil in the world?

If we are perfectly honest, we can only explain things up to a certain point. At some point, even if we KNOW why evil exists in the world, we will come across a situation or have something happen to us that may cause us to question God's goodness. Please understand, there is nothing we can say that makes times like that any easier. Even The Son of God, Himself, cried out on the cross, "My God, My God, Why have You forsaken me?" All the reasons that God allows pain and suffering to exist in this current world do not help us when we are going through seemingly unbearable suffering. Please understand that all we can do in this section is talk about some of the reasons we as human beings can understand for suffering to exist. When we read the book of Job we do not see God giving Job an answer. Sometimes we are not given one. We can see that God exists, that He has revealed Himself to us through His son, the prophets and the Apostles and we can explain things up to a certain point. Beyond that we have to have faith and trust in God.

The first thing we see when it comes to the problem of pain and suffering is something that we've already discussed: that God gave man the ability to choose good or evil. A great deal of the pain and suffering that exists in the world is the result of individuals who choose to do evil rather than good and that often includes our own bad choices. The only way to remove all the suffering in the world that is a result of our own and other's bad choices would be for God to remove free will. God does not pick and choose. He causes His rain to fall on the just and the unjust. Either we all have free will or none of us does. And if I get to choose whether to be an automaton or to have the free will to serve God of my own volition, I choose to have free will.

One thing that sometimes causes us confusion is the passage where it tell us "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." (Rom 8:28) This passage does NOT say that all things that happen to us are good. It tells us that God can take all things that do happen to us and make something good come out of them. There is a big difference in the two things. Paul is actually acknowledging that there are bad things that are going to happen. He, himself, was in danger of being executed. What he is telling us is to take heart and to have faith that whatever happens to us in this life, God can use it to bring good into the world. The story of how the Aucas tribe, once considered one of the most murderous peoples in the world, came to believe in Christ and to change their culture of revenge and murder is just such an instance. The missionaries who tried to convert the Aucan people were warned that they killed any outsiders. They went anyway and were, as warned, killed by the Aucans. But God allowed the Aucas warriors to witness something they had never seen before: God receiving the dying missionaries' souls. The brave wives of these missionaries went, themselves, to the Aucan people and were able to convert them. It was only later that they learned the reason – that the Aucas warriors had seen something as those men died that shocked and put fear into them and made them want to know why they were different. God used this tragedy to save an entire people.

Another problem is that what we think may be good for us or what we think is a bad thing may turn out to actually work for our own good. Our son, Jerry, would never have been placed at Westside Habilitation if it had not been for the fact that we had a tree fall on our house and had nowhere to house him. There are several other things that we were able to see in hindsight that would not have come about except for what we saw at the time as a very devastating incident. What we saw initially as a bad thing, turned out to have been essential to so many things that needed to happen. But at the time it happened, with our limited sight into the future, all we could see was the bad. This is something that is illustrated in the Bible in the story of Joseph. Joseph was sold by his brothers into

slavery in Egypt but he managed to rise in Egyptian society to a point that he was second only to the Pharaoh. In the end, because of this, he was able to save his family from starvation and bring them into a land where they would grow to be a great people. As Joseph said in Genesis 45:3-8 “Please come closer to me,” Joseph said to his brothers. When they did so, he said, “I am Joseph, the brother you sold into slavery in Egypt! Now, don't be sad or angry with yourselves that you sold me. God sent me ahead of you to save lives. The famine has been in the land for two years. There will be five more years without plowing or harvesting. God sent me ahead of you to make sure that you would have descendants on the earth and to save your lives in an amazing way. It wasn't you who sent me here, but God. He has made me {like} a father to Pharaoh, lord over his entire household, and ruler of Egypt.”

Another thing we fail to grasp, is that all of the things in this life that we put so much value on will not matter to us or anyone as little as 300 years from now. That is hard for us to grasp when the things we see now are so important to us. My wife and I have both expressed the wish that we die in a plane wreck together or a car wreck together as it is hard for us to contemplate either of us having to live without the other. But in spite of that, we both know that in the scheme of things we would not be separated from one another for a great deal of time. That would not make it any less hard even though we both know that it is true.

And finally, the very thing that we see as a bad thing may be what ultimately saves us. In Matthew 5:3 in the Sermon on the Mount is a stunning statement. Jesus says “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Fortunate are those who are desperate? Fortunate are those who are at their wit's end? Fortunate are those that have already reached the last straw in their lives? Why are they fortunate and why does Jesus say theirs is the kingdom of Heaven? There are several reasons He calls them fortunate, but the most important are that the desperate know they are in urgent need of redemption. And when the desperate have the Gospel preached to them, it sounds like good news and not like the scolding of an irate parent. They can respond to the call of the Gospel with complete acceptance and lack of reservation because they have so little to lose and are ready for anything. Our pain and suffering, it turns out, can be the very thing that turns us toward God. In the book Pain, The Gift Nobody Wants, Dr. Paul Brand discusses his realization of the value of pain through his work with lepers who have lost the ability to feel pain. He related the story of one of his patients by the name of Sadan: “This frustrating cycle went on for months. Several times Sadan asked us to stop wasting time on his feet. “Go ahead and amputate them as other doctors recommended,” he said. I could not do it. Nor could I find a solution to his foot sores, however. It mystified me that surgical wounds on his hands healed on schedule while foot ulcers on the very same patient did not. Was “bad flesh” the explanation? Sadan felt no pain from the foot ulcers, and he never complained. One day I changed his dressings for at least the tenth time. I could hardly bear to meet him and remove his socks. I had come to love Sadan, and I knew he loved me and clung to me as his last hope. It broke my heart that day to tell him that the other doctors were probably right. We might have to amputate, because we simply could not stop the spread of infection. Sadan received the news with sad resignation. I put my arm around him and ushered him down the hospital corridor to the door, trying to think of some word to encourage him. I had none to offer. I fully shared his sense of despair. Instead of returning to my examining room, I stood and watched Sadan walk down the steps, cross a sidewalk, and head down the road. His head and shoulders sagged in a posture of defeat. Then for the first time I noticed something. He had no limp! I had just spent half an hour cleaning out a grossly abscessed wound on the ball of his foot, and he was putting his full weight on the exact spot we had so carefully treated. No wonder the wound never healed!” Dr Brand went on to share how they were able to save Sadan's feet by coming up with a walking cast that kept the pressure off the wound and allowed it to heal. But ultimately it was the inability to feel pain that kept

him from realizing that he needed to make a change in his life. In his case, the change that pain would have caused him to make would have been to keep from putting his weight on the damaged part of his body. The change that emotional pain can often make is to see that our life has something lacking. It often is the very thing that makes us see our need for God. The pain and unpleasant things in life can often be the very things that save our lives. Pain, though not a good thing in and of itself, can and often does work for our good.

In considering the question ‘Can we know that God is good?’ we can establish logically that He must be, we can see the beauty He has created, we can demonstrate that obeying His Message to us has a beneficial effect on mankind, we can establish that His Word proclaims both His absolute goodness and His merciful goodness, and we can show that there are reasons for God to allow pain and suffering in The World. None of that matters if we cannot establish beyond any reasonable doubt that God loves us and will always love and care for us.

How do we know how much God loves us and that His love for us is eternal? Because of two things: The **first** is that, as we have demonstrated in this lesson, God is absolutely good. That means that He cannot lie. And God has made promises to man that he is not willing that any should perish (II Peter 3:9), that he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved (Acts 2:38 Mark 16:16), and that we shall have eternal life (John 10:27-28). The **second** is that God the son came and lived as one of His own creatures, lived a sinless life and then died in our place taking our punishment upon Himself. As it tells us in John 3:16-17 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR
'CAN WE KNOW THAT GOD IS GOOD?'

1. What was the basis for your belief that God is good?

Most simply accept that He is good because His Word declares that He is.

Logically we can see that He is because otherwise we would not have a knowledge of good and evil and we can see the beauty of the universe around us and the evidence of His goodness reflected in the actions of those who follow Him.

2. What if God were not good?

The world would be a place of suffering beyond what we can imagine because there would be NO good in it. It would not be the beautiful, logical world in which we live and we would have no hope.

3. Why do you think God made the World and Universe so beautiful to our eyes?

Because He cared enough for us and wanted to demonstrate His love for us.

4. Have you had an experience that caused you to doubt the goodness of God?
How did you resolve it?

NO

5. Why do we get angry with God when bad things happen?

Because we don't see the whole picture. We don't see the reason God held back His help and we react with anger.

V. CAN WE KNOW THAT WE ARE SAVED?

There are many who would answer “yes” to that question (and there are two separate views of those that say “yes” unequivocally) and many who would tell you that only God knows who is saved and who isn’t. There are a few that would say that what God was doing in the book of I John was giving us a way to be assured personally of our salvation, but that you are the only one who can know based on what is written there and in other parts of the New Testament; that no one outside of yourself and God can know whether you have salvation or not.

There are verses that can be used to support all four of these positions taken in the religious world today. So which one of these positions is the correct one? I have found that whenever I examine The Scriptures, that whatever belief makes a blended whole of all the Bible has to say on a subject, unless I have missed something in The Scriptures, that belief or position will be the correct one. I urge everyone to read and study the Scriptures for themselves and not to take my word for anything the Bible might have to say about a subject. This question is extremely important. Because it involves not only a discussion of these four positions on whether we can know we have salvation, but it must, by necessity, start with a discussion of how we become a Christian in the first place. What I want to do in this section of our class on the five great questions is to explore **First**, how we get into Christ and **Second**, explore the four basic positions taken in the religious world regarding the question of whether we can know we have salvation.

A. First – How do we become a part of the body of Christ?

As I stated before, there are two approaches to this first question. Both approaches agree that there is a part that is played by God and a part that is played by man. God paid the price for our sins that we were powerless to pay. As Romans 5:6-10 tells us: “6 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. 8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. 10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”

Up to a point, both approaches agree regarding the part that we play in salvation. Both agree that we must do the following: (Note: I’ve only listed one verse of many that support each point) 1) We must hear the good news – Romans 10:14 “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” 2) We must believe – John 8:24 “I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.” 3) We must repent of our sins (This is a very important point because it involves a change in the way we live. One online poster who identified himself only as jimmi4950 gave one of the best definitions that I’ve seen of the Greek word μετανοία and how that differs from simple remorse: “Literally it means ‘to rethink.’ In practice it refers to the action of turning away from a negative thing, and toward a positive thing. Repentance is not a feeling. It is an action - something you do. Remorse is a feeling. Judas experienced remorse for betraying Christ. He allowed his remorse to turn into despair, and hanged himself. Simon Peter also experienced remorse for betraying Christ. He **repented**, turning away from his sin and toward His Savior to receive forgiveness.”) – Acts 2:37-38 “37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? 38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

4) We must confess Christ before men (In most instances, the first time an individual is called on to confess Christ before men is at the time of his conversion to Christ) – Romans 10:9-10 “9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. 10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

At this point both approaches to salvation agree that we must do one final thing. One approach teaches that 5) We must be baptized (a reenactment of Christ’s death, burial and resurrection according to Romans 6:4-5 “4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.”) – Mark 16:16 “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

The second approach is that we must say what has been characterized as The Sinner’s Prayer. The only passage I have been able to find that could be stretched to fit this requirement is Acts 22:16 “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” In this passage, Paul is told to arise, be baptized and wash away his sins. We see even in this passage that we wash away our sins in baptism. I Peter 3:21 makes it clear that it is a symbolic washing away: “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” What the proponents of The Sinner’s Prayer argue is that it’s not in the act of baptism that we call on the name of the Lord, but rather that there is a prayer involved that takes the place of baptism. This is a prayer asking God to forgive you of your sins. The reason usually given for rejecting baptism as being necessary for salvation is that we cannot do anything to earn our salvation. Those that hold this position forget that they have already accepted that there are at least four things we must do to be saved: Hear, Believe, Repent and Confess. And they have, in reality, substituted one last thing commanded in scripture for something NOT commanded.

To say that the act of accepting God’s grace by obeying **all** of God’s requirements means you earn salvation is absurd. Especially when you are substituting something else in it’s place anyway. Did those invited to the banquet in Luke the fourteenth chapter do anything to **earn** a place at the banquet table? “16 Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: 17 And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. 18 And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. 19 And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. 20 And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. 21 So that servant came, and showed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. 22 And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. 23 And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. 24 For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.”

Even if you could argue that the ones initially bidden had done something to deserve being invited to the banquet (and you cannot), the rest of us certainly have not. But those that were invited to the banquet had to come to the banquet. You will not be fed if you refuse to come to God’s banquet. If that is an act on my part, I am glad to perform it because I want to be part of the feast God has prepared for those that accept the gift of His Son.

I have tried over the years to come to some other conclusion than the one that baptism is necessary for salvation because I know so many who have refused to accept baptism as necessary and I do not want them to be lost. All of the arguments against the essential nature of baptism boil down to a belief that we are doing something to earn our salvation when we obey this command. I have never heard a good argument as to why the first four things God asks us to do are not also considered something we are doing to earn our salvation if the last thing must be considered in that light. And I have never heard a good argument explaining why the act of saying a prayer is any less an act than that of baptism.

The fact of the matter is that we cannot ever be good enough to save ourselves. All agree that we must become a child of God in order to be saved. I know of no one who holds either position who believes it is our own works as Christians that saves us. All believe it is only by the grace of God that we are saved. Why not follow the Bible's adoption procedures to become children of God rather than man's? It is only by doing that that we can take the first step to knowing we have salvation.

B. Second – Can I know that I have salvation?

The **first** and **second** of the four positions taken by the religious world on this question is that yes, I can know that I have salvation because once in Christ, there is nothing I can do to lose my salvation. I believe this was a doctrine that Paul may have been combating when he said in Romans 6:1-2 “1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? 2 God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?”

Outside of such references to a possible problem with this doctrine in the early church, there is no mention of this belief that we can discover in the writings of Biblical Theologists for the first 1500 years of Christianity. Indeed, the early second century Christian writer Irenaeus wrote “And to as many as continue in their love towards God does He grant communion with Him...But on as many as, according to their own choice, depart from God, He inflicts that separation from Himself which they have chosen of their own accord. John Wesley profoundly said “Whatever is true is not new; whatever is new is not true.”

This doctrine is what is commonly referred to as OSAS (Once Saved, Always Saved). The first of the two groups who fall into this category believes that there is nothing you can do to lose your salvation ever, at all. Once saved, no matter how atrocious your life may become nor how far from walking with God you are, you cannot lose that salvation.

The second group also believes there is nothing you can do to lose your salvation but does not deny the verses showing some have left the faith and are lost. Their explanation for those verses is that such individuals only thought they were saved; that they were never really saved in the first place. A way this second group's belief is often characterized is “If you have it, you can't lose it. If you lose it, you never had it.”

OSAS is a comfortable doctrine and there are a number of verses and arguments that are used to support OSAS doctrine. But what leads to error is a stubborn holding on to an idea and picking and choosing only the parts of the Bible that can be used to support it. This leaves you in the untenable position of either ignoring or twisting passages to fit it. The chart on the next page gives some examples of the passages used by those who support this doctrine and some of the clear passages and teachings of Scripture that contradict this idea.

Some verses used in support of OSAS

Note: there are many verses that are used by proponents of OSAS. These are just a few

John 3:36	He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life	<p>The Bible makes clear over and over that every promise of God is conditional. The writer of the book of Hebrews (Heb 3:12) warned “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of <u>unbelief</u> in <u>departing</u> from the living God.”</p> <p>It is often argued that the warnings in the New Testament apply to those who are not in Christ in spite of the fact that they are addressed TO Christians. It is significant, then, that the writer specifically says “Take heed, <u>brethren</u>.”</p>
Titus 3:5	Not by works of righteousness that we have done	<p>Those who promote OSAS accuse those who do not of believing that it is our works that save us.</p> <p>Nothing could be further from the truth. I know of very few who actually believe that our works are what make us acceptable to God.</p> <p>The book of James, however, makes clear that a faith that does not move us to action is no faith at all. In James 2:20-23 it tells us “But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.”</p>
Eph 2:8-9	For by grace are ye saved through faith	<p>There is nothing we can do to earn salvation. When we say that God's grace calls on us for a response to it, we show that we value God's gift.</p>
Rom 6:23	the gift of God is eternal life	<p>Even OSAS supporters acknowledge we have to accept God's gift. The question that scripture answers in the affirmative time and time again is “Am I free to turn my back on God's grace after having previously accepted it?”</p>
I Pet 1:23	Being born again, not of corruptible seed	<p>The Apostle Paul was very conscious of the possibility of “not finishing the race.” In I Cor 9:25 he said “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.”</p> <p>This is a concept often found in scripture. In Ezekiel 18:24 it tells us “But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die.”</p> <p>Hebrews 10:26-27 speaks directly to us as Christians “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.”</p>
Rom 8:15	Ye have received the spirit of adoption	<p>It is argued by OSAS supporters that once adopted, we cannot be un-adopted. Paul, in Romans 11:17-21 tells us “And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.</p>
Eph 4:30	Ye are sealed unto the day of redemption	<p>Those who say that since we are sealed, we cannot break away forget that the Jews received circumcision as a seal of their being God's people. In Romans 4:11 it tells us “And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also:” God gives us the seal of the Holy Spirit. It is His sign of the covenant He is making with us. But even though God has never broken His side of any covenant, man has often broken that covenant. We need to be aware of the consequences if WE break the covenant he has made with us in Christ.</p>

The **third** of the four positions taken by the religious world on this question is that we cannot know whether we have salvation or not. There is some merit to this position as most of those who hold this position do so because they feel that the only one who can know whether we are saved is God. They also believe that that is the only position possible besides once saved always saved. Instead of trusting in “faith only,” they trust in a “works only” salvation which is simply the mirror image of the chart on the previous page. They are simply substituting verses in the first column for verses that enjoin the Christian to perform good works, produce fruit and stay faithful to the end. Such passages as the one in Matthew 10:22 where Jesus says “And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved” and the passage in I Corinthians 9:27 where Paul says “But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.” A person that believed in OSAS would answer those verses with passages and teachings in the scripture that show that a Christian cannot save themselves and ones that talk about the grace that God extends to us that covers our sins.

Besides the verses that I listed above, there are many other passages that are used to prove that it is our works that save us. Hebrews 10:26-27 for example. “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.”

What this approach is lacking is the same as the approach taken by those who teach the Once Saved Always Saved approach to our lives as Christians – balance. It also leads to fear and denies us the perfect peace that God has promised us. (Phil 4:7 “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” as I John 1:18 says: “perfect love casteth out fear”)

The **fourth** position recognizes that we can never be good enough to be saved but also recognizes that God asks for a response from us in return. This position unites all of the verses in a blended whole that, I feel, makes perfect sense.

There are two books that I know of in the New Testament that specifically tells us why they were written. The first is the book of John. In John 20:30-31 it tells us “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.”

The second book is the book of I John. In I John 5:13 it tells us that John had a two-fold purpose in writing I John. In I John 5:13 it says “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”

The book of I John continues with John's desire to communicate the reasons we are able to have confidence that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, but in the book of I John, he ALSO writes “**that ye may know ye have eternal life.**” that means that in the pages of that wonderful book is the key to knowing whether we have eternal life.

The book of I John acknowledges the fact that we are not perfect and that we, as Christians, will sin. In I John 1:8 it tells us that “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” But in the preceding verse, John gives us the promise that **if** we are walking in the light as He is in the light, we have 1) “fellowship one with another” and 2) “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

So, how do we know if we are walking in the light (so that we can KNOW that we have eternal life)? John gives us four ways to test whether we are walking in the light:

Test #1 – If we are trying to keep His commandments

John tells us in I John 2:5-6 “But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.”

Remember that John acknowledges that we sin. But John says that if we sin and are walking in the light (trying to keep his commandments), the blood of Jesus is continually cleansing us from sin. So the first test is that we are trying to keep His commandments. Jesus said there are two great commandments – Loving God with all your being is the first of those two commandments. If we love God we will keep His commandments.

Test #2 – If we love as Jesus loved

John tells us in I John 2:7-10 “7 Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth. He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.”

Jesus said that the second great commandment is to love our neighbor. These first two tests of whether we are walking in the light are the most important. In fact, John devotes a great portion of the book of I John to loving God and loving others. This is an important test to know whether we have salvation and we are the only ones who can know besides God if we are harboring hatred for others in our heart.

Test #3 – If we put our faith/hope in Him

John tells us in I John 3:1-3 “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”

The Bible has called on God's children all through the ages to put their trust in God. God counts that trust as righteousness on our part. The Bible tells us regarding Abraham the father of the faithful in Romans 4:3 “For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.” As it says in Heb 11:6 “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”

Test #4 – If we love the truth

John tells us in I John 4:5-6 “They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.”

John spends a portion of the book of I John combatting a particular heresy of his day. We cannot truly be called children of God if we have no interest in knowing God's Word and God's Will. Paul said in II Thess 2:8-12 “And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

Can we know we have salvation? The Bible gives an emphatic “YES!”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR
CAN WE KNOW THAT WE ARE SAVED?

1. Have you doubted that you were saved since you became a Christian? If so, why did you doubt it?
2. What is the difference between trying to live a sinless life and having a repentant heart?
3. What does “Walking in the light as He is in the light” mean to you?
4. Do you know you are saved? Does your answer give you “the peace that passes understanding?”