



Reason WHY

*The Bible Offers Honest
Answers to Honest Questions*

By Stan Key

Answers

“The unexamined life is not worth living.”

Socrates

Too Hard for God?

By Stan Key

*Is anything too hard for God?
Perhaps you think my question odd,
But listen and I think you'll see
The cause of my perplexity.*

*I do not doubt that God alone
Can speak a word, and from his throne
The universe is set in place,
And stars are hung in empty space.*

*'Twas easy to create the sun:
He spoke the word – and it was done!
Miracles, signs and wonders too
It seems there's nothing God can't do!*

*But saving souls like you and me
Reveals a deeper mystery:
For all the powers in heaven above
Can never force a heart to love.*

*Deep within my soul I see
A kingdom that belongs to me,
Where I am sovereign, I decide,
And even God can't come inside!*

*If I was destined by decree
Created so I'd bow the knee,
Then like a robot I'd obey....
No! God must find another way!*

*To melt my selfish heart of stone
The Mighty One gave up his throne
And came to die upon a tree
In hopes that love would conquer me.*

*For even God will never force
A sinful man to change his course
Until he opens wide his heart
And let God's grace fill every part.*

*Is there nothing God can't do?
I leave the answer up to you.
Your response, this very hour,
Will demonstrate his sovereign power.*



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Downloadable PDFs of both student and answer guides for this study are available at www.francisasburysociety.com/stan-key.





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Reason **WHY**

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INTRODUCTION: MIND MATTERS

I. The Purpose of this Study

A. Mind Your Mind.

In *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, Mark Noll states that “The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is **not much** of an evangelical mind” (p. 3). It is almost as if many in the church today have misunderstood the apostle Paul. Rather than saying, “Be transformed by the renewal of your of minds” (Rom. 12:2) they imagine that he said “Be transformed by the **removal** of your minds.” It is time for us to wake from our intellectual coma and put our brains to work! Ravi Zacharias has aptly entitled his radio program *Let My People Think!*

B. The examined life.

Most Christians today know *what* they believe but they do not know **why**. But warm hearts and uninformed heads make a dangerous combination. Without a consistent, coherent and Biblically-informed worldview, followers of Christ may:

- Live contrary to what God desires... and **not even know it!**
- Be easily **shaken** when challenged by a well-educated non-Christian.
- Live in spiritual and intellectual **frustration** because life isn't working the way it ought.
- Be **ineffective** in their witness for Christ.

Socrates said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” Human beings, in contrast to the **animals**, crave meaning in life. Food, shelter and the absence of pain is not enough. Humans demand answers to life's most persistent questions: Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? Etc. This study aims to encourage every follower of Christ to examine his/her most fundamental **assumptions** about life and God.

C. Three Goals.

1. At a *personal* level, this study aims to provide a **safe** place to examine **dangerous** questions.
 - Skeptics, agnostics and unbelievers will be encouraged to doubt their **doubts**.
 - Believers will be encouraged to be intellectually **honest**.
2. At a *spiritual* level, believers will be motivated to obey the Great Commandment to love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul and with **all your mind** (Matt. 22:36-37). For the Gospel to do its work in our lives and culture, we need more than warm hearts and energized spirits. We must change the way we think! *Do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed** [metamorphosis] by the renewal of your mind... (Rom. 12:2).*
3. At a *practical* level, believers will be equipped to be more effective **witnesses** for Christ. In a multi-cultural, relativistic, post-modern world, we must do more than quote Bible verses and share our personal experience. We must be ready to give a **defense** for the hope that is in us (I Pet. 3:15). Our witness will never make faith *inevitable*. But if done properly, it will make faith **possible** by showing that Christianity is **plausible**.

II. Apologetics.

A. What is apologetics?

“Apologetics” is not telling someone “I’m sorry I’m a Christian.” Rather, it is the name of that discipline of study that aims to **defend** and **commend** the faith. The word is derived from the Greek word *apologia*¹ which originally described a legal defense, or a speech given in reply to a question or accusation. Several times in the New Testament the word is used in this way (Acts 22:1; 24:10; 26:1; I Cor. 9:3; Phil. 1:16; II Tim. 4:16).

B. The book of Acts gives many examples of what Christian apologetics looks like.

1. Acts 17:2-3 (Thessalonica). *And Paul went in [the synagogue], as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he **reasoned** with them from the Scriptures, **explaining** and **proving** that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead...*
2. Acts 17:17-18 (Athens). *So [Paul] **reasoned** in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day... Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also **conversed** with him...*
3. Acts 18:4, 11 (Corinth). *[Paul] **reasoned** in the synagogue every Sabbath and tried to **persuade** Jews and Greeks. ...And he stayed a year and six months, **teaching** the word...*
4. Acts 19:8-10 (Ephesus). *[Paul] entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, **reasoning** and **persuading** them about the kingdom of God... he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, **reasoning** daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years...*
5. Acts 28:23-24 (Rome). *...From morning till evening [Paul] **expounded** to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to **convince** them about Jesus.... And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved.*

C. Why study apologetics?

1. To strengthen the faith of those believers who have **doubts**. Not all doubting is “bad.” Jesus’ own followers sometimes had doubts (Mark 16:8, 11, 13-14; Luke 24:11, 25, 37, 41). Though many evangelical churches discourage Christians from expressing their doubts, this study actually wants to encourage **honest** doubt! Like Thomas (“Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails...” John 20:24-29) and like the father of the demon possessed son (“I believe; help my unbelief!” Mark 9:24), we come to authentic faith only when we have the **courage** to express our doubts.

A faith without some doubts is like a human body without any antibodies in it. People who blithely go through life too busy or indifferent to ask hard questions about why they believe as they do will find themselves defenseless against either the experience of tragedy or the probing questions of a smart skeptic.²

2. To enable **honest seekers** to take a step of faith. Many agnostics, atheists, skeptics, secularists, materialists, pluralists and relativists actually *want* to believe in the Gospel... but can’t. They need a **reason** to believe! Once seekers

¹ The root word is *logos* (word, logic) and the prefix is *apo* (from). Thus, *apo-logia* means “to speak out,” “to speak up.”

² Tim Keller, *The Reason for God*, xvi.

realize the reasonableness of faith, our job then becomes to **persuade** them to make a decision and put their trust in Jesus!

3. To **refute** error. Apologetics must do more than promote the truth. It must also **expose** the weaknesses, inconsistencies and contradictions of other religions, worldviews and philosophies. Ronald Reagan famously said: “The trouble with our liberal friends is not that they’re ignorant; it’s just that they know so much that isn’t so.” Similarly, we must gently help our non-Christian friends to recognize the **flaws** in their own belief system.

III. The Classic Text: I Peter 3:13-16.

*Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy [sanctify Christ as Lord], always being prepared to **make a defense** [apologia] to anyone who asks you for a reason [logos] for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame (I Peter 3:13-16).*

- A. The *command* for apologetics: **do it**. Defending the faith is not a task reserved for specialists and those who like to debate! Peter gives this command to **every** believer. This is not optional. Being unprepared to defend your faith is comparable to going into battle without your **armor or weapons**. When the questions come, we must have a better response than “Let me suggest a book,” “You have to take it by faith,” or “I don’t know.” Like the Boy Scout motto, we must “Be prepared!”
- B. The *context* for apologetics: **persecution**. For Christians in the first century, defending one’s faith was not a hobby or an amusing past-time. Debating theology wasn’t done for the fun of it. Christians were hated and vilified. Defending the faith was often a matter of **life and death**.
- C. The *courage* of apologetics: Have **no fear** of them. Having once denied his Lord, Peter knew how much courage it takes to name **the Name**! It takes boldness to confront false thinking and popular ideologies. In the early church, Christians who spoke out about their faith were ostracized, vilified and sometimes thrown to the lions. Peter commands us not to be afraid because all they can do is **kill** you (Luke 12:4-5).
- D. The *scope* of apologetics: **everyone, everywhere, all the time**. Peter’s command is to “always” be prepared to make a defense to “anyone” who honestly seeks to understand what the Gospel is all about.
- E. The *spirit* of apologetics: **worship**. *...in your hearts honor Christ as Lord...* (v. 15). Defending the faith is one of the ways we can worship Jesus Christ and recognize his Lordship. Like everything else we do, apologetics should be done **to the glory of God**. We do not practice apologetics because we love to argue but because we love our Savior.
- F. The *tone* of apologetics: **respectful**. *...yet do it with gentleness and respect...* (v. 16). Defending the faith should never involve demeaning or belittling those who hold opposing opinions. We are called to love our neighbor and this includes those who hold different worldviews. Sadly, more arguments are lost by our **arrogance** than by poor reasoning! Pride has no place in Christian apologetics! A Christian is not someone who knows everything... rather he is someone who knows Someone who knows everything. Big difference!

- G. The *life-style* of apologetics: **holiness**. Christians are to always maintain “a good conscience” and practice “good behavior” (v. 16). To win our neighbors to Christ requires more than a good argument. We must live a life that is **consistent** with the Gospel we preach. Regrettably, sometimes our actions and our attitudes speak so loudly that others simply cannot hear what we are trying to say. The greatest apologetic anyone can ever give the world is not the sophistication of their arguments but the **integrity** of their life!
- H. The *goal* of apologetics: **conversion**. It is not enough to win the argument. The purpose is to win the person! It is possible to win **the battle** and lose the war. The goal is not to lead people to us but to Him! John the Baptist was the model for all true witnessing when he said, “He [Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30).

IV. Three Reasons Why YOU Need to Become a Christian Apologist:

- A. For **God’s** sake. God commands it! In defending the faith you obey his voice and express your worship. You are sanctifying Jesus as Lord.
- B. For your **neighbor’s** sake. How will your neighbors, friends and family members come to faith if they feel that such a step would be intellectual suicide? These people don’t need a tract or a sermon. They need a reason to believe. *You* may be their only hope.
- C. For your **own** sake. Until your head is in sync with your heart you will be a frustrated Christian! So do yourself a favor: love the Lord with all your mind.

TABLE TALK

1. What is the most important thing you learned from this lesson?
2. Do you believe that most Christians today are intellectually honest? Explain.
3. What do you think Socrates was trying to say when he said that the unexamined life was not worth living? Do you agree?
4. To change the world will take more than sanctified hearts; it will take sanctified minds! Discuss this statement.
5. Which of the following questions are you most unprepared to answer? This may help you to understand where you need to be preparing your apologetics!
 - How can one know that the Bible is true?
 - Aren’t God and Allah the same?
 - Why is Christianity so homophobic?
 - Aren’t humans just highly evolved apes?
 - How can I be sure about what happens when I die?
 - How is Jesus different from Buddha?
 - If God is good and powerful, why birth defects?
 - Were there dinosaurs on the ark?
 - Can human nature be changed?



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CHAPTER 1. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF UNBELIEF

I. The Heart Has its Reasons.

Blaise Pascal (1623–1662) wrote about the relationship between the mind and the heart in these famous words: “The heart has its **reasons** which reason knows nothing of.”³ We all arrive at an understanding of what is true not only by our heads but by our **hearts!** “Just the facts, man” may have worked for Joe Friday (*Dragnet*) but for everyone else, more than the evidence is involved. Think about how people take positions on a variety of issues: Santa Claus, evolution, global warming, health insurance, etc.

II. The Intellectual Virtues.

If we are going to keep our head and our heart in sync and be effective witnesses in a post-modern world, we must learn to practice the intellectual virtues.⁴

A. A passion for **truth**.

The truth is many people are not interested in the truth! Rather, they are concerned about **politics**, ideology, life styles, and personal preferences. The primary question for most people is not *Is it true?* but rather *Do I like it?* Jesus said: *For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice* (John 18:37). Christians should be men and women who are ready to follow the evidence **wherever it leads!**

B. A passion for **holiness**.

A **pure heart** is indispensable for clear thinking! In biblical psychology, we think with our hearts. Herein lies the problem: our hearts as well as our minds are **corrupted** by sin.

*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness **suppress** the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse* (Rom. 1:18-20).

Often the problem in arriving at an understanding of the truth is not a **lack** of evidence but rather the suppression of it! Many reject God because they don't *want* Christianity to be true! One of the great purposes of redemption is to bring us to the place where we stop trying to make truth conform to our **desires** and start praying that our desires would conform to what is true!

C. A passion for **consistency**.

We live in a **universe** not a multiverse! Thus, truth cannot be compartmentalized. What is true in one area of life will be true in all areas of life. All truth is God's truth! Whether we are talking about the Bible, science, history, origins, politics, or sexual ethics, truth-lovers seek consistency.

³ *Pensées*, 154.

⁴ See James W. Sire, *Habits of the Mind*, 106–125, and James W. Sire, *A Little Primer on Humble Apologetics*, 94–97.

D. **Humility.**

One of the surest evidences that one is walking in the truth is that he/she is humble. You have to be wise to know how **dumb** you are! *If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know* (I Cor. 8:2). John Stackhouse⁵ explains that Christians should be humble in at least three respects:

1. *Epistemologically* humble (humble in what **we know**). Just because we know God doesn't mean we know everything! *Now I know in part...* (I Cor. 13:12). As Francis Schaeffer was quick to point out, we can know something **truly** without knowing it **exhaustively**. Rather than pretending to know all truth we should humbly acknowledge that we know the One who does!
2. *Rhetorically* humble (humble in how **we speak**). Avoid cockiness and an air of superiority that pretends the evidence is such that any idiot can see. Show **respect** for others: their intelligence, their moral integrity and their spiritual interest. D. T. Niles said it well: "evangelism is one **beggar** telling another beggar where to find bread."
3. *Spiritually* humble (humble about our own **spiritual experience**). Only the Holy Spirit can change the heart and transform the mind! Paul wanted those converted under his ministry to ground their faith not in human wisdom but in the power of God (I Cor. 2:1-5).

III. **The Psychology of Unbelief in the Gospel of John.**

- A. The purpose of the book is stated in John 20:30-31:

*Now Jesus did many other **signs** in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may **believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have **life** in his name.*

One could say that the Gospel of John is the first book on Christian apologetics ever written. The author's goal is to **convince** his readers of the truth so they will believe the Gospel and experience abundant life. To accomplish this purpose, John set for a select number of "signs" (miracles):

1. Water is changed into wine (2:1-12).
2. The healing of the nobleman's son (4:46-54).
3. The healing of the paralytic (5:1-18).
4. The feeding of the 5,000 (6:1-15).
5. Jesus walks on water (6:16-21).
6. The healing of the man born blind (9:1-41).
7. Lazarus is raised from the dead (11:1-44).
8. Jesus' own resurrection (20:1-29).
9. The miraculous catch of fish (21:1-14).

These signs are outward and visible, not inward and mystical. They occurred in time and space. They are **verifiable**. The same data was available to all.

⁵ John G. Stackhouse, *Humble Apologetics*, 227-232.

B. The problem is not the **lack of evidence**. Read John 12:27–31a.

Numbers of unbelievers have said; “If only God would speak in an **audible Voice**, then I would believe... of course!” That’s exactly what happened in this incident! John records it so we can understand that it takes more than evidence to produce belief.⁶ When God spoke from heaven, the crowd divided itself into:

- The naturalists: It thundered.
- The superstitious: It was an angel.
- The true believers: It was God speaking clearly.

C. The psychology of unbelief.

Atheists and agnostics seem to delight in claiming that Christians are uneducated, gullible, simpletons. John’s Gospel helps us to understand that the knife cuts both ways! Unbelievers also often have **biases** that undergird their own most basic assumptions (beliefs). John explains that there are four possible reasons that cause people not to believe in Jesus Christ.

1. **Philosophical** difficulties. Read John 18:33-38.

Pilate’s problem was the philosophical concept of truth. *What is truth?* As a politician, his focus was on **power** (getting my own way), not truth. He was a **cynic**, doubting the very existence of truth. Like many today, Pilate believed in **relativism** (multiculturalism, pluralism, political correctness). He was **certain** that everything was uncertain!

There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative... Some are religious, some atheist; some are to the left, some to the right; some intend to be scientists, some humanists or professionals or businessmen; some are poor, some rich. They are unified only in their relativism and their allegiance to equality.... The danger they have been taught to fear from absolutism is not error but intolerance.... The true believer is the real danger. The study of history and of culture teaches that all the world was mad in the past; men always thought they were right, and that led to wars, persecutions, slavery, xenophobia, racism, and chauvinism. The point is not to correct the mistakes and really be right; rather it is not to think you are right at all.⁷

Reaching people like Pilate typically demands a philosophical challenge to their most basic assumptions (relativism). Before such a person can believe that Jesus is the truth, he/she must discover the truth about **truth**.

2. **Intellectual** difficulties. Reading John 20:24-28.

Pilate was a cynic but Thomas was a **skeptic**. His problem was not with the concept of truth but rather with the need for evidence. He was open to faith but needed a reason to believe. He was an **honest** doubter. Until he knew that believing in Jesus was a **plausible** intellectual option, he remained stuck in his doubts and skepticism.

⁶ Jesus made a similar point in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31), which ends with the pointed application: “If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.”

⁷ Alan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 25f.

Many today don't believe the Gospel because the data they have is poor and they lack proper evidence. For example, listen to Richard Dawkins, in *The God Delusion*, describe the God he doesn't believe in:

[God is] arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving, control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser;... a homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.⁸

To reach honest doubters, we may first have to help them find honest answers for honest questions so that their intellectual obstacles can be overcome and faith becomes **possible**. Common intellectual difficulties include:

- The Bible is full of myths (like the resurrection).
- Being a Christian an anti-scientific.
- But what about the crusades, the Inquisition and slavery?
- Why do Christians hate homosexuals?
- I don't believe in the Easter Bunny either.

3. **Emotional** difficulties. Read John 11:20-27.

Sometimes a **traumatic** life experience makes it "impossible" to believe in a kind and loving heavenly Father: *I can't (won't?) believe in a God who would let my baby die... who permitted my father to sexually abuse me... who didn't protect me from bankruptcy, etc.* When C. S. Lewis was a child, his mother became very sick. He prayed for her healing, but she died. So he became an agnostic. William J. Murray "explains" the atheism of his mother (Madalyn Murray O'Hair) in these terms:

*It is my opinion that my mother's maniacal campaign to remove all reference to God in public schools and government, plus her heated atheistic campaigns over the years, stem back to this issue. (She) was **mad at men**, and she was mad at God, who is male. Rather than confront her conscience, she determined to deny God's existence.⁹*

Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died... (v. 21). Martha is a hero because she **chose** to believe in Jesus even when life was falling apart! *Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?* (v. 40). Most people assume that seeing is believing. Martha helps us to understand the deeper truth that **believing** is seeing!

Reaching people struggling with emotional hindrances to faith often demands that we **weep** with them, pointing them to the cross of Jesus Christ where he too experienced evil: *My God, my God, why....???*

4. **Moral** difficulties. Read John 3:19-21, 11:47-48, and 12:42-43.

If Jesus is Lord, our lives have to **change!** This means the one to whom we are witnessing will have to stop sleeping with his girlfriend, cheating on exams, drinking so much alcohol, and watching pornography. No wonder atheism is so attractive! Bonhoeffer said: "the man who **disobeys** cannot believe, for only he

⁸ Every Christian I know would like the chance to say to Mr. Dawkins: "I don't believe in *that* God either!"

⁹ Lee Strobel, *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary*, 109.

who obeys can believe.”¹⁰ Atheistic philosopher Thomas Nagel at least was honest enough to admit the truth.

*I want atheism to be true... It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a god: I don't want the universe to be like that....*¹¹

Those living in willful disobedience to the will of God must be made to see that until they **surrender** their will to God, faith will be impossible! Their problem is not intellectual. They are guilty of **treason** against the Most High King.

IV. Steps to Faith.

For the honest seeker who longs to conquer the doubts that ravage his/her soul:

- A. Doubt your **doubts**. *By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything* (I John 3:19-20).
- B. Surrender your **will**. *If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority* (John 7:17).
- C. Receive **Jesus**. *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God* (John 1:12).
- D. Allow God to give you the **gift of faith**. *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God* (Ephesians 2:8).

TABLE TALK

1. Think of the person closest to you who is a confirmed atheist (or agnostic, cynic, skeptic, etc.). Has this lesson helped you to better understand their unbelief? Explain.
2. What is the most important thing you have learned from this lesson?
3. Look again at the intellectual virtues. Which virtue is most missing in your life?
4. Think of your own spiritual journey. Which one of the “difficulties” to faith was the hardest for you to overcome? (Philosophical, Intellectual, Emotional, or Moral).
5. Has this lesson caused you to think differently about the way you currently witness to those around you?

¹⁰ *The Cost of Discipleship*, 63. See John 3:36—“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not **obey** the Son shall not see life...”

¹¹ Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God*, 119.

My Faith Has Found a Resting Place

By Eliza E. Hewitt (1891)

*My faith has found a resting place,
Not in device or creed;
I trust the ever-living One,
His wounds for me shall plead.*

*Refrain:
I need no other argument,
I need no other plea,
It is enough that Jesus died,
And that He died for me.*

*Enough for me that Jesus saves,
This ends my fear and doubt;
A sinful soul I came to Him,
He'll never cast me out.*

*My heart is leaning on the Word,
The living Word of God,
Salvation by my Savior's name,
Salvation through His blood.*

*My great physician heals the sick,
The lost He came to save;
For me His precious blood He shed,
For me His life He gave.*



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CHAPTER 2. CAN WE TRUST THE BIBLE?

I. The Message in the Bottle.

- A. A Parable. Imagine an island far out in the ocean where the islanders had lived so long they had come to believe they were the only people in the world. The island defined the totality of human existence. One day a boy discovered a bottle washed upon on the shore. Opening it he found a message inside: “Don’t be afraid. Help is coming soon.” What could this mean?...¹²
- B. Just as the islanders had to “explain” the origin of those messages, so humans today must respond to the historical **fact** of the Bible. Who wrote it? Where did it come from? Is it true? Some let the Bible explain its own existence. Others look for more “naturalistic” explanations.

II. A God Who Speaks.

The Bible does not read like a **myth** or a legend and it is not a collection of mystical experiences. It claims to be **history**; the story of a people chosen by God (the Jews) who were to be the channel through which he revealed himself to the world. It is impossible to truly know another person unless that person speaks and discloses who he/she really is. Without such self-disclosure all our ideas about that person are mere conjecture. The same is true for God. Unless God speaks, he remains unknowable. But that is precisely what the Bible claims. God has spoken:

- A. Through **creation**. Read Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 1:19-20.

The message that comes to us through the natural order reveals that God exists and that he is great and glorious. However, creation does not tell us:

- God’s **name**.
- God’s will for our lives.
- How to have a **relationship** with him.... How to be saved.

- B. Through **conscience**. Read Romans 2:14-16.

God can speak through an inner Voice (dreams, meditation, etc.). But because our hearts are tainted by self-interest and pride, we must be hesitant to put absolute trust in what our consciences might say. In fact, one of the surest signs of a decadent culture is when everyone does what is right in his own eyes (Judges 17:6; 21:25).

- C. Pre-eminently, through his Son, **Jesus Christ**. Read. John 1:14; Hebrews 1:1-3.

It is no coincidence that Jesus is called **the Word** of God. He is God’s ultimate and final self-expression. The very reason we have the written Word is to point us to the incarnate Word. *You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me (John 5:39)*. In other words, the **purpose** of Bible study is not so much to know the Bible but rather to know him! To read the Bible as a collection of proof texts to support your science, morals, or even your theology is to miss the point!

¹² This parable is the writer’s own adaptation of ideas he found in Eugene Peterson’s *Eat this Book* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009). Peterson got his ideas from the novelist Walker Percy (*The Message in the Bottle*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975).

D. Through **Scripture**. Our topic for this study.

III. But Is It True?

A. A Satanic strategy. Since the beginning, Satan has had one very simple strategy in his quest to enslave men and women and usurp the throne of God: cause people to **doubt God's Word**.

*Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "**Did God actually say**, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:1-5).*

Note the progression of Satan's work:

1. Doubt God's Word. *Did God actually say...?*
 2. Deny the **consequences** of sin. *You will not surely die.*
 3. Doubt God's goodness. *You will be like God...* He is keeping something back from you. He doesn't have your best interests at heart. He can't be **trusted**.
- B. Insufficient answers. Doubting God's Word takes many forms. While some will boldly assert that the Bible is not true, most doubters take a more subtle, nuanced approach.
1. The Bible is indeed inspired... but so was **Shakespeare**. The person who talks like this doesn't understand the doctrine of inspiration. He means that the Bible is **inspiring**. But Shakespeare never claimed to be a mouthpiece for God!
 2. The Bible is **man's word** about God not God's word about man. The Bible is just a record of the thoughts of godly men about God and how he works in the world (like the Bhagavad Gita, the Analects of Confucius, etc.). But this is *not* what the Bible says about itself. Over and over we read, *Thus says the Lord...*
 3. The Bible is **partially** true. Can't we just say that some (most) of the Bible is true? Do we have to believe in *plenary verbal inspiration* and *inerrancy*? The problem is this: who decides which parts are true and which parts aren't? Do we all get to **pick and choose**?
 4. The Bible **contains** the word of God. This sounds pious, but again, it implies that the reader is sovereign, not the text. The reader decides what is God's word and what isn't.
 5. The **ideas** are inspired but not the words. Again, this sounds spiritual but how does one go about separating ideas from words?
 6. What's important is that the Bible is true *for you*? This clever approach makes the reader's own **interpretation** more important than the text.

IV. Looking at the Internal Evidence: What the Bible Says about Itself.

A. The Bible claims to be **inspired** by God.

*All Scripture is **breathed out** by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work (II Tim. 3:16-17).*

The word “God-breathed” or “inspired by God” is the Greek *theopneustos* (God + spirit/breath). Paul is describing the process by which the words of Scripture (*all* the words!) are the result of God’s breath, his Spirit. What the Scripture says... God says.

*Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were **carried along** by the Holy Spirit. (II Peter 1:20-21 NIV).*

To believe in inspiration does not require one to believe in a theory of mechanical dictation. Authors of Scripture had their own distinctive personalities, styles, vocabularies and genres. Like our incarnate Lord, the Bible is fully **human** yet fully **divine**.

B. The Bible claims to be **without error**.

- *For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the **smallest letter**, not the least **stroke of a pen**, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished (Matt. 5:18 NIV).*
- *Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I said, you are gods’? If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture **cannot be broken**—do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? (John 10:34-36 ESV).*
- *Your word is **truth**... (John 17:17).*

C. The Bible invites the reader to **examine the evidence** so he can come to his own conclusion about the truth it proclaims. Check out the facts for yourself!

- Mark 15:21 NIV. *A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by...* There was no reason for the author to mention the names of Simon’s sons unless the readers knew these men and could **verify** if the information was correct.
- I Cor. 15:6 ESV. *Then He appeared to more than **five hundred** brothers at the same time, most of whom are still alive...* The author seems to be urging the readers to ask these men and women yourself!
- Acts 26:25-26. *“I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus... I am speaking true and rational words. ...this has not been done **in a corner**.”* Paul says that the events of Jesus’ life are public knowledge and verifiable to any who take the time to examine the evidence.

D. The Bible claims to be a complete and **finished** work.

*I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone **adds** to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone **takes away** from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book (Revelation 22:18-19).*

E. Unity and **harmony** of the Scriptures. In contrast to other religious writings (e.g., *The Koran*), the Bible is indeed unique. Consider this: **66** different books written over a span of **1,500** years by more than **40 authors** (kings, peasants, prophets, poets, fishermen, etc.); written in different places and in three different languages (Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic). And yet the unity and harmony of the message from Genesis to Revelation is unmistakable!

F. The witness of **fulfilled prophecy**.

<u>Event</u>	<u>Prophecy</u>	<u>Fulfillment</u>
Born of a virgin	Isaiah 7:14	Matt. 1:18, 24-25
Born in Bethlehem	Micah 5:1-2	Matt. 2:1
Herod kills the children	Jer. 31:15	Matt. 2:26
Preceded by a messenger	Isaiah 40:3	Matt. 3:1-2
Ministry to begin in Galilee	Isaiah 9:1	Matt. 4:12-13, 17
Ministry of miracles	Isaiah 35:5-6	Matt. 9:35
Teacher of parables	Psalms 78:2	Matt. 13:34
Enter Jerusalem on a donkey	Zech. 9:9	Luke 19:35-37
Resurrection of Jesus	Psalms 16:10	Acts 2:31
Ascension	Psalms 68:18	Acts 1:9
Betrayed by a friend	Psalms 41:9	Matt. 10:4
Sold for 30 pieces of silver	Zech. 11:12	Matt. 26:15
Price given for potter's field	Zech. 11:13	Matt. 27:7
Wounded and bruised	Isaiah 53:5	Matt. 27:26
Hands and feet pierced	Psalms 22:16	Luke 23:33
Crucified with thieves	Isaiah 53:12	Matt. 27:38
Garments parted and lots cast	Psalms 22:18	John 19:23-24
Suffers thirst	Psalms 69:21	John 19:28
Gall and vinegar offered	Psalms 69:21	Matt. 27:34
Bones not broken	Psalms 34:20	John 19:33
His side pierced	Zech. 12:10	John 19:34
Buried in a rich man's tomb	Isaiah 53:9	Matt. 27:57-60

G. The witness of **Jesus**. To follow Jesus as Lord means we accept all that he said and taught. He clearly believed that the Scriptures were completely true and authoritative (Matt. 5:17-18; John 10:35; 17:17). Can we be his disciples and not do the same?

V. **Looking at the External Evidence.**

A. The witness of the sheer number of **manuscripts**.¹³

<u>Author</u>	<u>Book</u>	<u>Date written</u>	<u>Earliest copies</u>	<u>Time Gap</u>	<u># of copies</u>
Homer	<i>Illiad</i>	800 BC	c. 400 BC	400 yrs	643
Herodotus	<i>History</i>	480-425 BC	c. 900 AD	1,350 yrs	8
Thucydides	<i>History</i>	460-400 BC	c. 900 AD	1,300 yrs	8
Plato	400 BC	c. 900 AD	1,300 yrs	7	
Caesar	<i>Gallic Wars</i>	100-44 BC	c. 900 AD	1,000 yrs	10
Tacitus	<i>Annals</i>	100 AD	c. 1,100 AD	1,000 yrs	20
Pliny	<i>Natural History</i>	61-113 AD	c. 850 AD	750 yrs	7

Few people bother to question the authenticity or the accuracy of these texts. And yet many have questioned the veracity of the documents of the New Testament. Seen in contrast to other manuscript evidence, this is startling indeed.

<u>Book</u>	<u>Date written</u>	<u>Earliest copies</u>	<u>Time Gap</u>	<u># of copies</u>
New Testament	50-100 AD	c. 114 fragment	50 yrs	5,366
		c. 200 books	100 yrs	
		c. 250 most of NT	150 yrs	
		c. 325 complete NT	225 yrs	

B. The accuracy of **transmission**. The discovery of the **Dead Sea Scrolls** in 1947 is illustrative. Prior to their discovery, the oldest manuscripts for the Old Testament were dated about 900 A.D. The Dead Sea scrolls were written about 100 B.C., almost

¹³ See Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence*, 38.

1,000 years earlier! Yet when compared to those upon which our Bibles are based, virtually no significant errors of transmission were noted!

- C. The original **autographs**. In technical terms, only the original copy (the “autograph”) is said to be inerrant. Occasionally minor corruptions of the text have occurred through transmission over the centuries. Most modern Bibles acknowledge these textual questions in the **footnotes**. For example: I Samuel 13:1; Mark 16:9-20; John 8:1-11; and I John 5:7-8.
- D. The witness of **archeology**. For example:
- Archeological finds in places like Ebla, Amarna, Mari, and Nuzi have confirmed many cultural aspects of the Old Testament that before were difficult to understand (covenants, customs, legal matters, etc.).
 - Luke’s nautical vocabulary and description in Acts is confirmed by archeological discoveries dating to that period.
 - In 1929 a tablet was discovered at Corinth that said “Erastus, curator of public buildings laid this pavement at his own expense” (see Romans 16:23).

Charles Colson summarizes:

Before the end of the 1950s, no less than 25,000 biblical sites had been substantiated by archaeological discoveries; there has been no discovery proving the Bible false. No other religious document in history has ever been found that accurate. The Book of Mormon, for example, talks about a civilization in North America in 400-600 BC. Not a single artifact of that civilization has ever been discovered.¹⁴

- E. The witness of **the Holy Spirit**. At a personal level, the most important witness to the truthfulness of the Bible is the inner confirmation from the Spirit. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would guide us in **all truth** (John 16:13-14).

The testimony of the Holy Spirit is superior to all reason.... It is necessary therefore, that the same Spirit who spoke by the mouths of the prophets, should penetrate into our hearts, to convince us that they faithfully delivered the oracles which were divinely entrusted to them....¹⁵

VI. Summary.

- A. The Bible is **necessary**. Unless God speaks, our ideas about who he is and what he wants will only be guesses. The only way to know God and his ways is if God chooses to reveal his thoughts and actions. He has! And the record of this self-disclosure is our Bible.
- B. The Bible is **true**. We can trust in the accuracy of Scripture because God can be trusted not to communicate in a manner that is false or inaccurate.
- C. The Bible is **authoritative**. Human reason, spiritual experiences, and the church can err and lead people astray. No one should put blind faith in such faulty instruments. However, the Bible can be trusted. It has priority even over the church. *Sola Scriptura!* Martin Luther said it well: *My conscience is captive to the Word of God.*
- D. The Bible is **clear**. The Bible is not too difficult to understand. God communicates in ways that even a child can comprehend.

¹⁴ *The Faith*, 51.

¹⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, 72.

- E. The Bible is **sufficient**. The Scriptures contain all we need to know for life and godliness. Nothing needs to be added. Nothing needs to be taken away.
- F. When I fall in love with the author, I discover that the Bible is a passionate **love letter** addressed personally to me. (See the story of Emile Cailliet on page 18.)

TABLE TALK

1. Describe your own personal journey in your attitude toward the Bible.
2. Why is our doctrine of the Bible so important?
3. Discuss the parable of the message in the bottle. What did you learn?
4. Many pretend that the church established the Bible. But it would be more accurate to say that the Bible established the church! Discuss the difference in these two perspectives.
5. Look again at the internal and external evidences for the authority and truthfulness of the Bible. Which evidences do you find most convincing?
6. Describe a situation of which you are aware where the erosion of confidence in the veracity of the Bible has impacted the way people think and behave.

Wonderful Words of Life

By Philip P. Bliss

*Sing them over again to me,
Wonderful words of life;
Let me more of their beauty see,
Wonderful words of life:
Words of life and beauty,
Teach me faith and duty:*

Beautiful words, wonderful words,
Wonderful words of life;
Beautiful words, wonderful words,
Wonderful words of life.

*Christ, the blessed One, gives to all
Wonderful words of life;
Sinner, list to the loving call,
Wonderful words of life;
All so freely given,
Wooing us to heaven:*

*Sweetly echo the gospel call,
Wonderful words of life;
Offer pardon and peace to all,
Wonderful words of life;
Jesus, only Savior,
Sanctify forever,*

Chapter 2: Appendix A

Two creedal statements have been helpful to evangelicals in giving them the vocabulary to better articulate their belief in the Bible.

*The Lausanne Covenant (1974). Article #2. The Authority and Power of the Bible.*¹⁶

We affirm the divine inspiration, truthfulness and authority of both Old and New Testament Scriptures in their entirety as the only written word of God, without error in all that it affirms, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice. We also affirm the power of God's word to accomplish his purpose of salvation. The message of the Bible is addressed to all men and women. For God's revelation in Christ and in Scripture is unchangeable. Through it the Holy Spirit still speaks today. He illumines the minds of God's people in every culture to perceive its truth freshly through their own eyes and thus discloses to the whole Church ever more of the many-colored wisdom of God. (II Tim. 3:16; II Pet. 1:21; John 10:35; Isa. 55:11; 1 Cor. 1:21; Rom. 1:16, Matt. 5:17,18; Jude 3; Eph. 1:17,18; 3:10,18).

*The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978).*¹⁷ "A Short Statement."

- 1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself.*
- 2. Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms: obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises.*
- 3. The Holy Spirit, Scripture's divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning.*
- 4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.*
- 5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.*

¹⁶ For the full text, see "The Lausanne Covenant," Lausanne Movement, <http://www.lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant>.

¹⁷ For the full text, see "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," Bible Research, <http://www.bible-researcher.com/chicago1.html>.

Chapter 2: Appendix B

The Book that Would Understand Me

By Emile Cailliet (originally published in *Eternity Magazine*, July 1974):

I was born in a small village of France and received an education that was naturalistic to the core. This could possibly have had a great deal to do with the fact that I did not even see a Bible before I reached the age of twenty-three.

To say that this naturalistically inspired education proved of little help through front-line experiences as a lad of twenty in World War I would amount to quite an understatement. When your own buddy—at the time speaking to you of his mother—dies standing in front of you, a bullet in his chest, what use is the sophistry of naturalism? Was there a meaning to it all?

One night a bullet got me, too. An American field ambulance crew saved my life and later the use of a badly shattered arm was restored. After a nine-month stay at the hospital, I was discharged and resumed graduate work.

During my stay at the American hospital, I had married a Scotch-Irish girl whom I had met in Germany on Christmas Eve the year before the war had broken out. She was, and has always remained, a deeply evangelical person. I am ashamed to confess that she must have been hurt to the very core of her being as I made it clear that religion would be taboo in our home. Little did I realize at the time that a militant attitude often betrays an inner turmoil.

I had returned to my books, but they were no longer the same books. Neither was my motivation the same motivation. Reading in literature and philosophy, I found myself probing in depth for meaning. During long night watches in the foxholes, I had in a strange way been longing—I must say it, however queer it may sound—for a book that would understand me.

But I knew of no such book. Now I would in secret prepare one for my own private use. And so, as I went on reading for my courses I would file passages that would speak to my condition, then carefully copy them in a leatherbound pocket book I would always carry with me. The quotations, which I numbered in red ink for easier reference, would lead me as it were from fear and anguish, through a variety of intervening stages, to supreme utterances of release and jubilation.

The day came when I put the finishing touch to “the book that would understand me,” speak to my condition, and help me through life’s happenings. A beautiful, sunny day it was. I went out, sat under a tree, and opened my precious anthology. As I went on reading, however, a growing disappointment came over me. Instead of speaking to my condition, the various passages reminded me of their context, of the circumstances of my labor over their selection.

Then I knew that the whole undertaking would not work, simply because it was of my own making. It carried no strength of persuasion. In a dejected mood, I put the little book back in my pocket.

At that very moment, my wife—who, incidentally, knew nothing of the project on which I had been working—appeared at the gate of the garden, pushing the baby carriage.

It had been a hot afternoon. She had followed the main boulevard only to find it too crowded. So she had turned to a side street which she could not name because we had only recently arrived in town. The cobblestones had shaken the carriage so badly that she had pondered what to do. Whereupon, having spotted a patch of grass beyond a small archway, she had gone in with the baby for a period of rest.

It turned out that the patch of grass led to an outside stone staircase which she had climbed without quite realizing what she was doing. At the top, she had seen a long room, door wide open. So she entered.

At the further end, a white-haired gentleman worked at a desk. He had not become aware of her presence. Looking around, she noticed the carving of a cross. Thus she suddenly realized that this office was a part of a church building—of a Huguenot church edifice hidden away as they all are, even long after the danger of persecution has passed. The venerable-looking gentleman was the pastor.

She walked to his desk and heard herself say, “Have you a Bible in French?”

He smiled and handed over to her a copy, which she eagerly took from his hand; then she walked out with a mixed feeling of both joy and guilt.

As she now stood in front of me, she meant to apologize, but I was no longer listening to her.

“A Bible, you say? Where is it? Show me. I have never seen one before!”

She complied. I literally grabbed the book and rush to my study with it. I opened and “chanced” upon the Beatitudes! I read, and read, and read—now aloud with an indescribable warmth surging within. I could not find words to express my awe and wonder. And suddenly the realization dawned upon me: this was the book that would understand me!

I continued to read deeply into the night, mostly from the Gospels. And lo and behold, as I looked through them, the One of whom they spoke, the One who spoke and acted in them became alive to me.

The providential circumstances amid which the book had found me now made it clear that while it seemed absurd to speak of a book understanding a man, this could be said of the Bible because its pages were animated by the presence of the living God and the power of his mighty acts. To this God I prayed that night, and the God who answered was the same God of whom it was spoken in the book.



Reason WHY

The Bible Offers Honest Answers to Honest Questions
By Stan Key

CHAPTER 3. DOES GOD EXIST?

I. What Do You See?



An old woman or a young girl?

We see the same picture, we experience the same data and sensory input. Yet we see draw different conclusions. For many of us the data is so obvious that we simply cannot imagine how anyone could see anything else?

The point here is this: it takes more than objective **evidence** to convince someone about reality. What is needed is a new way of seeing.

II. Does God Exist? Possible Answers to the Question.

A. “**No**. *God does not exist.*” This is the answer of **atheism** (a-theos).

1. After the ugly atheism of the 1960s (God is dead, Madalyn Murray, etc.), believing in God’s non-existence seemed to disappear for several decades. But in recent years there has been a resurgence of unbelief as witnessed in the popular writings of Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, and others.
2. Atheism asserts that **matter** is the only thing that matters. As Carl Sagan expressed it on his popular TV show *Cosmos*: “The universe is all there ever was or is or will be.”
3. Perhaps the fatal flaw in atheism is this: if God does not exist then existence is **meaningless**. But if existence has no meaning then this sentence has no meaning either!

Consequently atheism turns out to be too simple. If the whole universe has no meaning, we should never have found out that it has no meaning: just as, if there were no light in the universe and therefore no creatures with eyes, we should never know it was dark.¹⁸

B. “**Maybe**. *Perhaps God exists but we can’t be sure.*” This is the answer of **agnosticism** (a-gnosis).

1. But living with a non-answer to life’s most important question is usually either a mask for intellectually **laziness** or lack of moral **courage**. Claiming “I don’t know” is often a cop-out.
2. The weakness of this position is its own inherent inconsistency and irrationality. How can someone **know** that God is unknowable? How can one be **sure** that everything is unsure?

C. “**Yes**, *God exists.*” This answer can take multiple forms:

1. *Deism*. God exists but he (she? it? they?) is **unknowable**. God is like a watchmaker who created a watch and then went away to let it run on its own. Such a being is distant and **impersonal**.

¹⁸ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 31.

2. *Polytheism*. There are **many** gods: the storm god, the vegetation god, the sun god, the wine god, the war god, etc. So pick your favorite deity and worship him (her, it).
3. *Monotheism*. Three religions have concluded that there is only one sovereign God and they are all children of **Abraham**: Judaism, Islam and Christianity.
4. *Trinitarian theism*. Unique among all the options is Christianity's claim that God is one, yet eternally existing in three **Persons** (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

III. Two Notable Testimonies.

- A. Antony Flew (1923–2010). The son of a Methodist preacher, Flew was perhaps the most notorious atheist of the 20th century. But at age 81, he renounced his atheism and announced to the world “I now believe there is a God!”¹⁹ His conversion, however, was to theism not to Christianity.
- Flew’s examination of recent research on DNA let him to a belief in **intelligent design**. He asks: *How can a universe of mindless matter produce ... “coded chemistry”?*²⁰
 - *I was particularly impressed with Gerry Schroeder’s point-by-point refutation of what I call the “**monkey** theorem.” This idea, which has been presented in a number of forms and variations, defends the possibility of life arising by chance using the analogy of a multitude of monkeys banging away on computer keyboards and eventually ending up writing a Shakespearean sonnet... After hearing Schroeder’s presentation, I told him that he had very satisfactorily and decisively established that the “monkey theorem” was a load of rubbish....*²¹
 - *I must stress that my discovery of the divine has proceeded on a purely natural level, without any reference to supernatural phenomena.... My discovery of the Divine has been a pilgrimage of **reason** and not of faith.*²²
 - *Some claim to have made contact with this Mind. I have not – yet. But who knows what could happen next? Someday I might hear a Voice that says, “Can you hear me now?”*²³
- B. C. S. Lewis (1898-1963). In his autobiography of his early life *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis describes how as a young man he didn’t *want* God to exist. He *wanted* atheism to be true. Why? Because if God existed he would “**interfere**” with Lewis’ plans!

*No word in my vocabulary expressed deeper hatred than the word interference. But Christianity placed at the center what then seemed to me a transcendental Interferer.... There was no region even in the innermost depth of one’s soul (nay, there least of all) which one could surround with a barbed wire fence and guard with a notice “No Admittance.” And that was what I wanted; some area, however small, of which I could say to all other beings, “This is my business and mine only.”*²⁴

¹⁹ *There Is a God*, 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 75-77.

²² *Ibid.*, 93.

²³ *Ibid.*, 158.

²⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 172.

For several years this struggle continued. But atheists have a problem: how can you hide from the One who is omnipotent, the Hound of Heaven? Here is the rest of the story:

You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen [College], night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England. I did not then see what is now the most shining and obvious thing; the Divine humility which will accept a convert even on such terms. The Prodigal Son at least walked home on his own feet. But who can duly adore that Love which will open the high gates to a prodigal who is brought in kicking, struggling, resentful, and darting his eyes in every direction for a chance to escape.²⁵

IV. The Philosophical Answer.

Throughout history, many have sought to “prove” God’s existence by appealing to **rational** and **logical** arguments. To some, this may seem analogous to pointing a flashlight at the sun to help others to affirm its existence! The great benefits of such “proofs” is not that they make faith inevitable (then it wouldn’t be faith!) but that they make faith **possible**.

- A. The **cosmological** argument: the universe is there.
 1. The argument: *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork* (Psalm 19:1). There must be a **cause** for all that is, a First Cause.
 2. An illustration: Think of a train moving down the track. The caboose is pulled by the box car, the box car is pulled by the tanker, the tanker is pulled by... Surely, there is an engine somewhere pulling this train along.²⁶
- B. The **teleological** argument: things appear to be intelligently designed for a **purpose**.
 1. The argument: Where there is **design** (order, beauty, harmony, natural laws, etc.) there must be a Designer. This is a universe, not a multiverse.
 2. An illustration: If you find a watch lying in the forest, you will conclude that there must be a watch maker. (This was the famous argument of William Paley in 1802).
- C. The **anthropic** principle: the universe seems to have known we were coming.
 1. The argument: Our planet seems perfectly designed for **human** occupancy. If it almost as if someone knew we were coming and set out a welcome mat.
 2. An illustration: Imagine entering a motel room where your favorite music was playing, your favorite food was in the refrigerator, the TV was preset to your favorite stations, your personal toiletries were all carefully lined up on a shelf in the bathroom, and your favorite magazines were spread out on the coffee table. Could this be a **coincidence**?²⁷

²⁵ Ibid., 228-229.

²⁶ Peter Kreeft, *Fundamentals of the Faith*, 30.

²⁷ Antony Flew, *There Is a God*, 113f.

- D. The **moral** argument: the inner conviction of right and wrong, **conscience**.
1. The argument: Everyone has an internal voice that speaks to them about what is right and what is wrong. Where did this come from? If there is a law there must be a **Law Giver** (Romans 2:14-16).
 2. An illustration: Children on the playground arguing about right and wrong: “That’s not fair”, “You have to share,” “Don’t be a bully,” “I got here first,” “But you promised,” etc. Immanuel Kant said: “Two things fill the mind with ever-increasing wonder and awe... the starry heavens above me and the **moral law** within me.”
- E. **Irreducible** complexity.
1. The argument: The complexity of many organisms and structures is such that they could not have occurred by numerous, successive, slight modifications as Darwinism demands. The pieces had to all come together at **one time!** Think of birds, the eye, the bacterial flagellum, etc.
 2. An illustration: The mousetrap contains five parts: a wooden base, a holding bar, a spring, a hammer bar, and a catch. All of them must work **together** in order for the trap to do what it was designed to do (catch a mouse). If just one part is missing, it is not a mousetrap.
- F. Man is **incurably** religious.
1. The argument: Though many have tried to **eradicate** religion (French revolution, Stalin, Mao, etc.), none have succeeded. There is a God-shaped vacuum in every human heart. “You have made us for yourself, O God, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”²⁸
 2. An illustration: *Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for these desires exists. A baby feels hunger; well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim; well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire; well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for **another world**.*²⁹

V. The Biblical Answer: Romans 1:18-23.

Paul’s most systematic presentation of Christian theology is the book of Romans. He begins his presentation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ by discussing the existence of God. In these few verses, Paul tells us four realities about God’s existence.

*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness **suppress** the truth. For what can be known about God is **plain** to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been **clearly perceived**, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they **knew God**, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish **hearts** were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became **fools**, and **exchanged** the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things (Romans 1:18-23).*

²⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, 3.

²⁹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 106.

- A. The evidence for God is **overwhelming**.
- Paul is not appealing to the Bible to defend the existence of God, but to **nature**.
 - The evidence is available to everyone, everywhere, all the time.
 - Paul says that the organ with which we think is our **hearts**, not our heads.
- B. The evidence from nature tells us two things about God: 1) his eternal **power**, and 2) his **divine** nature. This is enough evidence to **condemn** us if we refuse to believe. But it is not enough evidence to save us. For that, we need the revelation of Jesus Christ!
- C. The problem is not the absence of evidence but the **suppression** of it. Remember the picture of the old/young woman? Paul is saying that some people have decided what the picture depicts and no amount of rational argument will dislodge them from their opinion. Paul is boldly saying that those who deny God's existence are guilty of intellectual **dishonesty**: they don't have the courage to follow the evidence where it leads them! Claiming to be wise they became fools. As Malcolm Muggeridge said, "We have educated ourselves into imbecility."³⁰
- Frederich Buechner imagines what would happen if one night God rearranged the stars in the sky so that in bold letters it said, "I exist!"³¹ He suggests that some would come to faith but others would attribute the "message" to some natural phenomenon, such as **swamp gas** that causes the light from the stars to be refracted in a way that new shapes appear to us here on the earth.
- Bonhoeffer states the matter boldly: "When people complain that they find it hard to believe, it is a sign of deliberate or unconscious **disobedience**."³²
- Jesus says it best of all: "If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God..." (John 7:17).
- D. For those who deny the existence of God, the results will be **catastrophic**. "The **wrath** of God is revealed from heaven against... those who suppress the truth... so they are **without excuse**." Later in Romans Paul says that "every mouth may be stopped and the whole world may be held accountable to God" (3:19). God has prepared a place for those who refuse to accept the evidence he has given them: hell.

VI. The Wager.

One of Pascal's most famous *pensées* (thoughts) was written for those who struggle with the question of God's existence. He realized that it takes more than evidence to settle the matter, it demands a **decision**. You *must* decide. Neutrality in this matter is impossible. Not to decide is to decide. You *must* wager one way or the other. But where will you place your bet?

Suppose you wager that God *does* exist and live a life based on that faith. Suppose after death you "discover" that he doesn't. You've lost nothing. But suppose you wager that God *doesn't* exist and live a life based on that faith. Then suppose after death you discover that he does exist! In that case, you lose everything.

Therefore, it makes rational sense to gamble on God! If you win you win everything. If you lose, you lose nothing.

³⁰ *Jesus Rediscovered*, n.p.

³¹ *The Magnificent Defeat*, 44f.

³² *The Cost of Discipleship*, 68.

TABLE TALK

1. Describe one thing that really struck you in the lesson today.
2. Do you ever struggle with doubts about God? Has this lesson helped you to strengthen your faith? Explain.
3. Think of someone you know who describes himself/herself as an atheist or an agnostic. What have you learned from this lesson that may help you to be a more effective witness to them?
4. Do you believe that every atheist and agnostic is basically intellectually dishonest?
5. How do you respond to Pascal's wager? Do you find his logic compelling?
6. Look again at the picture of the young/old woman. What does this illustration help us to understand about witnessing to those who don't see what we see?



Reason WHY

The Bible Offers Honest Answers to Honest Questions
By Stan Key

CHAPTER 4. WHERE DID IT ALL BEGIN?

I. In the Beginning...

A. Mommy, where did I come from?

Coupled with the questions: *Who am I? Where am I going? Why am I here? What happens when I die?* The question of origins (*Where did I come from?*) is one of life's most important questions! Answering this question correctly is a **perquisite** for living a life that matters.

*Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come **from God** and was going back **to God**, rose from supper... and taking a towel... began to wash his disciples' feet... (John 13:3-5).*

B. But who will answer this question for our culture today?

Every culture (nation, family, church, school, business) has its own creation story. More than mere history, such a story defines who we are (**identity**), why we exist (**purpose**), and where we are going (**destiny**). This explains the importance of revisionist history. "Whoever has the authority to shape a culture's Creation myth is its de facto 'priesthood,' with the power to determine what the dominant **worldview** will be."³³

II. Ideas Have Consequences.

Though there are other beliefs about origins, the two primary theories competing in our American culture today are between the Judeo-Christian worldview and the Naturalistic/Materialistic worldview. The **implications** that flow from our choice of worldview affect almost every area of life.

	<i>Judeo-Christian worldview</i>	<i>Naturalistic-Materialistic worldview</i>
<i>Ultimate Reality</i>	Infinite, personal God who is transcendent	Impersonal forces; if there is a "god" it would be part of the created order (immanent)
<i>Universe</i>	Coherent and understandable	The result of random forces and chance events; no meaning or purpose.
<i>Man</i>	Pinnacle of creation; in the image of God; qualitatively different from the animals	A highly evolved animal ; the product of time plus chance.
<i>Morality</i>	Based on the character of God and therefore absolute	Based on pragmatic considerations derived from human culture; relative .
<i>Afterlife</i>	Heaven and hell	Annihilation
<i>Scripture</i>	God's self-disclosure to man	Man's attempt to explain reality
<i>Meaning of life</i>	To know God and to please him	No meaning .

³³ Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 154.

III. Questions for Mr. Darwin and His Kin.

To be effective apologists, we need to get our own “**baloney** detectors”³⁴ to help identify the flaws in the standard Darwinian arguments.

- A. But isn't your position a **faith** proposition? Aren't you imposing **religion** (philosophical naturalism, materialism) in the classroom? Therefore, we must learn to engage Darwinian evolution not only as a science but also as a **worldview**.

*The truth is that much of Darwinism is not science but naturalistic philosophy masquerading as science. So an honest debate between Darwinism and Christianity is not fact versus faith but philosophy versus philosophy, worldview versus worldview.*³⁵

- B. But does atheistic evolution really account for the data?

1. How can mindless matter and random forces produce rationality and intelligence? “The most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is **comprehensible**.”³⁶
2. What about the gaps in the **fossil record**? Where are the “missing links” that show the progress of evolutionary changes from one species to another? As John Lennox insightfully stated: “Surely ‘evolution of the gaps’ is at least as widespread as ‘God of the gaps.’”³⁷
3. How to account for **irreducible** complexity of the cell? Darwin himself admitted that if it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, then his theory would collapse. Michael Behe claims to have made precisely this demonstration.³⁸
4. What about the recent research on **DNA**? How can mindless matter produce such complex “language”?³⁹
5. What about those classic arguments (“icons”) used for generations in biology textbooks to support Darwinian evolution that have now been shown to be either grossly **exaggerated, distortions** of the truth, or in some cases, clearly **false**? In his book *Icons of Evolution: Science or Myth?*, Jonathan Wells deals with a number of these arguments:
 - In the Miller-Urey experiment (1953), scientists claimed to produce amino acids (life?) by artificially recreating the atmosphere of the primitive earth, then shooting electric sparks (lightning?) through it⁴⁰.
 - Darwin’s “tree of life” supposedly shows how humans have evolved from ancient forms of life (the roots) to today (fish to amphibians to reptiles to mammals).⁴¹

³⁴ Ibid., 165.

³⁵ Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?*, 96.

³⁶ Albert Einstein, quoted in John Lennox, *God’s Undertaker*, 59.

³⁷ Ibid., 12.

³⁸ *Darwin’s Black Box*, n.p.

³⁹ See Francis Collins, *The Language of God*, 139–140.

⁴⁰ *Icons of Evolution*, 9–27.

⁴¹ Ibid., 29–58.

- Ernst Haeckel’s drawings placed the development of human embryos side by side with embryonic development of fish, salamander, chicken, rabbits, etc. The similarities seemed to “prove” common ancestry.⁴²
- The discovery of archaeopteryx (an animal that had wings and feathers, a lizard-like tail and claws on its wings) seemed to be the “missing link” between reptiles and birds.⁴³
- During the Industrial Revolution in England tree trunks were darkened by soot. The result was that birds could see (and eat!) the light-colored moths but not the dark-colored ones. This supposedly illustrates how natural selection works.⁴⁴
- Many science textbooks have a picture of a parade of creatures that morph over time from primitive ape to modern man. This ostensibly proves evolution.

One by one, Wells examines these classic arguments (icons) that have been used for decades to “prove” the truth of Darwin’s theory, and exposes their weaknesses and flaws.⁴⁵

Much of what we teach about evolution is wrong. This fact raises troubling questions about the status of Darwinian evolution. If the icons of evolution are supposed to be our best evidence for Darwin’s theory, and all of them are false or misleading, what does that tell us about the theory? Is it science, or myth?⁴⁶

6. Can an evolutionist really **live with** the implications of his theory?
 - a. There are no moral **absolutes**. This means there is no universal moral code so laws should only try to reflect public opinion, not shape it.
 - b. In moral education, teachers should not tell students that their ideas are right or wrong, but rather guide them to find solutions that work best for them. The goal is **values** clarification, not a search for truth. Should this philosophy also guide the way we teach grammar, spelling, history, and math? As Richard Rorty pointed out, the very notion of Truth (no “s” and a capital “T”) is very “un-Darwinian.”⁴⁷
 - c. If all human ideas are merely products of evolution, and not really true but only useful, then why should anyone believe that evolution was true? Isn’t Darwinism **self-refuting** and an example of flawed logic?
 - d. How does evolution explain acts of **selflessness** and love? Can natural selection explain why a man would lay down his life for a friend? To say that such actions are motivated by a “desire to survive and produce more offspring” simply doesn’t compute.

⁴² Ibid., 81–109.

⁴³ Ibid., 111–135

⁴⁴ Ibid., 140–141.

⁴⁵ Other “icons” that Wells treats in his book include: homology in vertebrate limbs, Darwin’s finches, four-winged fruit flies, and fossil horses and directed evolution.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 243.

- e. One book by evolutionary sociologists⁴⁸ tried to explain rape not as pathology, but as an evolutionary adaptation for maximizing reproductive success. Really? If we teach our children they are evolved animals, should we be **surprised** if they act that way?

IV. Genesis 1-2. In the beginning....⁴⁹

A. Notice the structure of the passage.

Seven Days of Creation 1:1–2:3							The Creation of Man & Woman & their home 2:4–2:25		
Day 1 Light	Day 2 Heavens	Day 3 Earth, sea, vegetation	Day 4 Sun, moon, and stars	Day 5 Fish & birds	Day 6 Animals & man	Day 7 God rested	Adam	Eden & the tree	Eve
1:1–5	1:6–8	1:9–13	1:14–19	1:20–23	1:24–31	2:1–3	2:4–7	2:8–17	2:18–25

B. Notice that at first, the earth was “without **form** and **void**” (Hebrew, *tohu* and *bohu*) (1:2). So God creates first some “forms” and then he “fills” them.

Day 1 he creates light... day 4 he “fills” the light with sun, moon and stars.

Day 2 he creates the heavens and the waters... day 5 he fills them with birds and fish.

Day 3 he creates the earth... day 6 he fills it with creatures and with man/woman.

The author seems to be motivated by **literary style** as much as by chronological order. This is almost poetic. This doesn’t mean the passage is non-historical. Au contraire! But it does mean that caution is in order in pressing the text too far for scientific details.

C. Notice some important repetitions:

1. “And God said...” (1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 29). Unlike other cosmologies of antiquity, God does not *make* the world by shaping pre-existent matter. No, he *creates* the world by **speaking** it into existence (by fiat). *By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host... for he spoke, and it came to be...* (Psalm 33:6, 9). *In the beginning was the Word.... And the Word became flesh...* (John 1:1, 14).
2. “And God called...” (1:5, 8, 10). God’s sovereignty over creation is seen in the fact that he has the right to give things their **names** (Day, Night, Heaven, etc.). When God tells Adam to name the animals (2:19-20), this demonstrates man’s dominion over the earth.
3. “It was **good**... very good” (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). If God made it, it is good. God is not the author of evil. However, notice that there is one thing in a perfect universe that is “not good”! *It is not good that the man should be alone* (2:18).
4. “And God **separated**...” (1:4, 6, 7, 14, 18). Light from darkness, waters above from waters beneath, and day from night, the Creator is intent on making distinctions and keeping things in their proper categories. This is also underscored by his insistence that plants and animals reproduce “according to its kind” (repeated ten times: 1:11, 12, 21, 24, 25).

⁴⁸ Randy Thornhill and Craig Palmer. *The Natural History of Rape: Biological Bases of Sexual Coercion*. MIT Press, 2000. Quoted in Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 211.

⁴⁹ This chapter focuses on Genesis 1 and the “What Is Man?” chapter focuses on Genesis 2.

D. Notice also:

1. How the texts gives hints of the **Trinity**. In describing “God”, “the Spirit of God” (1:2), and the Word of God (“And God said...”), the text introduces us to the fact that God, though One, has multiple ways in which He is understood. This is further underscored by:
 - The plural pronouns in verse 26: *Let **us** make man in **our** image....*
 - The word God (a plural noun, in Hebrew: *Elohim*) is consistently used with verbs that are singular. “And God said... God created...” The subject is plural but the verb singular.
2. Day begins at **sundown!** “And there was evening and there was morning, the [first, second, etc.] day” (1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). The day begins when men and women sleep. God is teaching the principle of **rest** (2:1-3).
3. Man (male and female) is described as the **pinnacle** of creation. It appears that everything that God created was prepared as a home for man and then entrusted into his care.

E. Notice what a **unique** document this is. When you compare and contrast Genesis 1-2 to other creation accounts written in the Ancient Near East (for example, the Akkadian creation myth, *Enuma Elish*), one discovers what a radically unique account Genesis really is!

Non-Biblical Accounts of Creation	Genesis 1-2
Myth – time and space are unimportant	History – time and space are very important
Polytheistic	Monotheistic
Creation out of pre-existent matter	Creation out of nothing – <i>ex nihilo</i>
Sexual themes	Sexuality (in God) is absent
The gods shape and form matter	God speaks creation into existence
The gods are known through nature (Astrology)	Nature is known through God (Astronomy)
A poly-verse... multi-verse	A universe
Cyclical concept of existence	Linear concept of existence
The gods are unethical and immoral	God is a Moral Being (holy)
The gods must submit to some deeper impersonal power or force (fate)	God is absolute and sovereign – there is nothing beyond or behind God
Blurs the boundaries between man and animal, male and female, right and wrong, god and man	Boundaries and distinctions are emphasized and celebrated
The gods are part of this world system (nature)	God is “wholly other”.

F. Notice what kind of **questions** the biblical text is intended to answer.

If the Bible is the Word of God, we can assume it will not be contrary to science. However, Genesis 1-2 was not intended to be read as a scientific text. Science seeks to answer the questions **what?**, **how?** and **when?** This Biblical text primarily seeks to answer the questions **who?** and **why?** Therefore, we miss the point of the passage if we read it primarily to determine: the age of the earth, the meaning of the word “day”, a strict chronology (how could light be created before the sun? where do dinosaurs fit in the story?), etc.

John Lennox gives a helpful illustration. He imagines his Aunt Matilda baking a cake that is taken to a group of the world's top scientists for analysis. Each scientist seeks to explain the cake according to his/her discipline of study. The nutritionists speak of the number of calories, the biochemists talk about the structure of the proteins, etc.

*Now that these experts, each in terms of his or her scientific discipline, have given us an exhaustive description of the cake, can we say that the cake is completely explained? We have certainly been given a description of how the cake was made and how its various constituent elements relate to each other, but suppose I now ask the assembled group of experts a final question: why was the cake made? The grin on Aunt Matilda's face shows she knows the answer, for she made the cake, and she made it for a purpose. But all the nutrition scientists, biochemists, chemists, physicists and mathematicians in the world will not be able to answer the question – and it is no insult to their disciplines to state their incapacity to answer it. Their disciplines, which can cope with questions about the nature and structure of the cake, that is, answering the “how” questions, cannot answer the “why” questions connected with the purpose for which the cake was made. In fact, the only way we shall ever get an answer is if Aunt Matilda **reveals** it to us.⁵⁰*

V. Rediscovering the Power of Our Creation Story.

In this postmodern, post-Christian age, it is painfully apparent that we have “forgotten” the true story of our origins. Exchanging Genesis for Charles Darwin, we are educating our youth into a new understanding of who they are and why they are here. Christians must find ways to once again tell the story of how God created the heavens and the earth. For those humble enough to listen, such a story will have a profound impact and will be embraced by many as **Good News** indeed!

A. What Genesis 1 tells us about Ultimate Reality.

1. God **exists** eternally. Go back as far as you can (prebiotic soup, Big Bang, etc.) and behind everything you find God. Nothing is beyond or behind God. He is the Ultimate Ultimate.
2. God is **omnipotent** and sovereign. He is infinitely wise. He is an **artist** of infinite skill, a great lover of beauty. Use a telescope or a microscope, you can see his amazing designs.
3. God is **transcendent** and distinct from his creation. He is not part of nature, he is above nature. If the universe suddenly disappeared... God would remain unchanged!
4. God is **One**. His Spirit hovers over and around us and his Word has power to create out of nothing. He is one yet three. And we are created in his triune image.
5. God is **personal**. He is not energy or some cosmic impersonal force. He speaks! He has purposes and plans. He longs to have fellowship with the humans he has made.

B. What Genesis 1 tells us about the universe (nature).

1. Nature is **real**. It is not an illusion or the figment of someone's imagination.
2. Nature is **comprehensible**. It is orderly and therefore intelligible. It is not the product of random forces and chance. It is governed by laws, not random

⁵⁰ John Lennox, *God's Undertaker*, 41.

forces. Therefore, nature invites us to study it! This accounts for the rise of **science**.

3. Nature is **good**. Seven times Genesis 1 repeats it! There is no Biblical basis for pretending that “spiritual things” are more important than “physical things.” Paul explained what many have forgotten: *For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer* (I Tim. 4:4-5).
4. Nature can **point** us to God and reveal his glory, just as any art work “points” to the one who made it. But nature must never be confused with God. Don’t worship the stars. Worship the One who made them!

C. What Genesis 1 tells us about ourselves.

1. We are **unique**. The universe was created for man’s enjoyment. Alone of all the animals, only humans are made in the image of God. We have a unique place in the cosmos. Pascal put it succinctly: “Man is neither angel nor beast.”
2. We have a **purpose** and therefore life has meaning. God gave humans the responsibility to care for his creation. We are stewards, not the owners, over nature. One day, we will be called to give an account of our stewardship. All work is therefore potentially sacred.
3. We are **male and female**. Humans come in only two varieties. Those who blur the distinctions and promote gender confusion are tampering with the very foundation stones of the created order.

D. What Genesis 1 does *not* tell us.

For by [Jesus] all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross (Colossians 1:16–20).

It’s all in the prepositions!

TABLE TALK

1. The “Old Man in the Mountains” is a rocky projection in the White Mountains of New Hampshire that resembles a human face when seen from the right angle. In South Dakota one can visit Mount Rushmore where four American presidents are clearly discernable. Which one is the work of random forces and which one indicates design? Explain how you know.
2. Describe one way that this study has impacted your mind and heart.
3. In talking with “evolutionists”, do you need to be more assertive in exposing the weaknesses and flaws of Darwinism? Are your “baloney detectors” operational?
4. What is the primary message that God has spoken to you today through his Word (Gen. 1)?

Let Heav'n Arise, Let Earth Appear

A hymn based on Genesis 1 taken from the Scottish Psalter and Paraphrases
Anonymous

Sung to the tune of "America, the Beautiful"

*Let heav'n arise, let earth appear, said the Almighty Lord:
The heav'n arose, the earth appeared, at his creating word.
Thick darkness brooded o'er the deep: God said, Let there be light:
The light shone forth with smiling ray, and scattered ancient night.*

*He bade the clouds ascend on high; the clouds ascend, and bear
A wat'ry treasure to the sky, and float upon the air.
The liquid element below was gathered by his hand;
the rolling seas together flow, and leave the solid land.*

*With herbs, and plants, and fruitful trees, the new-formed globe he crowned,
Ere there was rain to bless the soil, or sun to warm the ground.
Then high in heav'n's resplendent arch he placed two orbs of light,
He set the sun to rule the day, the moon to rule the night.*

*Next, from the deep, th' Almighty King did vital beings frame;
Fowls of the air of every wing, and fish of every name.
To all the various brutal tribes he gave their wondrous birth;
At once the lion and the worm sprung from the teeming earth.*

*Then, chief o'er all his works below, at last was Adam made;
His Maker's image blessed his soul, and glory crowned his head.
Fair in th' Almighty Maker's eye the whole creation stood.
He viewed the fabric he had raised; his word pronounced it good.*



Reason WHY

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CHAPTER 5. WHAT IS MAN?⁵¹

I. Who Am I?

A. The Riddle of the Sphinx.

According to Greek mythology, a sphinx guarded the gate to the city of Thebes. To every traveler who sought entrance he would ask a simple question: *Which creature walks on four legs in the morning, two legs in the afternoon, and three legs in the evening?* Those who gave the wrong answer were killed and eaten! Finally, Oedipus solved the riddle. The answer is **man**.⁵² As a result, the Sphinx lost all her power and the citizens of Thebes were liberated from her evil control!

Some have called the Riddle of the Sphinx the most famous riddle in history. It reminds us of two fundamental realities that are true in all cultures everywhere throughout all of time:

1. Perhaps the ultimate **mystery** of life is the riddle of man: Who am I?
2. The wrong answer to this question keeps you **enslaved**. The right answer sets you free!

B. The question (*Who am I?*) recurs often in history, highlighting one of the greatest themes treated in philosophy, literature and art.

1. Jean Valjean. “Who Am I?” from the musical *Les Misérables*.
2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer. His poem “Who Am I?”
3. The musical group Casting Crowns sang “Who Am I?”
4. Moses (Ex. 3:11), David (I Sam. 18:18; II Sam. 7:18), and Solomon (II Chron. 2:6) all asked this question: “Who am I?”

II. How Some Have Answered the Question.

- A. We are **gods**. This is the answer of pantheism and other Eastern religions and philosophies. Everything is part of the Divine. Some forms of contemporary environmentalism and ecology echo this approach, promoting Mother Earth, Cosmic Energy, the Great Spirit of the wind, etc.
- B. We are **machines**. The computer age has given new popularity to this view. Man, like a computer, is programmed (nature and nurture) to perform: input determines output. Behavioral psychology believes that man is simply the product of stimulus-response. Many believe we will one day be able to create a human computer.
- C. We are **animals**. The most popular contemporary model for understanding our identity is the one made possible by Darwinism. The only difference between a human and an ape is a few million years of evolutionary development, the difference is quantitative not qualitative.

⁵¹ With apologies to those who may be offended by the politically incorrect term “man,” the author has chosen the traditional term rather than using the more cumbersome “person” or “man/woman.” This enhances the literary style of our study and is faithful to the Biblical text.

⁵² As a baby, man crawls on all fours early in life (morning). As an adult (afternoon), man walks upright on two feet. Finally, in old age (evening), man walks with a cane (three “legs”).

III. Genesis 1:26-27; 2:4-25. The Answer to the Riddle of Man!

Many writers have exulted in the remarkable reality of being human. For example, Shakespeare can say, “What a piece of work is a man!”⁵³ But Genesis 1-2 is the best place to discover our true identity. Here we find at least eight marvelous truths about human beings that make man **unique**, **distinct**, and **superior** to everything else in the created order.

A. The **Pinnacle** of Creation (1:26-31).

The last thing God created was man! It was as if everything had been created for man and his enjoyment. Scientists call this “the anthropic principle,” sometimes called the “Goldilocks principle” which states that everything is “just right” for human enjoyment (the tilt of the axis, the distance from the sun, the speed of the earth’s orbit, the composition of the atmosphere, etc.). Man is not just an animal. In fact, he is given **dominion** over the animals (1:26, 28) and gives them their names (2:19-20). To have dominion does not mean to domineer, abuse, or exploit. Rather, it means to take care of God’s stuff, as **stewards** who must give an account.

The success of the movie *The Planet of the Apes* is perhaps best explained by the fact that the story depicts a world when man does *not* have dominion over the animals; rather the apes rule the world!

B. The **Image** of God (*Imago Dei*) (1:26-27).

No other creature was created in the image of God. Man is not God but man is **like** God. This makes man unique. Francis Schaeffer⁵⁴ explains that in many ways, man is part and parcel of the created order (like the animals) but in other ways he is very different (like God).

THE PERSONAL INFINITE GOD

Man	Chasm
Chasm	Man
Animal	Animal
Plant	Plant
Machine	Machine

Sin’s arrival in the world (Gen. 3) severely **damaged** the divine image in man so that humans now reflect the image of their fallen earthly parents (Gen. 5:1-3). However, the image though marred was not completely erased (Jam. 3:9). Furthermore, in Christ the image can be **restored** (Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24).

C. Male and Female (1:27).

Essentially, humans come in only two varieties: male and female. The distinction apparently transcends all other possible distinctions among men (ethnicity, economics, education, geography, language, politics, etc.). Thus to tamper with gender identity is to tamper with the **foundations** of the created order. Notice that in Eden there is no government and not even a church/temple. The **family** is the primary place where God intends to work out his purposes for humans. God defines “family” as one man and one woman in a sacred and fertile covenant.

⁵³ *Hamlet*, Act 2, scene 2.

⁵⁴ Francis A. Schaeffer, *Escape from Reason*, 26.

D. Dust and Spirit (2:7).

Notice that man is composed of both dirt and Spirit. In a sense, he is an **amphibian**: a creature who lives in two environments (spirit and material, soul and body, like God and like animals). In the Bible *adam* thus becomes the generic term for mankind as well as the proper, personal name for the first man. The term *adam* (man) reminds us that man is dust (Hebrew, *dam*) (Gen. 3:19; Psalm 103:14).

E. The Gift of Language.

Genesis 1-2 introduces us to the reality that God **speaks**. In fact, he creates the universe by his word alone. Among all the creation, only to man has he given the ability to talk like he talks. Dolphins and chimpanzees may have limited ways they share basic information but it is difficult to imagine that they would ever come to a meeting like this in order to discuss the meaning of dolphinness or monkeyness. This means that with man alone is God able to have a **personal relationship**: communion, fellowship and intimacy. God talks *to* the material world but he talks *with* man.

In *The Magician's Nephew*, C. S. Lewis describes how Aslan created Narnia. The most moving part is how he gave the gift of speech to the animals. He chose some, put his nose against their nose, then breathed on them and said; "Narnia, awake! Love. Think. Speak."⁵⁵

F. Moral Character (2:16-17).

The tree of the knowledge of **good and evil** was placed in the midst of the garden as the one prohibition for man in the entire universe. This single tree thus gave to humans the opportunity to **choose**. To obey or not to obey, that is question. God did not give moral laws to any other creature. The Bible considers man to be a free moral agent. God holds Adam and Eve morally **accountable** for their behavior.

G. Creative.

Though man is not able to create *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) as God did, he is able to take the material of the created order and work it creatively into **useful** and **beautiful** purposes. Though the fall had unfortunate consequences for human labor (3:17-19), it would be a mistake to think that work is part of the curse! The first person in the Bible described as being filled with the Spirit of God is Bezalel, a workman (Ex. 31:1-5). And remember that Jesus worked for 18 years as a **carpenter** (Mark 6:3). Just as God worked in creating the universe (2:2), man, who is created in his image, also has work to do;

- Have dominion (rule, control) over the animals and the plants (1:26-30).
- Be fruitful and multiply... to be pro-creative (1:28).
- To work and keep the garden (2:15).
- To name the animals (2:19-20).

H. Not Alone (2:18).

Seven times in the creation story we are told that what God created was "good." But in this pristine, perfect, sin-free environment there was one thing that was "**not good**". Adam was alone! What is "not good" about that? Alone, Adam can never:

1. Obey the **first commandment**: *be fruitful and multiply*.

⁵⁵ C. S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, 126.

2. Reflect **the image** of the triune God who created him: *Let us make man in our image.*

In other words, one can't be fully human alone. We are made for **relationships**, for community, for intimacy with God and with others. Typically this involves marriage and family but not necessarily. Jesus was **single!** You can be fully human without being married but you can't be fully human without deep, meaningful relationships.

- G. Before leaving the subject of man's unique identity, we might mention a few other ways in which humans are distinguished from the animal kingdom:
 - We stand erect.
 - We wear clothing.
 - We bury our dead.
 - The opposable thumb.
 - We worship.

IV. Who Am I? An Affirmation of Faith.

- A. Psalm 8.

*O Lord, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.
Out of the mouth of babies and infants,
you have established strength because of your foes,
to still the enemy and the avenger.*

*When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
what is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?*

*Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings (elohim)
and crowned him with glory and honor.
You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet,
all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.*

*O Lord, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

- B. Though our identity takes on an infinitely richer depth in Christ and in the transforming power of his blood and his Spirit, we must become **evangelists** today not only of our redemption but of our **creation!** Perhaps we need an affirmation of faith based on Genesis 1-2 that everyone, everywhere could be invited to recite. *I believe....*
 1. I am not the result of chance, but that I am created by a loving God for a good purpose.

2. I am not an animal nor an angel, but a human person, made in the image of God.
3. I am here to take responsibility for the gifts God has given to me. One day, I will be called to give an account.
4. Jesus is the model for what it means to be truly human: *Behold, the man! (Ecce homo)* (John 19:5).
5. Reaching my created potential is impossible because of the presence of sin in my life but I can reach my full potential through his shed blood and poured out Spirit (Rom. 8:29; I John 3:2).

TABLE TALK

1. Explain why the question of our identity (Who Am I?) is so important.
2. Describe someone you know who is confused about their true identity and how this false concept of self is holding them captive.
3. What is the image of God (*imago dei*)?
4. What did you learn today that is going to make the biggest difference in the way you think? In the way you act?
5. The Gospel promises that, in Christ, the image of God can be restored. Do you believe this? Discuss.
6. Why is it often important today for Christian witnesses to talk about creation *before* they talk about redemption?

Who Am I?

By Dietrich Bonhoeffer

*Who am I? They often tell me
I stepped from my cell's confinement
Calmly, cheerfully, firmly,
Like a Squire from his country-house.*

*Who am I? They often tell me
I used to speak to my warders
Freely and friendly and clearly,
As though it were mine to command.*

*Who am I? They also tell me
I bore the days of misfortune
Equally, smilingly, proudly,
Like one accustomed to win.*

*Am I then really all that which other men tell of?
Or am I only what I myself know of myself?
Restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage,
Struggling for breath, as though hands were
Compressing my throat,
Yearning for colors, for flowers,
for the voices of birds,
Thirsting for words of kindness, for neighborliness,
Tossing in expectation of great events,
Powerlessly trembling for friends
at an infinite distance,
Weary and empty at praying,
at thinking, at making,
Faint, and ready to say farewell to it all?*

*Who am I? This or the other?
Am I one person today and tomorrow another?
Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others,
And before myself a contemptibly
woebegone weakling?
Or is something within me still like a beaten army,
Fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved?
Who am I? They mock me,
these lonely questions of mine.
Whoever I am, Thou knowest, O God, I am Thine!*

Teach Us What We Yet May Be

Song lyrics to the hymn "Teach us what we yet may be"
by Catherine C. Arnott, arranged by Ludwig von Beethoven (*Hymn to Joy*)

*God who stretched the spangled heavens
Infinite in time and place
Flung the suns in burning radiance
Through the silent realms of space,
We, Thy children, in Thy likeness,
Share inventive powers with Thee
Great Creator, still creating,
Teach us what we yet may be.*

*We have conquered worlds undreamed of
Since the childhoods of our race,
Known the ecstasy of winging
Through uncharted realms of space,
Probed the secrets of the atom,
Yielding unimagined power
Facing us with life's destruction
or our most triumphant hour.*

*As Thy new horizons beckon,
Father, give us strength to be
Children of creative purpose,
Serving man and honoring Thee.
Til our dreams are rich with meaning
Each endeavor Thy design
Great Creator, lead us onward
Til our work is one with Thine.*



Reason WHY

The Bible Offers Honest Answers to Honest Questions
By Stan Key

CHAPTER 6. WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE WORLD?⁵⁶

I. Something's Rotten in Denmark!⁵⁷

- A. *The Plague* (French: *La Peste*) by Albert Camus. This book is an existentialist classic. It tells the story of an Algerian city (Oran) struck by a plague that no one really understands (its cause, its cure, and how it is spread). The city is quarantined and the gates are shut. The characters in the story (doctor, priest, vacationer, criminal, etc.) must figure out how to live in such tragic conditions. The book's message seems to be this: be **courageous** and **authentic** even when life is absurd. The final paragraph reveals Camus' pessimism about the human condition.

And, indeed, as he listened to the cries of joy rising from the town, Rieux remembered that such joy is always imperiled. He knew what those jubilant crowds did not know but could have learned from books: that the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good; that it can lie dormant for years and years in furniture and linen chests; that it bides its time in bedrooms, cellars, trunks, and bookshelves; and that perhaps the day would come when, for the bane and the enlightening of men, it would rouse up its rats again and send them forth to die in a happy city.⁵⁸

Existentialism in general and *The Plague* in particular seem to be **strong** on understanding the extent and the depth of the problem (a plague caused by rats) but completely **bankrupt** in pointing to a cure. Life is absurd: deal with it!

- B. There is great agreement among all people everywhere that something is wrong. There is great disagreement on what that something actually is! But until the problem is accurately diagnosed, the solutions proposed will be **inadequate** at best and **toxic** at worst. Throughout history, a long line of would-be "messiahs" have offered their own brand of "salvation" based on the "disease" they felt lay at the root of the tragic human condition.
1. Philosophers (Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, etc.) seem to believe that the problem is **ignorance**. Therefore the solution is **education**. Example: the way to deal with the sexual problems in our culture today is more "sex education" classes in schools.
 2. Krishna (Hinduism) seemed to believe that the root problem is our **bad karma** which is the result of our bad behaviors in a previous life. The goal of salvation is to build up a bank of better karma by our good behavior so that we can eventually **escape** this wheel of endless reincarnations and enter the state of Brahmin.

⁵⁶ I am indebted to G. K. Chesterton for the idea for the title for this lesson, which is taken from a book he wrote in 1910 entitled *What's Wrong with the World?*

⁵⁷ This expression comes from Act I, Scene 4, of *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare. Spoken by Marcellus, the true quotation is "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark." The phrase means that all is not well in the political hierarchy but over time has come to be used to describe a situation when things are not what they ought to be.

⁵⁸ Albert Camus, *The Plague*, 308.

3. Buddha taught that the basic human problem is **suffering** and the reason we suffer is because we have desire. Therefore the solution he offers is to **cease all desire** so that we can enter Nirvana—the state of the snuffed out candle.
4. Marx believed the problem was an **unequal distribution** of the wealth. Therefore his proposed solution was to find ways to redistribute economic resources, thus making possible a utopian paradise on earth.
5. Freud saw the root problem as lying in our **subconscious**; wounds and deficiencies that lie buried from our dysfunctional past producing neurosis, psychosis, etc. Therefore, the salvation he offers is one based in psychological **therapy**.
6. Medical professionals tend to think that the real human problem lies in our lack of good **health**. Therefore, if we can just find better health care, exercise, diet, etc. all will be well.
7. Politicians often see the problem as the lack of government programs. Their promise of salvation typically relates to higher taxes and **bigger government**.

Until we get the **diagnosis** right and figure out what the root problem really is, we will never be able to bring real solutions to our world. Our eternal destinies as well as the future of civilization hang in the balance when we answer the question “What’s wrong with the world?”

II. Paradise Lost: Genesis 3 Is the Biblical Explanation of the Tragic Human Condition.

Temptation & The Fall		Personal and Psychological Consequences		Cosmic and Theological Consequences	
1	6	7	13	14	24

A. Temptation and the fall (vv. 1–6).

1. There’s a snake in the garden!

To understand the origin of the snake one must read the **prequel** that describes the time when there was “war in heaven” and Lucifer was thrown out, falling to earth (see Rev. 12:7-9; Isa. 14:12-15; Ezek. 28:12-17). In Genesis, the author does not want us to get hung up on the origin of the serpent. Rather, he wants to emphasize that the origin of sin and evil is *not* to be found in holy **God**, *not* in the sinless **man and woman**, and *not* in the perfect **environment**.

2. There’s a question in the heart!

Because there is one prohibition (2:16-17) and because there is a snake in the garden, we have all the ingredients necessary for **freedom** and therefore for making a **bad choice**. God did not create Adam and Eve as robots. He wanted a relationship, he wanted their **love**! Therefore, it was essential that they have freedom of choice. Indeed, **free will** is part of the image of God. The will is the only thing we really possess. The will is the only thing God really wants. This is where the battle is won or lost!

There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, in the end, "Thy will be done."⁵⁹

3. There is an intention and an act.

The Bible talks about **sin** and **sins**, the sin nature and the sinful action. Sin is not just a behavior, it is an attitude. Criminals may have dirty hands yet clean hearts. Pharisees may have clean hands yet dirty hearts. In the beginning, Adam and Eve had no sin and thus they committed no sins. But when they allowed their **appetites** to become fixated on forbidden fruit, then sinful behavior was sure to follow. The Bible is a food-driven book. Adam's descendants, however, are born with misplaced appetites and a perversity that is un-natural. The doctrinal term to describe this reality for the human race is **Original Sin**, or sometimes Total Depravity.

4. We are not ignorant of Satan's schemes (II Cor. 2:11).

Though Satan is **crafty**, he lost his strategic advantage of secrecy when he tempted Adam and Eve! Now, we know his tricks and his clever devices. Beware! He is a **liar** and the father of liars (John 8:44).

- First, he tries to make us doubt God's **Word**. *Did God actually say...?* (v. 1). Satan knows if we begin to doubt the veracity, integrity and authority of God's Word, he wins! He has many ways to do this: liberal theology, higher criticism, creative interpretations, historical application, relativistic hermeneutics, etc.
- Then, he tries to make us doubt God's **character**. *God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God...* (v. 5). In other words, God is keeping something from you. Is he really good? Does he really have your best interests in mind? "Come on, Eve. Take control of your destiny. You can't **trust** God to take care of you!" Perhaps the precise moment of The Fall was that second when Eve said in her heart: "I can't trust God. I have to trust in **myself**."
- Finally, Satan tries to make us doubt the **harmful** consequences of sin. *You will not surely die* (v. 5). "No one is going to get hurt. What's the big deal with eating a piece of fruit?" Satan wants us to think we can sin with impunity. Sin came into Eve's heart and into the world when she began to think that which was good was evil... and that which was evil was good (Isa. 5:20). Remember that this tree was called "the knowledge of **good and evil**" (2:9,17).

- B. Personal and psychological consequences of sin (vv. 7-13).

1. **Shame**. *Then the eyes of both were opened and they knew that they were naked* (v. 7). Prior to their sin, they were "naked and unashamed" (2:25) but sin makes them **blush** (cf. Jer. 6:15). They try to deal with their shame by sewing **fig leaves**. But fig leaves are inadequate to cover what needs to be covered!
2. **Guilt** (vv. 8-10). The psychological consequence for breaking God's law is a guilty conscience. They deal with their guilt by **hiding** behind trees. This was a primitive psychological mechanism that today might be called avoidance or **denial**.

⁵⁹ C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, 72.

3. **Fear** (vv. 8-10). ...*I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid... and I hid* (vv. 8-10). Prior to this, Adam and Eve had enjoyed God's presence and the expanse of the garden. Now they are terrified. He had behaved like a **traitor**, usurping the place of God. How would God respond?
 4. **Blame**. When God asked the guilty humans what they had done, he was giving them a chance to confess, repent and be forgiven (vv. 9-13). They are free moral agents, therefore God is going to hold them responsible! Instead, Adam and Eve played the *blame game*, they chose to be **victims** rather than take responsibility for their choices. Adam blamed his sin on his wife and Eve blamed her sin on the snake! More subtly, they are both blaming **God** who allowed the snake to be in the garden in the first place! "It's not my fault. Don't blame me. I'm not responsible." When we pass the buck and refuse to take responsibility, we seal our fate and remain locked in sin **forever!**
- C. Cosmic and theological consequences (vv. 14-24).
1. For the serpent (vv. 14-15). He is **cursed** and ultimately doomed.
 2. For the woman and the man (v. 16-19). The wages of sin is **death** (Rom. 6:23; Gen. 2:17). Further, the woman will bear children in pain and have difficulty relating to her husband. The man will struggle and toil to till the ground and earn a living.
 3. For God (vv. 20-24).
 - He will send the **serpent-crusher** (v. 15).
 - He covers their nakedness with **animal skins**, not fig leaves (vv. 20-21).
 - He **expels** them from Eden (vv. 22-24). They will be forever homesick, wandering in spiritual exile "east of Eden" (4:16).
 4. Ever since Genesis 3, everyone is born in the image of **Adam** (Gen. 5:1-3). Though the image of God remains, it is seriously marred. We are each now born with a sin nature that creates in all of us a "bent to sinning." (Gen. 6:5; Jer. 17:9; Psalm 51:5; Rom. 3:23; etc.).

III. So, What's Wrong with the World?

- A. Who will deliver me from this dwelling-in-me sin (Rom. 7:17)?

When Yehiel Dinur (a prisoner from Auschwitz) met Adolf Eichmann (one of the master minds of Hitler's Final Solution) in 1961 at Eichmann's trial, he collapsed. When asked to explain his reaction, Dinur responded that Eichmann didn't look like the mass murderer and evil monster he had anticipated. He looked like a grandfather, the neighbor next door who works in his garden. "Eichmann is in all of us," Dinur soberly concluded.

In 1908, *The London Times* newspaper had a contest, inviting readers to write an essay on the question "What's Wrong with the World?" They promised to publish the essay they felt was the most creative and insightful. Though no one really remembers now who actually won the contest, many remember the "essay" turned in by G. K. Chesterton. It was short and to the point.

*Dear Sirs,
I am.
Sincerely yours,
G. K. Chesterton*

- B. Genesis 3 underscores this simple yet sobering reality: I am the problem; I am what's wrong with the world. It helps me to understand three very important questions:
- Why **I am** so messed up. The problem is not just my lack of education, my poor health, my psychological baggage, my economic circumstances, etc. The problem is that I am in rebellion against God!
 - Why **you are** so messed up (my wife, my children, my pastor, my friends, my president, my enemies, my boss, my professors, etc.). Genesis 3 actually helps me to cut you some slack and have more patience. You are as messed up as I am... maybe more!
 - Why all **creation** is so messed up (work is hard, babies are painful, tsunamis happen, cancer, etc.). Indeed, the whole creation is "*groaning in pains of childbirth*" (Rom. 8:18-25).
- C. Genesis 3 tells me at least seven things that I need to always remember about the human condition and what's wrong with the world:
1. **Sin** is the name of the root cause that lies behind every human malady. Therefore, the hope of the world is going to require a work of salvation that is much greater than politics, economics, medicine, the military, education, psychological therapy, etc. Because the problem is essentially **spiritual**, the solution must be as well.
 2. Sin occurs when we disobey God's plan for our lives and insist on "my will be done." **Self-will** is at the root of what sin really is.
 3. Sin has many tragic consequences: fear, guilt complexes, shame, blame, marital conflict, toil in work, labor in child birth, death, etc. Though we need to address these symptoms and seek to **alleviate** the consequences of sin, we must devote our primary energies to find a **cure** for the root cause. *Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of the daughter of my people not been restored?* (Jer. 8:22). (cf. Mk. 2:17).
 4. This chapter helps me to understand that sin is much **deeper** than my behaviors (what I do). It first resides in my **heart** (who I am). Therefore, the gravity of a person's sin must never be measured by outward behaviors alone! The Gospel is not merely behavior modification. The Gospel promises to cover my sins (the skin of animals) and ultimately crush the serpent. But it also promises a deeper work; that of inner **cleansing** of the very nature of sin and heart purity.

*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.
If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to **forgive** us our sins and to **cleanse** us from all unrighteousness (I John 1:8-9).*
 5. Sin makes us **blind** to sin! Therefore, when we try to deal with "the problem" in our human strength, the best we can do is come up with "fig leaf" solutions: they simply don't work.
 - We **deny** our sin.
 - We **rationalize** our sin and make excuses.
 - We **justify** our sin.
 - We **blame** our sin on others.
 - We try to **cover** our sin.

6. Only **God** can deal with sin! He wants to cover what needs to be covered. But animal skins require the shedding of **blood**. And he also wants to **heal** and **restore** what needs to be healed and restored (that requires inner work of his sanctifying Spirit). This chapter gives us the first announcement of the promised Messiah: the serpent-crusher (v. 15). Jesus came to save us **from** our sins; not to leave us in them (Matt. 1:21). He came to **destroy** the works of the devil (I John 3:8).
7. The only way to find victory (covering for our sins and healing from our sin) is to **confess** our sins and our sin! (Psalm 32:1-5; I John 1:9). Perhaps these words, written by Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556) and included in *The Book of Common Prayer* can help us to do just that!

Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Maker of all things, Judge of all; we acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, which we, from time to time most grievously have committed by thought, word and deed against Thy Divine Majesty, provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against us. We do earnestly repent and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings; the remembrance of them is grievous upon us; the burden of them is intolerable. Have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us most merciful Father; for Thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake. Forgive us all that is past; and grant that we may ever serve and please Thee in newness of life, to the honour and glory of Thy name; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

TABLE TALK

1. Why is it so important to be clear about how we diagnose “what’s wrong” with the world?
2. Describe the difference between a disease’s cause and its symptoms (consequences). How does this impact the practice of medicine? What spiritual analogy can we draw?
3. Did this chapter comfort you or trouble you? Explain.
4. Have you ever doubted God’s Word? What were the spiritual results of such doubt?
5. Which reaction to sin best describes your own “natural” response when sin is exposed in your life: Guilt? Fear? Shame? Or blame?
6. Describe a situation you have experienced when someone refused to confess sin and rather tried to deflect it (rationalize, deny, blame others, etc.). How could this situation have been different if the person had only confessed?
7. What have you learned today about confession?



Reason WHY

The Bible Offers Honest Answers to Honest Questions
By Stan Key

CHAPTER 7. WHAT ABOUT OTHER RELIGIONS?

I. A Global Village.

When I was growing up (South Georgia), the greatest religious difference among people tended to be whether one was Methodist or Baptist. How the world has changed! Today, we live in a multi-cultural world where every citizen of planet earth must come to grips with the reality of other world views. What are we to think of other religions?

- A. Some want to **ban** religion. All religions are equally false. This view is succinctly stated by physicist-philosopher Victor J. Stenger: “Science flies men to the moon, religion flies men into buildings.” Karl Marx also espoused such a view when he taught that religion is “the **opium** of the people.” Any religious belief and all religious practices are harmful, so let’s just do away with religion.⁶⁰
- B. Some want to **privatize** religion. Sure, everyone should be free to believe anything they want to. Just keep it to yourself! As long as you keep your religion inside your churches and temples it is fine. Just don’t bring it out into the public square.
- C. Some want to **equalize** religion. You have your opinion; I have mine. Let’s agree that both opinions are equally valid. Besides, deep down all religions are essentially the same, right? They only differ in outward practices. “I think different religions are different doors to the same house” (Steve Jobs). But to say that all religions are equally **tolerated** doesn’t mean that they are all equally **true**.
- D. Some want to **exterminate** other religious options so that their religion triumphs. These people reason that because my belief is true, if you don’t accept my belief, you have no right to exist.

II. How to Explain Other Religions?

Although everyone must wrestle with this question, for Christians it is especially troubling. The challenge comes on numerous levels:

- A. The **theological** challenge. What is the origin of other religions? How do we account for the fact that our world offers multiple ways to know Ultimate Reality? Where do these other religions come from?
 1. Perhaps they come from **demons**. Satan is able to disguise himself as an angel of light (II Cor. 11:14). And some religions make no secret of their desire to connect with occult forces and powers of darkness (I Cor. 10:20).
 2. Perhaps other religions are simply **man’s search for God**, human attempts to find meaning and purpose in some transcendent Ultimate Reality. This takes us to what is perhaps the crucial distinction between Christianity and virtually every other religion of the world.

Christianity is not a system of man’s search for God but a story of God’s search for man... Throughout the Bible, man-made religion fails. There is no human way up the mountain, only a divine way down... If we made

⁶⁰ Those who want to ban religion and replace it with secular philosophy should pause to reflect on the evils that atheism has brought. Consider Soviet Russia, Communist China, the Khmer Rouge, and Nazi Germany. Perhaps the most intolerant and violent movements of recent history have been those that believed religion should be eradicated because it causes intolerance and violence!

the roads (up the mountain), it would indeed be arrogant to claim that any one road is the only valid one.... But if God made the road, we must find out whether he made many or one. If he made only one, then... it is humility, not arrogance, to accept this one road from God, and it is arrogance, not humility, to insist that our man-made roads are as good as God's God-made one.⁶¹

3. Some have even suggested that just as the **one true God** inspired Judaism and Christianity, he may have also inspired other religions as well, at least to some extent. Jesus did speak of having “other sheep” (John 10:16).⁶² Why couldn't God speak through other “prophets” such as Mohammed, Confucius, Buddha, etc. Must we conclude that only Christianity teaches the truth? Surely there must be elements of truth in other religions as well.
- B. The **social** challenge. In an age of tolerance, relativism and multi-culturalism, how should we live together? Does toleration of other religions mean that I somehow am condoning them? Does my belief in freedom of religion mean that other religions are therefore equally valid?
- C. The **evangelistic** challenge. But if I soften my rhetoric and create space for others to practice their religion, showing them respect and love, am I perhaps **compromising** my mission as a disciple of Jesus Christ to preach the Gospel to all nations?

III. What the Bible Says about Other Religions.

- A. Other religions are a **test**. Just as God placed the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden, so he allows the presence of other spiritual options to confront us with a **choice**. Because no one is “born a Christian” we must all make a decision about our ultimate allegiance. *For the Lord your God is testing you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul* (Deut. 13:1-3).
- B. Other gods are **nothings**. Sometimes the Bible mocks those who practice other religions, pointing out the non-reality and vanity of such worship. You are praying to someone who isn't there! (Psalm 115:4-8; Isa. 44:16-17; Acts 14:15; I Cor. 8:4-7).
- C. Other gods are **demons**. But on other occasions, the Bible warns us of the Satanic power that lurks behind false religion (I Cor. 10:14-20).
- D. Repeatedly, God tells his people not to worship other gods; tear down their altars and crush their images. This is not a suggestion but a **command** (Ex. 20:3; Deut. 12:2-4; II Kings 11:18). Why? Because we become like what we worship (Psalm 115:4-8).
- E. Other gods simply **cannot save**. They are impotent. They promise what they can never deliver. Don't be deceived (I Cor. 6:9-11; Rev. 21:8).
- F. Beware lest pagan religious practices infiltrate the worship of the true God (Ex. 32:3-4; Amos 5:21-24; Matt. 15:8-9). This is called **syncretism**. Today, we might call contemporary worship, being seeker friendly or having worship that is culturally appropriate.

⁶¹ Peter Kreeft, *Fundamentals of the Faith*, 76-77.

⁶² There is no need for fanciful interpretations for the “other sheep” as if Jesus were legitimizing other religions or speaking of beings from other planets. Surely, he is simply talking about the Gentiles. He intends to open the door for their entrance into his kingdom as well as the Jews.

- G. Sometimes other religions contain **bridges** that can be used to point worshippers in the right direction.
- *Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious.... What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you (Acts 17:22-23).*
 - Numerous verses in the Koran can point Muslims to Jesus.
 - Don Richardson gives many examples of such **redemptive analogies** in his books *Peace Child* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1974) and *Eternity in their Hearts* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1981).
- H. But most often in the Bible, “religion” is actually a **hindrance** to man’s relationship with God. Religion is perhaps man’s ultimate expression of pride and rebellion! It is not a way to find God but rather a way to **avoid** him (Rom. 1:18–25). The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not a religion but a relationship. It is not a revelation *from* God but a revelation *of* God.

IV. The Greatest Objection to Christianity.

Jesus said: *I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me* (John 14:6).⁶³ Perhaps more than anything else Jesus ever said, these words provoke a vigorous and passionate **rejection** of Jesus and the Gospel.

- A. The objection typically follows one or more of the following lines of reasoning:
1. That’s so **intolerant**. Who does Jesus think he is? Does he think that he has the right to dictate who gets in the Kingdom of God and who doesn’t?
 2. That’s so **arrogant**. Jesus must be some kind of a megalomaniac; an elitist, a triumphalist, an imperialist, a chauvinistic bigot.
 3. That’s so **ignorant**. Jesus apparently has never been to school or travelled far from home. Doesn’t he realize how many wonderful people are atheists, Buddhists and practitioners of vegetarianism and yoga?
- B. The **scandal** of the Gospel. Struggles with Jesus’ claims did not begin in the 20th or 21st century. The New Testament makes clear that from the very first, many were scandalized by Jesus. The Greek word *scandalizo* describes an action that is offensive and scandalous, one that potentially causes someone to **stumble** and fall.
- *Blessed is the one who is not offended by me (Matt. 11:6).*
 - *And coming to his hometown he taught them in their synagogue.... And they took offense at him (Matt. 13:54-57).*
 - *Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of me this night” (Matt. 26:31).*
 - *For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” They stumble because they disobey the word... (I Pet. 2:6-8).*

The Gospel could therefore be boiled down to this simple question: Is Jesus for you a **stumbling stone** or your **cornerstone** ?

⁶³ If Jesus had only said, “I am a way, a truth and a life; one of the ways to the Father is through me,” the offense of the Gospel immediately would be removed.

- C. What is about Jesus that is so offensive and so scandalous? **Why** do so many stumble and fall? Why is he so politically incorrect?
1. The scandal of his **love**. To put it bluntly: Jesus loved all the wrong people! He befriended tax collectors, prostitutes, Samaritans and lepers. He was a “friend of sinners” (Luke 7:34). Scandalous!
 2. The scandal of his **death**. When Jesus first announced that he would die on a cross, Peter was scandalized. “Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you” (Matt. 16:22). A crucified Messiah? God on a cross? Paul knew that when he preached the cross, he was preaching a **stumbling block** (I Cor. 1:22-23; Gal. 5:11).
 3. But it was especially the scandal of his outrageous **claims** that provoked many to stumble and fall away. He claimed to be:
 - The one the scriptures had **prophesied** and spoken about (John 5:39).
 - The one who would **judge** the world (John 5:25-27).
 - Able to give eternal life (John 3:14-15; 6:33-35; 10:10; 11:25-26).
 - Able to **forgive sins** (Mark 2:3-7).
 - Offer real food: his body and blood (John 6:53-55, 60-61, 66).
 - **Equal** with God (John 5:18; 10:30-33; Mark 14:61-64).
 - Existing before **Abraham** (John 8:53-59).
 - Worthy of **worship** (Matt. 2:11; 14:32-33; John 9:35-38).
 - The **only** way to know and experience God (John 14:6-9).

There is simply nothing comparable to these claims anywhere else in human history! C. S. Lewis states the issue clearly:

If you had gone to Buddha and asked him, “Are you the son of Bramah?” he would have said, “My son, you are still in the vale of illusion.” If you had gone to Socrates and asked, “Are you Zeus?” he would have laughed at you. If you had gone to Mohammed and asked, “Are you Allah?” he would first have rent his clothes and then cut your head off. If you had asked Confucius, “Are you Heaven?”, I think he would have probably replied, “Remarks which are not in accordance with nature are in bad taste.” The idea of a great moral teacher saying what Christ said is out of the question. In my opinion, the only person who can say that sort of thing is either God or a complete lunatic suffering from that form of delusion which undermines the whole mind of man.... We may note in passing that He was never regarded as a mere moral teacher. He did not produce that effect on any of the people who actually met Him. He produced mainly three effects – hatred – terror – adoration. There was no trace of people expressing mild approval.⁶⁴

- D. The scandal of Jesus quickly spread to his **followers**. Just as there was something offensive about Jesus, so it is true of his disciples.

If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.... If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you... But all these things they will

⁶⁴ God in the Dock, 157-158.

*do to you on account of **my name**, because they do not know him who sent me (John 15:18-21).*

Note it well: Christians are offensive to the world not so much because of their worldview, their morality or their religious practices. The scandal lies in the way Christians **name the Name**. When Peter denied three times any association with that Name, all was lost. But after Pentecost, the word that occurs over and over in Peter's preaching is the Name: **Jesus**. In fact, it was the first word of his first sermon. "*Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth...*" (Acts 2:22. See also 2:23, 32, 36, 38; 3:6, 13, 16, 20; etc. See especially Acts 4).

*And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what **name** did you do this?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the **name** of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is **no other name** under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*

*Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with **Jesus**. But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, saying, "What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name." So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the **name** of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:7-20).*

Disciples of Christ are hated because they dare to name the Name. This is what makes them so offensive. "*Do not be **surprised**, brothers that the world hates you*" (I John 3:13).

If you confess at a fashionable cocktail party that you are plotting to overthrow the government, or that you are a PLO terrorist or a KGB spy, or that you molest porcupines or bite bats' heads off, you will soon attract a buzzing, fascinated, sympathetic circle of listeners. But if you confess that you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, you will find yourself suddenly alone, with a distinct chill in the air.⁶⁵

V. Developing a Christian Attitude toward Other Religions.

- A. We need to have certainty without **arrogance**. One can be sure of something without being a bigot or having a condescending attitude. The Christian realizes that all is of grace. An "arrogant Christian" is therefore an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms. *What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do*

⁶⁵ Peter Kreeft, *Fundamentals of the Faith*, 74.

you boast...? (I Cor. 4:7). “Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread” (D. T. Niles). No, I don’t have all the answers... but I know someone who does!

- B. We need to show tolerance without **compromise**. To tolerate something is not equivalent to approving it or agreeing with it. God obviously “tolerates” all manner of folly and immoral behavior on the earth. We should imitate his example. Jesus knocks on doors. He never forces his way into anyone’s life.
- C. Above all we must show respect and **love**. I can love my neighbor and respect his opinions even when I believe he is wrong. In fact, I hope he will do the same for me! I can dialogue with him and seek to better understand his point of view. I can even find elements in his worldview that are commendable and worthy of emulation. I can love my neighbor even if he never changes!

TABLE TALK

1. What is the one primary truth you learned today that has the potential to shape the way you think and change the way you live?
2. Has it been easy for you to accept the fact that Jesus is “the (only) way”? Describe your journey in coming to this belief.
3. Give some examples from your own experience of when you discovered how offensive the Gospel of Jesus Christ can be in a world like ours.
4. Do you find it difficult to be certain of something and humble at the same time? Talk about this.
5. Describe an occasion when you tried to witness to someone from another religion. What happened? What did you learn?
6. Peter wimped out and denied his Lord three times. Can you identify with Peter in how difficult it sometimes is to name the Name of Jesus in public?



Reason WHY

The Bible Offers Honest Answers to Honest Questions
By Stan Key

CHAPTER 8. WHY PAIN?

I. Life's most difficult question.

A. Though this is a universal question, it is especially difficult for Christians who have two fundamental convictions: 1) God is **all good**. 2) God is **all powerful**. So when something bad happens, Christians find themselves on the horns of a dilemma.

- God *could* do something if only he *would* (he is powerful but not good).
- Or God *would* do something if only he *could* (he is good but not powerful).

This dilemma has led numbers of people into either **despair** or **unbelief**. Some have called the problem of pain and suffering the rock of atheism.

B. God's Problem?

Bart D. Ehrman grew up in an evangelical church and professed a born-again experience. He went to Moody Bible Institute, Wheaton College and obtained a Ph.D. in New Testament studies from Princeton Theological Seminary. Then he rejected all that he had been taught and became an agnostic! Why? It wasn't his questions about the veracity of Scripture that led him to unbelief but the problem of **suffering**.

*I could no longer reconcile the claims of faith with the facts of life. In particular, I could no longer explain how there can be a good and all-powerful God actively involved with this world, given the state of things. For many people who inhabit this planet, life is a cesspool of misery and suffering. I came to a point where I simply could not believe that there is a good and kindly disposed Ruler who is in charge of it. The problem of suffering became for me the problem of **faith**.⁶⁶*

C. But the problem of suffering is also a stumbling stone for many Christians. How does pain fit into the **abundant life** that Jesus came to offer (John 10:10)?

1. The so-called "**Prosperity** gospel" tends to view pain and suffering as an indication either of divine displeasure or a lack of faith.
2. The Four Spiritual Laws begin by stating that "God loves you and has a **wonderful** plan for your life."

II. Read your Bible!!!

A. Rather than evading the question, the Bible **highlights** it.

1. When Abram leaves Ur and by faith arrives in the land God had promised to give him (Canaan), he discovers **famine** in the land (Gen. 12:10).
2. Three days after the miracle of deliverance at the Red Sea, God led his people to Mara: the **bitter** place (Exodus 15:22–27).
3. Coming down the mountain where Jesus had been gloriously transfigured, the disciples immediately encounter a **demon possessed** boy (Mark 9:2–29).
4. Immediately after his baptism, Jesus was "**led by the Spirit** into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (Matthew 4:1).

⁶⁶ Bart D. Ehrman. *God's Problem*, n.p.

5. Paul often spoke of the place of suffering in the Christian life. For example: *That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the **fellowship** of his sufferings, being **conformed** to His death* (Philippians 3:10–11 NKJV).
- B. One person who understood the place of suffering in the life of a Christian was John Bunyan. Written from a prison cell (!), Bunyan's *Pilgrim Progress*⁶⁷ highlights the place of pain in the journey of faith by placing the Hill of **Difficulty** immediately after the cross. The abruptness with which Christian moves from the joy of salvation to the pain of climbing a steep mountain is startling. The point Bunyan is making is that pilgrims should **expect** suffering and pain in their journey. At the foot of the Hill of Difficulty Christian encountered two things:
- *A spring of water.* The refreshing water gave **strength** and **courage** to climb the steep mountain before him.
 - *An intersection.* A **choice** was demanded. Two other paths veered off the narrow road leading up the mountain: one to the right and the other to the left. Both paths seemed to lead in the right direction but actually led to destruction.

Christian also encountered five people at the foot of this mountain who refused to climb the steep path. Three of them were asleep: 1) **Simple**. "I see no danger," he said. He represents the willfully ignorant. 2) **Sloth**. "Yet a little more sleep," he said. He represents the lazy. 3) **Presumption**. "Every fat (tub?) must stand upon his own bottom," he said. He represents the self-reliant and independent. Two other "pilgrims" had not come through the Narrow Gate but had climbed over a wall to get onto the path. They were looking for short-cuts to the Celestial City. They each chose one of the side paths. Their names were 4) **Formalist** (those who have a form of religion and not the power) and 5) **Hypocrisy** (those who only pretend to be Christian, concerned with their image).

Christian, refused to talk further with these five "pilgrims," drank deeply from the spring of water, and began to climb the mountain. As he walked, he began to sing:

*This Hill, though high, I covet to ascend,
The difficulty will not me offend,
For I perceive the way to life lies here;
Come, pluck up, heart; let's neither faint nor fear:
Better, though difficult, the way to go,
Than wrong, though easy, where the end is woe.⁶⁸*

III. The most famous sufferer in history: Job. Mainly chapters 1–2.

- A. The story emphasizes the **godliness** of Job's character (1:1–5; cf. 1:8; 2:3).
1. Blameless. Not **faultless**... he loved God with a whole heart.
 2. Upright. Moral **integrity**.
 3. Fears God. A healthy **relationship** with God based on submission and respect.
 4. Turns away from evil. A lifetime of making right **choices**.

Lesson #1. Readers of this ancient book learn immediately that no one on earth was more righteous than Job... and no one on earth suffered more intensely. The first lesson about suffering we learn from Job is that moral integrity and a right relationship with God do not make us **immune** from pain and suffering.

⁶⁷ *Pilgrim's Progress*, 74–96.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 74.

B. The story emphasizes the **reason** for Job's pain (1:6–12; 2:1–8).

The great irony is that the readers know a piece of information that is never revealed to the main character! We know something that remains a **mystery** to Job. God and Satan have been talking about Job and made a deal. Satan believes that Job serves God only because of his blessings.⁶⁹ So God gives Satan **permission** to afflict Job with adversity to prove that Job's faith is genuine. The point of this dialogue is *not* that God and Satan treat human souls like pawns in some cosmic chess game. No! The point rather is that the reason for suffering is **withheld** from the one who suffers. Job has to suffer without ever understanding why!

Lesson #2. The book of Job teaches us that suffering is not a problem to be **solved** but a mystery to be **embraced**. Can we trust God when he refuses to explain *why* such terrible things are happening? That question summarizes the message of the book. You may not like an "answer" like that but God at least had the decency to take his own medicine. Jesus died screaming, "My God, why...?" And heaven was **silent**. Jesus solved the problem of suffering by suffering. Jesus doesn't explain the answer to the mystery of suffering. He *is* the answer!

C. The story emphasizes the **depth** of Job's suffering (1:13–22).

- In a single day, Job lost all of his **wealth** (500 yoke of oxen, 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels and very many servants) and all of his **children** (7 sons and 3 daughters).
- Job lost his **health** (2:7–8). He had "loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head." His physical problems included panic attacks (6:4), insomnia (7:4), worms (7:5), nightmares (7:14), depression (7:16), failing eye sight (16:16), bad odors (19:17), loss of weight (19:20), and fever (30:30).
- His **nagging** wife (2:9). "It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife" (Prov. 21:9). Job had a wife like that!
- His **well-meaning** friends (2:11ff.). Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar (aka Moe, Larry, and Curly) came to comfort Job but their words of sympathy (34 chapters worth!) only added to his misery.

Lesson #3. Piece by piece, Job's **support system** was dismantled (possessions, family, spouse, theological counsel, etc.) until the only thing he had left to rely on was **God**. The story of Job dramatically poses the question: is God enough?

D. The story emphasizes the **ineptness** of Job's counselors (2:9–13).

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar held a prosperity type of theology that believed if someone lived a righteous life, God would bless them with health, wealth and happiness. Yet, this theology did not match Job's situation at all! These "comforters" were **incompetent**. These "counselors" were guilty of spiritual **malpractice**. The end result of this type of counseling is twofold:

1. Job is not helped or comforted at all. In fact, these guys make him feel **worse!** They are "worthless physicians" (13:4) and "miserable comforters" speaking "windy words" (16:2–3). In other words, they were wind bags! Perhaps the only time his friends helped him was when they sat on the ground with him for seven days and "no one **spoke a word**" (2:13).
2. God gets really **angry** at ministers who profess to offer spiritual comfort but actually speak what is not true and thereby make a bad situation worse.

⁶⁹ Apparently Satan believes the "prosperity theology," too!

*...the Lord said Eliphaz the Termanite: “My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right... Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves. And my servant Job shall **pray for you**... (42:7–8).*

Lesson #4. When it comes to finding comfort in the midst of suffering, this book offers a double message:

- For the one who suffers: be very careful who you **listen to** for counsel.
- For the one offering counsel: get it right or **shut up!**

E. The story emphasizes Job’s **response** to his tragic situation.

Humans respond to suffering in a wide variety of ways: depression, anger, denial, etc. But Job’s response is very instructive:

1. **Worship** (1:21–22). *“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord **gave**, and the Lord has **taken away**; blessed be the name of the Lord.”* God has not promised a pain-free existence. But he has given us a Gospel that makes it possible to trust him even when all hell is breaking loose!
2. **Trust**. *Though he **slay me**, I will hope [trust] in him (13:15). For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall **see God**, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another... (19:25–27).*
3. Yet, Job has lots of **questions** (34 chapters worth!). Job needed some space and time to “work it out.” At times his words are good... and at times his words are questionable. But for 34 chapters, God let him babble on.

Lesson #5. When human intellect cannot comprehend the tragedy, trust in his love and goodness anyway! *Be **still**, and **know** that I am God (Psalm 46:10).*

F. The story emphasizes God’s **response** to Job’s response. (chapters 38–41).

For 37 chapters, God said nothing as Job and his friends argued and debated about why bad things happen to good people. But finally God had enough.

*Then the Lord answered Job out of the **whirlwind** and said: “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action like a man; I will **question** you, and you make it known to me. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! (38:1–5a)*

Weary of the petty questions of men seeking to understand life’s deepest mystery, God has a few questions for Job (four chapters of them!). See chapters 38–41.

Lesson #6. When it comes to our efforts to come to grips with our difficult circumstances and to understand why things happen as they do, God is very, very **patient** and will listen lovingly as we seek to comprehend our circumstances (this book is 42 chapters in length!). But be warned: there is a **limit** to how much God will listen to our belly aching. The day will come when the conversation is over and he will arise to question us!

G. The conclusion of the matter (chapter 42).

1. Finally Job is **silent**. He **repents** and reaffirms his submissive trust in God.

Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further (40:4–5).

“I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted... I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.... I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes (42:1–6).

2. God is angry at Job’s counselors and **rebukes** them because they had “not spoken what is right.” But their restoration to God comes only when Job prays for them (42:7–9).
3. *And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job, when he had **prayed** for his **friends**... (42:10).*
4. *And the Lord blessed the latter days of Job **more** than his beginning... (42:12).*

Lesson #7. When we (finally) **respond rightly** to suffering, we will be more richly blessed after the fact than before!

IV. Good Greif!

- A. Perhaps we can summarize what the Bible has to say about our response to suffering in these short exhortations:

1. **Expect** it. *...Do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you (I Peter 4:12).*
2. **Embrace** it. Rather than constantly asking God *Why?* try asking *For what purpose?* Lord, what are you trying to teach me through this?
3. **Learn** from it. *For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it (Heb. 12:11).*
4. **Thank God** for it. *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (James 1:2–4).*
5. **Use** it. *“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him” (John 9:1–3).*
6. **Glory** in it! *...we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame... (Romans 5:3–5).*

- B. The monument to the **boll weevil** in Enterprise, Alabama.

TABLE TALK

1. When people put their faith in a “prosperity” type of Gospel, what happens when they find themselves in the midst of unexplainable suffering and pain?
2. Describe a time in your life when you experienced great pain and suffering. What lessons did you learn?
3. When you were hurting, did “Job’s comforters” ever appear at your door to offer help?
4. As you think about your efforts to console others going through a crisis, have you ever been a “Job’s comforter” to someone else?
5. Many seem to believe that the presence of pain indicates the absence of God. Is this true?
6. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you one way in which he wants you to personally apply the lesson today. Would you share that with your group and ask them to pray for you?

How Firm a Foundation

John Rippon

*How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!
What more can He say than to you He hath said,
You, who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?*

*In every condition, in sickness, in health;
In poverty’s vale, or abounding in wealth;
At home and abroad, on the land, on the sea,
As thy days may demand, shall thy strength ever be.*

*Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed,
For I am thy God and will still give thee aid;
I’ll strengthen and help thee, and cause thee to stand
Upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand.*

*When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of woe shall not thee overflow;
For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless,
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.*

*When through fiery trials thy pathways shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply;
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.*

*Even down to old age all My people shall prove
My sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love;
And when hoary hairs shall their temples adorn,
Like lambs they shall still in My bosom be borne.*

*The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I’ll never, no never, no never forsake.*

CHAPTER 9. WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

I. Back to Basics.

- A. Vince Lombardi, the legendary coach of the Green Bay Packers, would gather all his players at the beginning of every season and give them a speech. His lecture always began with five simple words: “Gentlemen, this is a **football**.” He then went on to talk about the fundamentals of the game: a three-point stance, 10 yards make a 1st down, etc. The point of his speech was obvious: in playing the game it is easy to forget the **ABCs** of what football is all about.
- B. “What is a Christian?” The question seems almost insulting. The answer is so **obvious!** Right? Think again. Suggested answers to this question cover a wide range of possibilities:
1. For those outside the church.
 - a. Someone born in a “Christian” **family or nation**.
 - b. Someone who is **religious**.
 - c. Someone who is **nice**.
 - d. Someone who is **not nice**.⁷⁰
 - e. Someone who votes **Republican**.
 2. For those inside the church.
 - a. Someone who has had **an experience**.
 - b. Someone who has said **the sinner’s prayer**.
 - c. Someone who has been **baptized**.
 - d. Someone who has been told by someone else “You are a Christian.”
 - e. Someone who reads the Bible, prays and **goes to church**.

We must flatly say that one of the greatest contemporary **barriers** to meaningful spiritual formation in Christlikeness is overconfidence in the spiritual efficacy of regular church services, of whatever kind they may be.⁷¹

- C. Answering the Question.
1. Most people both outside and inside the church would agree that a Christian is someone who believes **the Gospel**. But this raises yet another basic and fundamental question: *What is the Gospel?*
Imagine yourself in an elevator, travelling from the ground floor to the 15th floor. A stranger asks you, “Could you please explain to me what the Gospel is? I only have 45 seconds.” How would you respond?

⁷⁰ The George Barna Group reports that in 1996, 85 percent of Americans who had no religious commitment viewed Christianity favorably. Just 13 years later, in 2009 only 16 percent of young “outsiders” had a favorable impression of Christianity and just 3 percent had a good impression of evangelicals (Philip Yancey. *Vanishing Grace*, 15).

⁷¹ Dallas Willard. *Renovation of the Heart*, 249–250.

2. There are many places we might conceivably turn to answer such questions: our favorite preachers and authors, theologians, Church history, spiritual experience, etc. But one passage in the New Testament seems to be of particular relevance: Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost. This was the **first time** the Gospel was preached and here we see all the elements of basic Christianity. "Gentlemen, this is the Gospel." As we look at this passage we find the answers to three basic questions:
 - *What is a Christian?*
 - *What is the Gospel?*
 - *How do I become a Christian?*

II. Acts 2:22–42. The Prototypical Gospel Sermon.

After an introduction (2:14–21) in which Peter explains how the signs and wonders of that first Pentecost (mighty wind, tongues of flame, speaking unknown languages) are the fulfillment of prophecy, his real sermon begins in verse 22.

The Sermon	The Response to the Sermon
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus' life (22). • Jesus' death (23). • Jesus' resurrection (24–32). • Jesus' ascension (33–35). • Conclusion: God has made him Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified (36). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What shall we do (37)? • Repent, be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit (38). • They devoted themselves to: apostolic teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer (42).
22 36	37 47

Using Peter's sermon, let's answer our three questions: *What is a Christian? What is the Gospel?* and *How do I become a Christian?*

III. What Is a Christian?

- A. Notice Peter's vocabulary.

How often does the word "Christian" occur in this sermon? Though there were 3,000 conversions that day, the term "Christian" was completely absent. This is noteworthy because "Christian" tends to be our **favorite** term for describing Christ's followers today. Perhaps it would help the current situation where the church is anemic and weak if we would simply get back to basics and use the preferred vocabulary of the early church.

- B. The New Testament uses the term "Christian" only three times (Acts 11:26; 26:28; I Peter 4:16). The more prominent terms are:

1. **Believers** (2:44; etc.). About 13 times in Acts.
2. Followers of **the Way** (9:2; etc.). About 6 times in Acts.
3. **Disciples** (6:1; etc.). About 30 times in Acts.

- C. The dominant term "disciple" describes someone who is a learner, an **apprentice**; someone who is in a **mentor** relationship. To be a disciple of Jesus means that we want to be with him, do what he does and ultimately become **like him** in every way. Many problems about who *is* a Christian and who is *not* could be immediately cleared up if we simply got back to this basic Biblical vocabulary.

First of all, we should note that being a disciple, or apprentice, of Jesus is a quite definite and obvious kind of thing. To make a mystery of it is to misunderstand it. There is no good reason why people should ever be in doubt as to whether

*they themselves are his students or not. And the evidence will always be quite clear as to whether any other individual is his student... Now this may seem very startling, even shocking, to many in our religious culture, where there is a long tradition of doubting, or possibly even of being unable to tell, whether or not one is a Christian.... It is almost universally conceded today that you can be a Christian without being a **disciple**... The very term Christian was explicitly introduced in the New Testament—where, by the way, it is used only three times—to apply to disciples when they could no longer be called Jews, because many kinds of gentiles were now part of them.⁷²*

*...Nondiscipleship is the **elephant** in the church. It is not the much discussed moral failures, financial abuses, or the amazing general similarity between Christians and non-Christians. These are only effects of the underlying problem.... It is now understood to be a part of the “good news” that one does not have to be a life student of Jesus in order to be a Christian and receive forgiveness of sins. This gives a precise meaning to the phrase “cheap grace,” though it would be better described as “costly faithlessness.”⁷³*

IV. What Is the Gospel?

Look again at how you answered this question in the “elevator conversation” exercise above. Perhaps your answer mentioned heaven, getting “saved,” the “sinner’s prayer,” or the fact that God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. Notice how such responses are completely absent from Peter’s sermon. Peter’s presentation of the Good News is essentially a presentation of **Jesus** (the first word of his sermon! v. 22).

- A. The Gospel is *not* ethics, a worldview, a religion, or a program for **self-improvement**. It is *not* **fire insurance** from hell and a free ticket to heaven. It is *not* a message about health, wealth and happiness. Though these types of things may be consequences of the Gospel message once it has been received, they are *not* the Gospel itself. Peter mentions none of these things in the prototypical Gospel sermon of the New Testament. The Gospel is the presentation of a **Person**!

John Wesley, George Whitefield, and other great preachers would describe their evangelistic efforts in these words, “I offered them Christ.” The true witness will not offer his/her **opinions** about Christ—nor will he focus upon the consequences of accepting or rejecting “salvation” or “Christianity.” The point is to offer **Christ** to everyone!

*...for I know **whom** [not “what”] I have believed, and I am convinced that **he** [not “it”] is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me (II Tim. 1:12).*

1. He **came** (v. 22). This is hardly a typical biography. There is no mention of his parents, his birth, his education, his career, etc. There is not even a mention of his **teachings** (Sermon on the Mount, parables, etc.). Peter simply mentions briefly that his miracles validate his identity (John 20:30–31). Who came? God!
2. He **died** (v. 23). This was the shocker. The Messiah (God incarnate) came and died as a common criminal on a cross. But this was not an unfortunate ending to an otherwise good story! No. It was “according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.” The cross was no **accident**, it was the very reason that he came. But notice: Peter is holding his listeners responsible for his death!

⁷² Dallas Willard. *The Divine Conspiracy*, 281f.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 301.

3. He **rose** (vv. 24–32). Peter is quoting from Psalm 16 as **Scriptural** evidence for the resurrection but he also bears **personal** testimony to having met the risen Lord. *This Jesus, God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses* (v. 32).
4. He **ascended** (vv. 33–35). Quoting from Psalm 110, Peter testifies how Jesus is **now** reigning over the universe at the right hand of God. It is his sovereign lordship that has made possible the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It wasn't the cross or the empty tomb that sent the disciples with a message of victory into the world. It was the glorious reality of his present reign and indwelling Spirit! The early Christians refused to say "**Caesar** is Lord" not just because it was irreverent. They refused simply because it wasn't true! Jesus is Lord!
5. The conclusion of the sermon is this: *Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom **you** crucified* (v. 36).

Yes, Jesus is Lord! That is a fact of history. But Peter does not hide the fact that his listeners were complicit of Christ's death. Though God sent his Son to save us, you didn't **recognize** him, you **rejected** his message, and you are **guilty** of his death! *But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life... (3:14–15).* Gospel preaching aims to help the listeners to come to grips with the fact that they are guilty of treason and deicide; they are **Christ-killers**.

While preaching in Australia, R. A. Torrey was approached by a dignified gentleman who was troubled by such "harsh" preaching. "Though I've never asked Christ to be my Savior I'm a good and moral man. What do you have against me that you preach like that?" Torrey responded: "Sir, Jesus Christ is king whether you acknowledge it or not. Therefore, because you have not bowed your knee before him I charge you with **high treason** against your King!"

V. How Do I Become a Christian?

Though the sermon was formally over, the "worship service" was just getting warmed up! True Gospel preaching always demands a **response**. The goal of Gospel preaching is not just information but transformation.

A. Conviction of sin (v. 37).

Many people today choose to "become a Christian" because of:

- Some life **crisis** (illness, loss, divorce, etc.).
- Some fear (death, uncertainty, etc.).
- Hope for better **circumstances** (health, wealth, happiness, etc.).
- Desire to make sense out of life (worldview, unanswered questions, etc.).

But none of these factors were at work on the day of Pentecost. Peter's listeners responded to the Gospel because the message they heard (Jesus came, died, rose, and ascended) "cut to the heart" (v. 37). They were **convicted** of sin, exposed, caught red-handed. This is what Jesus had promised would happen when the Holy Spirit comes:

*And when [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world concerning **sin** and **righteousness** and **judgment**: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged* (John 16:8–11).

Though Peter never “opened the altar” and invited people to respond, his listeners simply refused to leave. “What shall we do?”

B. Believing the Gospel and becoming a disciple of Jesus.

There are five specific actions that the listeners are exhorted to take:

1. **Repent.** The word means to turn around, to change the way you think. It is much more than feeling lousy about the dumb stuff you have done. It is deep remorse over our blindness and arrogant rebellion with a profound desire to change.
2. **Believe.** Though the term is not used in this text the concept is clearly present. The Gospel invites us to believe that Jesus came, died, rose and reigns as Lord. But this is not just a mental acceptance of certain facts. It is a reliance and trust in Jesus as my Savior and Lord: to forgive my past, equip me for the present, and lead me in the future. “Follow me.”
3. Be **baptized.** Obedience in baptism is often the first step in operationalizing one’s faith and repentance. Baptism is to Christian discipleship what a ring is to marriage: an outward sign of an inward reality. One isn’t baptized in order to be a disciple but rather because one already is! The ceremony symbolizes “the forgiveness of sins.”
4. Receive **the gift** of the Holy Spirit. Notice the word “gift” is singular. The primary work of the Spirit is not that of giving gifts but of giving the indwelling reality of God in a person’s life. The Christian life simply cannot be lived in the power of the flesh.
5. Devote yourself to **teaching, fellowship, breaking bread and prayer** (v. 42). No one can follow Christ alone. We need community so that we can establish the types of **spiritual disciplines** that make growth possible.

The text is not clear about how long it took for these 3,000 converts to take these five “steps.” Perhaps they occurred more or less at the same time. Perhaps they were spread out over a number of weeks or months. It took Peter about **three years!**

VI. A Helpful Summary.

In his excellent book *Evangelism in the Early Church*, Michael Green studies the sermons of Acts and summarizes the Gospel in three basic points:⁷⁴

A. The Gospel is a **Person** to be proclaimed.

Jesus came. He died. He rose from the dead. You killed him! And now he reigns at the right hand of God as Lord and Christ.

B. The Gospel is a **gift** to be offered.

When you put your trust in Jesus as Lord and Christ, you receive a double blessing: forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

C. The Gospel is an **invitation** to respond to.

This message demands a response: repent and believe. Be baptized and devote yourself to spiritual disciplines.

⁷⁴ *Evangelism in the Early Church*, n.p.

TABLE TALK

1. When did Peter become a Christian?
2. The New Testament preachers preached Jesus. Many contemporary preachers preach *about* Jesus. What's the difference?
3. Compare your testimony of becoming a Christian to how the 3,000 became Christians after Peter's sermon. What is similar? What is different? How long did it take for you to experience all the different actions involved in conversion?
4. What is the difference between asking someone "Are you saved?" and "Are you a disciple (apprentice, mentee) of Jesus?" Why is this question important?
5. Has this study changed the way you think about evangelism? Will you now share the Gospel differently?
6. Imagine yourself sitting in a private conversation with the Senior Pastor of your church. He asks you; "Do you have any counsel for me on how we can be more effective in our church in our presentation of the Gospel?" How would you advise him?

Ask Ye What Great Thing I Know

By Johann C. Schwedler

(translated from German to English by Benjamin H. Kennedy)

*Ask ye what great thing I know,
That delights and stirs me so?
What the high reward I win?
Whose the Name I glory in?
Jesus Christ, the Crucified.*

*What is faith's foundation strong?
What awakes my heart to song?
He Who bore my sinful load,
Purchased for me peace with God,
Jesus Christ, the Crucified.*

*Who is He that makes me wise
To discern where duty lies?
Who is He that makes me true
Duty, when discerned to do,
Jesus Christ, the Crucified.*

*Who defeats my fiercest foes?
Who consoles my saddest woes?
Who revives my fainting heart,
Healing all its hidden smart?
Jesus Christ, the Crucified.*

*Who is life in life to me?
Who the death of death will be?
Who will place me on His right,
With the countless hosts of light?
Jesus Christ, the Crucified.*

*This is that great thing I know;
This delights and stirs me so;
Faith in Him Who died to save,
Him Who triumphed over the grave:
Jesus Christ, the Crucified*



Reason WHY

The Bible Offers Honest Answers to Honest Questions
By Stan Key

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