

SHORT RESPONSES TO HARD QUESTIONS

- *Christians are often asked the following questions.*
- *This is the “short answer” that I would offer to some of these questions.*

How can I be sure that the Christian God even exists?

1. Proof is a word that is associated with a very high degree of probability derived from reason, evidence, and presuppositions about a particular subject. In this sense we do not and cannot prove that God exists any more than we can prove that the earth is millions of years old. We simply can say with varying degrees of probability that something is true or false.
2. The objective testimony to the existence of God rests with (a) presuppositions that allow the possibility of the supernatural, (b) material evidence, and (c) reason. When materialists conclude that God does not exist we need to note that they start with a presupposition that excludes the possibility of the supernatural so that God cannot exist.
3. One does not have to prove that God exists but just show that there is a very high probability that God exists. This means that to believe in the existence of God is not unreasonable.
4. There is a subjective element to the conviction that God exists. It rests with (a) the spiritual dimension of human life (para-normal, art and beauty, answers to prayer), (b) the unmet longings of the human soul (shame, purpose, hope), and (c) the universal human sense of a reality that transcends the material world.
5. The classic arguments for the existence of God may not prove that God exists but they do make a strong case for the high probability that God exists.
 - A. Cosmological argument - There is need for a first cause of the cosmos.**
 - 1. Any motion requires an original mover.**
 - a. If you wish to provide an explanation of change, you have only two alternatives; either you must hypothesize (a) an infinite regression of change with no explanation of an original mover, which is an intellectual embarrassment, an offense to reason or (b) you must hypothesize some unchanging ground that lies prior to all the multiple changes we experience in ordinary life.
 - b. Acts 17:28 “for in Him we live and move and exist”
 - 2. Effects point to an original cause.**

- a. If every event has a cause, and the universe is a system of causes and effects, it stands to reason that there must be an underived causal agent and necessary being that underlies and enables all these causes and effects.
- b. Ps.102:26 'Long ago thou didst lay the foundations of the earth, and the heavens were thy handiwork. They shall pass away, but thou endurest; like clothes they shall all grow old; thou shalt cast them off like a cloak, and they shall vanish; but thou art the same and thy years shall have no end.'

3. Contingency and interdependency suggest an independent starting point we call God.

- a. Nothing is self-existent yet something must be in order for the web of interdependent life to exist.
- b. Like a daisy chain all of life seems to be a web that is interdependent. Where did this chain begin? Believers suggest that the answer is God.
- c. Acts 14:17 and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.

4. Degrees of being or grades of perfection point to an ultimate and perfect Source.

- a. The fact that degrees of value, merit, and goodness suggest that there is an ultimate perfect standard. Christians call this perfection "God."
- b. Deut.32:4 "He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he."

5. The life force in nature points to the essence of life in God.

- a. How are we to understand the origin and nature of life? What is its dynamic essence? Where does it come from? Christian confessions suggest that it points to an eternal living and life giving God.
- b. Job 12:10 "In whose hand is the life of every living thing. And the breath of all mankind."

B. Teleological argument - There is order and purpose in nature that speaks of intelligent design. The designer must be God.

1. Order in nature suggests that there is a designer.

- a. Order is everywhere observed.
- b. It is implausible that such order could have occurred by chance.
- c. The power of this argument is seen by considering the improbability of the opposite hypothesis, that there is no cause or order to anything.

2. **The fact that there seems to be purpose or design in nature suggests the existence of a designer.**
 - a. The evolutionary hypothesis suggests that survival is the governing impulse in life. But where does this impulse come from? Why does it exist?
 - b. Modern biochemistry has enabled us to observe the complex nature of the elements of life. Design in the DNA is hard to deny.
- C. Anthropological argument** - All people possess a rational and moral impulse that goes beyond the practical and immediate needs of man. The best explanation for this impulse is God's existence.
1. **The appearance of mind in nature suggests an ultimate mind.**
 - a. It is hard to imagine complex order without intelligence.
 - b. The fact that the universe is intelligible and that humans can in part understand it is a powerful argument for the existence of a supreme intelligence.
 2. **The existence of persons suggests a supreme person.**
 - a. One cannot reasonably have human personality drop out of the blue in evolving history without hypothesizing a divine person that elicits and awakens human personality.
 - b. The notion of self awareness suggests
 3. **The human idea of God suggests that God exists.**
 - a. If humanity has the idea of God implanted in its very nature, then some sufficient reason must be hypothesized.
 - b. What is the best explanation for this? Evolution or the facts that we are made in God's image and instinctively know there is something beyond us.
 4. **The universal God consciousness among humans suggests that something exists beyond us.**
 - a. The idea of a supreme force, being, principle, etc. seems to exist in all cultures and in all ages throughout history.
 - b. People have been willing to die for this belief. It is possible to die for false beliefs, but it is difficult to think of any other idea in human history for which so many caring and intelligent persons have been willing to offer their very lives.
- D. Moral argument** - All people possess a moral conscience, sensitivity to beauty, a longing for justice.
1. **Inspiration for moral good is best explained by the existence of God.**
 - a. The universal moral sense within humans suggests a moral personality behind human nature.
 - b. People have strong feelings about justice, courage, etc. even though they may not believe in God. The notion of a just and ideal society must originate in a cosmic moral mind.

- c. The evolutionary model struggles to explain the complex moral spiritual nature of humanity.
- 2. The longing for justice is best explained by the existence of God.**
 - a. In this life there is no justice or direct correlation between virtue and prosperity or happiness. For justice to win Kant reasoned that freedom, immortality, and God must exist.
 - b. Rev.7:17 “God shall wipe every tear from their eyes.”
- 3. Society is better when people act as though God exists.**
 - a. Believing in God makes people function better and feel better and makes lives more productive.
 - b. Ps.33:12 “Blessed is the people whose God is the Lord, the people he chose for his inheritance.”
- 4. The phenomena of aesthetic beauty suggests the presence of an aesthetic source.**
 - a. The presence of beauty and human ability to recognize universal beauty (a sunset, etc.) suggests the presence of God.
 - b. Ps.19:1-4 “The heavens tell out the glory of God, the vault of heaven reveals his handiwork. One day speaks to another, night with night shares its knowledge, and this without speech or language or sound of any voice. Their music goes out through all the earth, their words reach to the end of the world.”
- E. Congruity argument** – That postulate which best explains the most distantly related facts is more probably true. The existence of God best explains all phenomena.
 - 1. If God in fact exists, then the virtually universal belief in divine reality is accounted for.
 - 2. If God exists, then the intellectual hunger for a first cause of causes is satisfied without the embarrassment of an infinite regress of causes or unaccounted-for motions.
 - 3. If God exists, then our inveterate religious nature has an object.
 - 4. If God exists, then the uniformity of natural law finds adequate explanation.
 - 5. If God exists, then human moral awareness is vindicated from the charge of being an immense absurdity.
- F. Ontological argument** - The fact that we can imagine a supreme being requires that such a being exists. This argument is adopted from a Platonic framework, in which the ideal is more real than the physical. (This argument, in its 20th century form, appeals to the nearly universal sense of a supreme power.)
- 6. Conclusion:** Belief in the existence of the Christian God is “a step of faith” based on a high level of probability derived from empirical observation, reason, and presuppositions. Ultimately, this belief requires

a subjective element where the deep longings of the human soul find its rest in the Biblical story of creation, redemption, and hope.

If a good and great God exists why is their meaningless evil in the world?

1. The Scripture explains that the sin of Adam (man) plunged the creation into a state of moral chaos and injustice which would not be fully corrected until Christ's return at the end of the age.
2. The book of Job addresses the problem of "meaningless evil" by showing that there may be meaning and significance beyond our ability to comprehend.
3. We do not need to explain evil but we are capable of responding to it with love, faith, and hope.
4. The fact that humans have a sense of good and evil (enabling them to identify injustice) suggests that God exists and has placed His image within us. The natural evolutionary view of humanity cannot account for such an impulse and sensitivity.
5. While the Christian may not be able to explain all suffering and injustice it (unlike atheism) can offer a special hope and comfort to those who suffer.

Do you have to accept Jesus as your savior to go to heaven?

1. Only God decides who goes to heaven.
2. God will be perfectly fair in his judgement but God does not grade on the curve.
 - a. The standard of God's judgement will be our integrity as humans. We will be judged by the extent to which we are true to our humanity (which is defined as living our lives in the image of God) Jesus being the model.
 - b. For some of us there is great anxiety about that judgment because we sense that we have fallen short and are powerless to measure up to our calling.
 - c. God has graciously given His Son as a substitute whereby through faith in him we have his righteousness imputed to our account. This is the gospel.
 - d. But no one is forced to receive that gift. If we choose to face God clothed in our own righteousness, we are free to do so knowing that God will be perfectly fair.

It is hypocritical to use the name of Jesus, who preached love, and then condemn the sincere beliefs of those who don't happen to agree with you?

1. A hypocrite is someone who fails to integrate their confession and their conduct. We no doubt are hypocritical at many points but when we speak of the exclusiveness within the Christian message we are not departing from the clear teaching of the historic Christian faith as revealed in the Bible and confessed down through the ages. It would be hypocritical to not confess an exclusive Christian message when Jesus and the Apostles clearly taught it.
2. At this point your objection is not with us so much as with the historic Christian teaching, which we confess. The Christian story must be challenged by refuting its ideological and historical foundations not by exposing the hypocrisy of some of its members or by simply finding the teaching offensive to the modern mind.
3. When you sense that the exclusiveness of the Christian message is unloving, you do so on the basis of an assumption.

You assume that love affirms not only legal and social pluralism but also ideological pluralism. That is, you accept the right of others to believe what they want. So do I.

But this is where we disagree. You also insist on dignifying (as a valid expression of truth) any sincerely held world and life view. While I affirm legal and social pluralism, I do not feel that I am inconsistent in rejecting ideological pluralism.

Some truths are universal, absolutes that transcend time and culture. We are not bigots for critiquing certain views as wrong. (KKK, Terrorism, Child sacrifice, etc.)

4. I would suggest that your assumption of ideological pluralism is hard to defend. Few of us are so radically pluralistic that we would dignify as honorable, the beliefs of the KKK or Terrorists (for example). It is at this point I would say that the hypocrisy is with you not with me.
5. I would ask, on what basis do we condemn the views of the KKK as wrong or dangerous? You may answer: They violate basic human rights.
6. I say, fair enough, but where do we get our understanding of what it means to be human, and from where come these rights? I would argue that the rights and dignity of humanity are not to be found in an evolutionary theory of human origin or in the subjective decisions of nine judges on the Supreme Court but rather from a religious base.
7. Our dignity is linked to our bearing the image of our Creator as revealed in the Biblical story. When you try to construct the human story apart from the broader Biblical story you leave the realm of dignity and enter the pagan

world that is forced to dignify everything as an expression of human creativity and denounce nothing for fear of being a bigot.

Why should anyone believe that Christianity or any particular religion is the only right way? Why not treat all religions as paths to God?

1. Radical pluralism seems to make sense in our postmodern age until you consider its logical implications. For example: Do we really believe that a religious or political system that abuses children, women, and people of different ethnic backgrounds, is deserving of the same support that as a more politically correct faith? The fact is, we each embrace an “exclusive” set of assumptions or values by which we evaluate all systems of belief.
2. The popular faith of many people is a pseudo Christianity, which embraces some of the values of the Kingdom of God while rejecting the claims of the King. For example we may embrace a view of human rights for children and minorities that comes from a past Christian culture and evaluate the worthiness of a religion on how well it promotes those values. In doing so we are operating from a (subconscious and exclusive) faith perspective. Everyone operates from a value system that is exclusive of some things.
3. Christianity is radically inclusive in that it accepts all people, not on the basis of their moral, ethnic, or natural merit but on the basis of their common sinfulness.
4. If Christ rose from the dead, his claims should be seriously considered. If he claims to be the right and only way we should evaluate that claim against the alternatives. But we do not have the option of not embracing some faith based assumptions upon which we live.

Is it reasonable to worship a God who sends sincere, “good” people to hell just because they don’t believe in Jesus?

5. If our standards were the standards it would seem strange or even incomprehensible that God would condemn anyone who seems “good”.
6. The reason many Christians have not been moved by that logic is because they see “our standards” as the “unreasonable” part.
7. The wonder of it all, to many Christians, is that God would save any, for we are all guilty with mixed motives, selfish defensive life strategies, and rebellious hearts.
8. To be sure these dark sides of life are expressed in differing degrees but the fact remains, we all seem to have a dark side.

Didn’t Jesus say, “Judge not, lest you be judged”?

1. In John 7:24 he said, "Do not judge according to appearances, but judge with righteous judgment."
2. Only a fool has no discernment of right and wrong. The real question is not judgment but the basis and sphere of the judgment.

Why are evangelical Christians so homophobic?

1. The Christian church is not homophobic but it does view homosexual acts as contrary to God's ideal design. Homophobia is an irrational fear of and discrimination against people with a homosexual erotic preference.
2. Christians are committed to the authority of the Biblical revelation and it has been the common understanding down through the years that the Biblical record referred to homosexual acts as sinful and contrary to God's design.
3. The proscription against homosexual acts in Romans 1 suggests that homosexuality is not so much a judgement against the homosexual person as against a nation or culture that has abandoned God.

What about all the atrocities committed in the name of religion? Wouldn't the world be better off without religion?

1. The same logic could be used with respect to government. Just think how many wars governments have started. But you say we need government to establish order and manage social and economic interaction. How much more do we need religion with its power to curb selfish passions, encourage altruistic behavior, and give hope to suffering masses.
2. James 4:1-2 says, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask."
3. The hypocrisy of religious people does not negate the virtue of true religion. There are few things more honorable than good religion and few things more vile than bad religion.
4. I would argue that if you want to see hell in living color, remove all thoughts of a transcendent authority from our culture. Democracy will become the domination of the weak by the strong, Capitalism will become the exploitation of the poor by the rich, and Human Rights will feed never ending litigation whereby we demand the freedom to do what ever we want and also demand that someone else pick up the tab when we don't like the consequences of our choices.
5. A pagan culture has no rational basis for normative ethics. It is left with a superficial functionalism, arbitrary legalism, or impulsive sentimentalism.
6. Both Jefferson and Adams recognized the need for religions constraining power over our souls if we were to preserve our freedoms.

7. Governments that have systematically outlawed religion because it was responsible for division, bloodshed, and intolerance have themselves become the most intolerant, divisive, and bloody.

Is not the Bible to be understood in the light of historical critical scholarship?

1. The Bible is to be granted, at least, the same basic respect that we would grant other pieces of ancient literature. How many other ancient documents could survive the subjective intellectual terrorist attacks that have characterized “Biblical scholarship” over the years?
2. Historical criticism is useful if used with broad presuppositions (which do not exclude the possibility of the supernatural), concrete extra Biblical sources (not creative imagination), and proper humility (with some self criticism). Historical criticism has too often been critical of everything but its own house.

How can you be so certain that you know the truth?

1. Certainty is relative and involves a faith commitment that is based on the plausibility of a certain story being true. I am committed to the truthfulness of the Christian story for three reasons.
 - It addresses the deepest need of my soul in a way that nothing else has. It offers freedom from guilt and shame while at the same time respects the holiness of God.
 - The evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is strong.
 - The evidence for the authority of Scripture is strong.
2. There are some things that are more certain than others. It is important to major on majors and minor on minors.

Why are you so concerned about imposing religious ideas (prayer and creation) on public education?

1. We have to ask and answer the question as to how we are to communicate values in public education. We do not have the option of communicating neutral values - we must recognize that by communicating tolerance of all values as personal preferences, we are teaching a fundamental value. We assume that certain values are to be encouraged (telling the truth, not stealing or cheating, respecting property, etc.)
2. Some times we are left with the impression (in the secular state) that the only virtue that can be defended in the public square is “personal autonomy” where we are completely free to choose our personal values apart from any transcendent authority. It is implied that if we do

not like the consequences of our choices we should also have the right to blame someone else and even sue them. Rights without responsibilities, seems to be the core virtue (vice) of a modern secular society. Most of us do not want to live in a world where there is no virtue in self-sacrifice for the common good.

3. The rational basis of such values is grounded in who we are as humans made in the image of God.
4. While it is improper to advocate any one particular religious sect over another, it is necessary to include as a part of public education the foundation for the virtues, which support the public good. That foundation is the affirmation of transcendent moral authority. Public prayer (a sign of respect for transcendent authority) and the teaching of human origins (and human nature) is a reflection of a tenured world and life view in America.
5. I would not replace the teaching of evolution with creation nor would I teach creation as science. I would address the question of human origin and origin of life as a philosophical and religious question with scientific side bars.

Why do evangelical Christians insult women by denying them the right to choose what happens in their own bodies? Why do you insist on imposing your personal religious convictions on others?

1. The right of privacy or right to choose what happens to one's own body is a valid right that deserves to be respected and protected even when it may lead to actions that are offensive to the personal values of someone else.
2. But this is true in the case of abortion rights only if you assume that the unborn child is not a person with constitutional rights.
3. A parallel situation existed in pre-civil war America where slaves were viewed as property of others. The owner, it was argued, has a right to treat his property as he pleases. The right of personal property is valid but in the case of slaves; only if it is assumed that the slave is not a person with rights.
4. The basic question in the abortion controversy then becomes this - When does the unborn become a person with constitutional rights? We know that the unborn is alive and genetically human but is it a person? Or when does it become a person?
5. It is often argued that we cannot know for sure when the subject becomes a person. Fair enough. But we assume that the subject becomes a person at some time before, at, or after birth.
6. Because we are dealing with a human person or potential human person it seems only wise to take a very conservative posture toward abortion lest we kill a person. Who dares take a risk of killing what could be a person? Until we

know for certain that the unborn is not a human person we should fight to save the unborn.

7. This is why many people see abortion as something bigger than a woman's private right to choose.

America is a secular state not a Christian nation. Where do you get the idea that this pluralistic society was ever Christian?

1. Some have described America as a secular state with the soul of a church.
2. It was based on three pillars: A Capitalistic economic system, A Democratic governmental system, and A Judeo Christian moral system.
3. The freedom that is the corollary of capitalistic democracy is assured only by the self-restraint and responsibility for the public good motivated by personal convictions that find their rational foundation in religious faith.
4. The Judeo Christian world view (expressed in a general Biblical ethic) was an assumption of the founding fathers, it is the conviction of the vast majority of present day citizens, and it is the historical root of all successful free societies.
5. The separation of church and state is best understood as a separation of the state from any one religious sect. This was in deliberate contrast to the British system where the Anglican Church was the official state church. The founding fathers did not intend to remove public recognition of a sacred canopy or "general religion." This is why our institutions had many public references to moral law based on Biblical texts.
6. It might be argued that materialists (who believe that there is no reality beyond space, time, matter, and energy) embrace a nontraditional religion based on faith in humanity, or nature. The founders of the American republic did not assume that materialism was neutral and should enjoy a tenured status in education, government, or the public square.

Why do conservative Christians try to legislate "their morality" on everyone else?

1. Many of our nation's values are reflected in our legislated rules. (sanctity of private property, human rights, etc.)
2. Social values are often based on religious convictions. There should be no shame in talking about the religious base for values but because we do not live in a theocracy, we do not set our laws by "special revelation" (the Bible or private visions, etc.).
3. In debating public legislation in a pluralistic society it is necessary to keep the arguments "secular", based on "common sense", "natural order", "popular preference", etc. While religious convictions may energize values they are not going to be persuasive in a secular public debate. When I disagree with

legislated values, I may feel coerced by those support those values. When I agree with legislated values, I may see them as common sense.

If the Holy Spirit of the New Covenant was to transform people into Christ-like disciples why do Christians seem to be no different than non-Christians?

1. The grand fulfillment of the New Covenant promises awaits the 2nd coming of Christ.
2. The N.T. writers never assume that Christians will automatically be perfect or even different than other people. This is why the letters of Paul, and Peter are full of exhortations to trust and obey.
3. The Spirit of Christ can be resisted, frustrated, and ignored according to Paul. The N.T. never suggests that following Christ will be easy, automatic, or perfect.
4. The image of God in the non-believer is capable of good deeds and virtue. The “old nature” in Christians is capable of great evil. These two truths should keep Christians humble, open minded, and grateful as they relate to the world.

Why do bad things happen to good people?

1. The world in which we live is the best possible environment to showcase all the attributes of God through His people. Injustice and tragedy demand and create an opportunity for a response. Love is most dramatic when it is a response to being unloved. Courage finds meaning in disappointment, hope in despair, faith in “the darkness” of not seeing the future, etc.
2. Pain and suffering can challenge our theology. Some things happen because we reap what we sow. Some things happen because we are victims of the evil of others. It is fairly easy to excuse God from these situations. It is when there is unjustified tragedy that is not connected directly to human evil, that God’s nature comes into question. All of these things remind us that we live in a fallen world and are groaning along with nature waiting for our deliverance. The pain of injustice drives us to hope in something beyond this life.
3. It is foolish to assume that anyone is so good as to deserve immunity from the fallout of a fallen world. Our relative evaluation of others and ourselves creates a sense of entitlement that is unwarranted from a broader perspective.
7. We can not know the reason for all suffering nor do we have to assume that there is a reason for all suffering that will be meaningful for us. God’s sovereignty does not imply that we will or can understand His ways as rational to our minds and perspectives. His perspective is at points beyond our purview.

8. Suffering gives us an opportunity to share the suffering of Christ and thus know him, as we would not without suffering.
9. Suffering can teach us disciplines of faith, courage, hope, love, etc. that can not be learned or displayed without hardships.