

### Part One: New Testament

1. "How historically reliable is the New Testament?"
  - The number of Greek manuscripts for the New Testament (over 5,000) is superior in manuscript evidence when compared to other ancient documents (Homer's *Iliad* is second with 643).
  - The "time gap" between the original document and the copies of the New Testament is far less than all other ancient documents in both partial and complete copies.
  - If we "lost" all the written copies of the New Testament in our bibles, we would still be able to reconstruct it via the Early Church Father's (ca. 100-350 CE) citations, allusions, and quotes. (One scholar estimated all but 11 verses are contained in their writings.) Does this not suggest that we have the "real" New Testament?
  - The "Jesus" story was first committed to memory (oral tradition). Within two to three years of Jesus' resurrection Paul is converted. Paul receives the "Jesus" tradition from Jesus himself (Gal 1.16-17), Peter (Gal 1.18-19), and the Jerusalem church (Acts 9.26-30). "Disciples," "eyewitnesses," and other leaders/guarantors of the "oral" Jesus tradition are the primary sources of the Gospels and a general "consensus" of Jesus' life and teaching affirmed and taught.
  - As the disciples, eyewitnesses and other leaders/guarantors of the Jesus tradition begin to "pass away" the "oral" Jesus tradition is written down in the Gospels (Matthew: 70-80 CE; Mark 60-70 CE; Luke 70-80 CE; John 90-100).
2. "The New Testament has numerous textual errors, has been translated hundreds of times, and most of the early copyists were non-professionals scribes. Also, there are between 200,000-400,000 variant readings in the New Testament."
  - Through the work of textual criticism (restoring the original text) we have good reasons for maintaining that the New Testament we have is the New Testament the early Christians employed.
  - Variant readings can be misleading (e.g., one misspelled word in 3,000 different manuscripts would be counted as 3,000 different readings when in reality is it only one misspelled word).
  - There are 10,000 places where 200,000+ variants occur. From these variants, some scholars estimate 0% - 1.67% possess any significance. No

major doctrine, for instance, is based on these variant readings. If no major doctrine is based on a variant reading, then how would variant readings be problematic to the historical Christian faith?

- We should expect a high number of variant readings in the New Testament because of the overwhelming manuscript evidence of the New Testament (over 5,000). Taken in another way, to assert that we only have a handful of variant readings for Pliny's *Natural History* does not necessarily mean the text is better copied or more reliable than the New Testament. Rather, it's probably due to the limited amount of manuscript copies (seven) for Pliny's *Natural History*.
- The great number of variants of the New Testament actually provides a "checks and balances" against the variants themselves. Due to a small number of manuscripts other ancient documents lack the ability to offer a system of "checks and balances."
- Regarding copyist errors found in the New Testament critics note how "ill-equipped" (not-trained) they were. However, how can these critics be confident in the use of sources that critique these copyists? Isn't it possible that the very sources critics cite are also full of "errors" and have been altered as well?
- Even though we may have up to 400,000 variant readings it is important to note that present-day critics themselves are confident that we possess an accurate New Testament. If this is not true, then how can they identify which bible verses possess variant readings unless they know which variant reading is the more likely to be correct?

3. "The Church councils voted on which books were to be regarded as the Word of God (the process of canonization). Does this not suggest some political motivation behind the canonization of the New Testament?"

- In general, there are three tests for canonicity including (1) rule of faith, (2) apostolicity, and (3) universality. The rule of faith refers to teachings and doctrines that are recognized as standard, in congruity and harmony within the Christian community. Apostolicity means that an apostle had to be the author or directly associated with the books in question. Concerning universality the books in question had to have continuous acceptance and usage in the Church (not merely temporary and limited acceptance and usage).

- Although the New Testament Canon was affirmed in 393, 397, and 419 it does not follow that it took 300 years to identify works as "canonical." The Gospels and some of Paul's letters (1 Tim 5.18; Lk 10.7), for instance, were internally cited as Scripture in the first century and later received as Scripture by the early second century.
- Concerning canonization an important issue is one of "content" and not of political control. The New Testament Canon began to form as the Church established its identity (doctrine/practice) and responded to false teachings/scriptures (during the second thru fourth century CE). The Early Christian Church has every right to exclude teachings and practices that are false or not consistent with its identity.
- In short, canonization refers to the collection of authoritative books rather than the authoritative collection of books (the Church identifies, recognizes, and testifies to the New Testament canon). This means that the twenty-seven books possess intrinsic authority as God's Word rather than receiving its authority from church councils.

4. "What about Gnosticism? Do recent findings of the Gnostic Gospels demonstrate that the Christian Church has been hiding historical/theological information? Why should we trust the traditional picture of Jesus if we now have the Gnostic Gospels? Don't the Gnostic Gospels claim inspiration as well?"

- Gnosticism was an early second century movement that combined mystical knowledge with religious and philosophical traditions in order to proclaim an enlightened knowledge and way of living. This is fundamentally different than the New Testament's view of what constituted "Christian doctrine." (The primary and key doctrines concerning Jesus Christ, for instance, were "becoming" established during the mid-first century.)
- Because Gnostic teachings concerning God, creation, Jesus' nature, salvation, and Jesus' death are different than Christianity's beliefs the latter have every right to exclude them from their canon since they—the Gnostic Gospels contradict Christianity's primary and key doctrines.
- Critics of the New Testament Canon who believe Gnosticism (and other works) should be included in an expanded New Testament undermine their own position when they accuse "traditional" Christianity with "voting" books into the New Testament Canon. Are not scholars who want the Gnostic Gospels "canonized" participating in the same process that they are condemning?

- While it is true that some *Gnostic Gospels* claim inspiration or an apostle for its author it does not mean it should be included in the New Testament Canon because we must discover if these claims are genuine. (Also, recall the three general "tests" for canonization.) However, even supporters for the inclusion of the *Gnostic Gospels* into some "expanded" New Testament do not believe that these "Gospels" represent the work of the first-century apostles or acquaintance of apostles.

### **Part Two: Jesus**

1. "Jesus did not resurrect from the dead. There is not enough evidence to warrant such a belief."

- These earliest Christian believers were monotheistic, law-abiding, Sabbath-keeping Jews who did not believe in a unique resurrection in the middle of history (they believed in a general resurrection at the end of the age). However, something must have happened to cause them to radically change their beliefs. The resurrection explains the origin of the disciples' belief in the resurrection, the changing of the day of worship from the Sabbath to the first day, and the establishment of the church.
- The "natural" theories (swoon, conspiracy, hallucination, legend) do not possess enough explanatory power to explain the three historical effects (the origin of the disciples' belief in the resurrection, the change of the day of worship from the Sabbath to the first day, and the establishment of the church).
- The swoon theory (Jesus did not die, but appeared to die) should be rejected because it is ignorant (the Romans knew how to crucify people), lacks common sense (could you fool the disciples after a crucifixion that you conquered death?), needs a continuing story for Jesus (where did he go if he did not die and go to heaven?), and contradicts medical evidence (legs not broken: Jn 19.31-33; asphyxiation occurred: Jn 19.34-35).
- The conspiracy theory (a person or people stole the body) lacks evidence as well. To begin with, no one has confessed under torture (referring to those who concocted the story) that Christ did not resurrect. Also, do you think the disciples were crafty enough to fool everyone or have the power to steal the body? Finally, would you die for a liar if you created the story yourself? (You might die for a lie not knowing that it isn't a lie, but probably less likely if you yourself created the story.)
- The hallucination theory contradicts our fundamental knowledge and experience of visions and non-veridical experiences. First, hallucinations, by

- nature are private, individual, and subjective (and yet the disciples and many others saw the risen Christ at the same time and in the same relationship with one another). Second, the durations of hallucinations are usually short (but Christ's followers had them for approximately six weeks). Third, disciples believed in a "general and end-time" resurrection, but Jesus resurrected not at the end of this age, but in the middle of history.
- The legend theory should be rejected because there is not enough time (need several generations) to create such a legend (1 Cor 15.3f, for instance may be dated 3 to 8 years after the resurrection; see next point below). Furthermore, we have the presence of eyewitnesses and guarantors in the Gospels and Paul's letters. Most of these eyewitnesses and guarantors were probably alive when Paul's epistles and the Gospels were written as well. Finally, Paul's conversion from Saul could not be based on legendary aspects because there was not a long enough time gap between the reported event (resurrection) and his conversion (two years later).
  - The Historicity of 1 Cor 15.3f. These verses belong to a "resurrection creed" and are "pre-Pauline" ("delivered" and "received" were rabbinic words for passing/receiving tradition). In addition, if 1 Corinthians was written by 55 CE (as many "liberal" scholars have attested), Paul received tradition from Peter and James (35-38 CE), and the creed exists prior to the tradition, then we are looking at "observations" of a creed that are reported to take place even earlier (35-37 CE).
  - If Jesus resurrected from the dead, then many observations follow including (1) all that exists is not necessarily material entities, (2) the universe is not necessarily "closed" to the supernatural or miraculous, (3) a supernatural God "cares" because He acted in a historical time and space in resurrecting Jesus, (4) the power of sin and death can be "defeated," (5) Jesus was probably the most unique person who has ever lived—more unique than any other religious teacher, guru, or prophet, (6) Christianity is unlikely to be a "by-product" of one's wish fulfillment or reflection of one's culture, and (7) it is possible that this one meta-narrative (a universal truth that speaks to the universal "human condition") is not a "dead" option.
  - In summary, the natural theories (swoon, conspiracy, hallucination, legend) do not adequately explain what happened to Jesus' body. On the other hand, Jesus' resurrection is the best explanation for the origin of the disciples' belief in the resurrection, the changing of the day of worship from the Sabbath to Sunday, and the establishment of the church. Finally, Jesus'

resurrection challenges us to question various established positions of science, philosophy, and religion.

2. "The idea that God desires a bloody sacrifice is offensive."
  - The "bloody sacrifice" demonstrates the seriousness of sin in God's eyes. God has a perfect moral standard and anyone that falls short of this standard receives the penalty of death (Rom 6.23). Because God views sin as "very serious" only a "perfect" substitute could be offered in the place of our sins (a perfect life exchanged for imperfect lives; 2 Cor 5.21).
  - There is "life" in the blood (e.g., sometimes we say that "a person spilled blood" meaning that he/she died by making a great sacrifice). Anything short of a "sacrifice" would not be sufficient because God through Jesus' death (and resurrection) offers us the chance to receive eternal life. Without blood, there's no forgiveness of sins because the blood itself "contains" life (Heb 9.22).
  - The notion of a "sacrifice" is rooted in a specific historical context. As such, it makes perfect sense for the Old Testament, for instance, to deal with the issue of sacrifice because many cultures that existed alongside the Israelites made sacrifices (to their "gods") as well during this time period.
  - Regarding the historical context of the New Testament Jesus had to die in a manner that was public (the cross) because God had to show the world the significance of his death (theological reason). Furthermore, Jesus' death should be understood in conjunction with the Old Testament sacrifices (they were "shadows" that ultimately pointed to Jesus' death and his death stands in continuity and fulfillment of Old Testament sacrifices). In addition, the crucifixion was not only historically pertinent to Rome's style of execution, but more importantly, it illustrates the seriousness of sin. Finally, if Jesus did not die publicly then people could claim that he didn't really die (and therefore he didn't really resurrect from the dead).
  - When soldiers at war die for their fellow soldiers we call them heroes and applaud their "sacrifice." We thank them for "spilling their blood." In these cases we don't claim that the soldiers' death was "offensive." Likewise, why can't we say that Jesus is a "hero" and applaud his "sacrifice" for the world?
3. "If Jesus is God, then why didn't he just come out and claim it?"
  - The Jewish culture would understand "God" without any distinction between Father, Son, and Spirit (as Christians do). If Jesus explicitly claimed to be God to a Jewish audience, then he would commit blasphemy (Mk 2.1-12).

- Jesus must make implicit claims to divine status because explicit claims would be misinterpreted to mean he is the same Person as God (the Father; cf. John 1.1 where this is a distinction made between God and the Word); again, Jews would not distinguish between God the Father and God the Son as Christians do.
- From a Christian understanding when Jesus refers to "God" he is referring to God the Father thereby distinguishing between the persons of the Trinity.
- What Jesus makes implicit (Mk 2.1-12: forgive sins; Jn 8.58: self-existence; Mt 5: "It has been said," "but I said to you") the Apostle Paul (Jesus shares the same authority, honor, and glory as the Father in light of Christian practices such as prayer, baptism, Lord's Supper, hymns) and later New Testament authors make Jesus' divine nature more explicit (e.g., John 1:1, 1:14; 14.6-14; 17.24; Hebrews 1:3; 1.6).

4. "One person cannot be both divine and human. It does not make sense to believe that Jesus is fully and wholly divine and human."

- In order for a person to make this claim he or she must know what it means to be "divine." If they don't know what "constitutes" divinity, then how can they claim that God can't add human nature to his divine person? (For example, some may contend that there is no such geometrical figure as a square-circle but we know what a square is and what a circle is, but surely we cannot claim to "know" what humanity is and especially what constitutes "divinity.")
- If God exists within (immanent and personal) but also necessarily outside (transcendent and infinite) of our four-dimensional world (length, width, height, time) then isn't it possible that He transcends our "four-dimensional logic" as well? We are not suggesting that Jesus' divine and human natures are illogical, but rather a mystery, or perhaps a paradox.
- There are theological reasons for postulating Jesus' divine nature such as (1) a finite person could not bear the penalty of sins, (2) salvation is from the Lord (Jonah 2.9), and (3) a true mediator between God and man implies Jesus' divinity (1 Tim 2.5).

5. "The Apostle Paul is the true founder of Christianity—not Jesus. Paul corrupted Jesus' teachings and made him into a divine-human messenger."

- The resurrection "compelled" the disciples to (re)consider Jesus' status. Prior to the resurrection they regarded him as a teacher, prophet, miracle-worker, and Messiah. The resurrection, however, made the disciples search for words and titles (e.g., "Son of God") to explain Jesus' identity.
- Paul became acquainted with Jesus and his teaching in three ways. First, Paul met the resurrected Jesus (Acts 9.1-9; 1 Cor 9.1-2). Second, Paul received revelation from Jesus himself (Gal 1.16-17). Third, Paul received "Jesus tradition" from the disciples (Gal 1.18-19; Acts 9.26-30). Thus, Paul was in a good position to know about Jesus.
- Paul and disciples reached a general consensus concerning Jesus' nature. Paul did not create his own doctrine concerning Jesus' nature. Rather, his Christology is based on his own religious experiences with Jesus himself and interaction with Jesus' disciples.
- Paul uses "binitarian" language (Jesus shares the same authority, honor, and glory as the Father in light of Christian practices such as prayer, baptism, Lord's Supper, hymns). Later, New Testament authors make Jesus' divine nature more explicit (e.g., John's Gospel, Hebrews). This language, however, came about after Paul met Jesus, received revelation from Jesus, received "Jesus tradition" from the disciples, and reached a general consensus with the disciples concerning Jesus' nature.

### Part Three: Religion

1. "Religion is either a reflection of one's culture or a by-product of one's culture. Consequently, it is relative to one's culture rather than possessing absolute or universal religious truth."

- Due to their historical and social contexts it is true that religions possess cultural elements, but it does not follow that they are not making transcendent, ultimate, and universal truth claims. If you ask Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, and Sikhs they will tell you that they believe that they are making transcendent, ultimate, and universal claims.
- A person who reflects this position is "assuming" that a supernatural or ultimate being or reality cannot exist. This person would have to be omniscient to know (for sure) that such a being or supernatural reality cannot exist. (If they say they are "agnostic," then they cannot defend their position with confidence.)
- Furthermore, the person who makes this claim may also be guilty of the same accusation he or she is charging others with. For instance, we may reply to

this person that their claim ("religion is either a reflection of one's culture or a by-product of one's culture") is also a reflection of his or her own culture as well. If this is true, then he or she cannot claim that religions are cultural because in order to make this claim they need to possess universal, absolute, and transcendent truth or knowledge.

- Many religions trace origins to a historical context. Christianity, for instance, is based on Jesus. What is important to note is that the earliest followers of Christ proclaimed their message in relation to Christ's teaching, way of living, and resurrection. The earliest followers believed that Jesus resurrected from the dead; it is this belief (centered on a historical event; see 1 Cor 15:3f) that encouraged and "compelled" them to share their testimonies about Jesus (establishing Christianity) and eventually led to their martyrdom.
- In short, if Jesus resurrected from the dead, then it is highly unlikely that Christianity is a mere reflection or by-product of one's culture because the nature of such an event (a resurrected person) transcends time, space, and cultures.

2. "Due to the nature of religious experiences (they are different than everyday sense experiences of sight, smell, hearing, etc.) they should not be regarded as trustworthy and genuine. These experiences are examples of 'wishful fulfillments.' Furthermore, Christians should not claim that their religious experiences (e.g., they experience the Triune God during worship) are trustworthy and true while the experiences of other religious followers are invalid and false."

- To begin with, this claim could be suggesting that there is a distinction between a "physical" and "spiritual" way of using our senses. However, we use the same mechanism (our senses) to interpret our world and reality whether it refers to a tree, mountain, book, car, God, or some ultimate reality.
- In general, we should be able to trust our sense experiences unless we are experiencing a physical injury (e.g., eyes, ears, brain, etc.), psychological impairment (we have "lost touch" with reality), hallucination (e.g., drunk, drugs), temporary sense limitation (e.g., weary, headache, hungry, weak, just woke up, thirsty, sick, etc.), a change brought upon by the environment (e.g., it's raining, snowing, sun shining in our eyes, walking in a desert, a reed appears to "bend" in the stream, my reflection in the water/mirror, etc.) or environmental change (e.g., our "normal" sense perceptions were "designed" for earth, but will not "function" properly if we landed on another planet).

- How does a person know that religious experiences are examples of "wishful fulfillments?" In order for them to claim this he or she must also "know" that God or some ultimate reality does not exist.
- In contrast to the religious experiences of other faith members, Christians may claim that their experiences are valid in the following manner. (Christians do not need to "prove" that their experiences are valid and others religious experiences are "invalid." Rather, Christians must explain or provide an explanation for the different religious experiences.) First, Christians believe that sin has radically affected everyone (knowledge of God has been lost, God's truth is distorted, image of God has been defaced) (Eccl 7.20; Ps. 14.1; Jer 17.9; Rom 3.9-20). Sin negatively affects how human beings (mis)interpret God and their religious experiences.

Second, Christians contend that spiritual warfare also plays a role in deceiving people into believing that they are experiencing the ultimate reality (Eph 6.11-18). Satan and his followers (demons) manipulate, distort, and masquerade the truth so that people mistaken their understanding and experience of the "ultimate reality" to be genuine and true (Mk 4.15; Jn 8.44; 2 Cor 11.14; Gal 1.8; 1 Pet 5.8).

Third, Christians maintain that Holy Spirit "regenerates" us (we are spiritually born again and saved, our spiritual "eyes" see and "ears" hear God) and provides enlightenment, truth, illumination for understanding and experiencing God (Mt 3.11; Jn 3.5; 14.17, 26-27; 16.5-16; Acts 1.8; Rom 8.26; Eph 5.18). God's image (which was previously "defaced and "broken") is now being restored and renewed in Christ (Eph 4.24; Col 3.10). On the other hand, other religious followers have not experienced the Spirit's work in their lives in the same capacity.

Fourth, Christian scriptures (Old and New Testament) also provide enlightenment, truth, and illumination for Christians thereby testifying to the truthfulness of their relationship and experiences with God (Ex 19.16; 32.16; Ps 12.6; 119; 2 Tim 3.16-17; Heb 4.12). Other faith traditions do not "use" the Christian scriptures in the same manner.

- In summary, Christians may claim that their experiences are valid because (a) our sense experiences should be trusted under normal conditions and (b) the Holy Spirit, Christian scriptures, renewing/restoring of God's image have overcome the distortion of truth.

3. "Don't all religions teach us the same things, that is, to be a good person?"

- Good morals are usually a by-product of these religions, but not the essence of their teachings. To summarize them in this fashion is to not do them justice because they all address the "spiritual" condition of humanity and provide answers in different ways.
- If you place a Buddhist, Christian, Jew, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu in the same room and informed them that they could walk out if they agreed on humanity's spiritual problem/answer no one would be able to leave due to their different worldviews. Thus, religions (at their central core) do not have the same teachings.
- Religions also differ as to the "ultimate goal" of each respective faith. For instance, Christianity postulates heaven while Buddhists strive for nirvana. Some religions maintain a future reincarnation, while others contend for a bodily resurrection. Some religions teach a universal salvation/liberation while others teach a limited number of people will be saved/liberated.

4. "There has been a great deal of "evil" done in the name of Jesus Christ. Christians, for instance, are responsible for an 'imperialistic' mentality towards other cultures. How can you believe in a religion that has promoted such hostile attitudes towards the 'other?'"

- Concerning "violent acts" and "atrocities" committed in the "name of Jesus" these "Christians" were not living like "true" Christians. Christians who have committed these horrible crimes are sinners and evil people irregardless of class, gender, or religion.
- Christians should acknowledge the "sins committed in the name of Jesus." We should agree that acts and crimes against humanity are wrong. We should also agree that many missionaries have "distorted" various cultures as well with our "Western" and/or "Christian" view of culture.
- Admittedly, what a person believes—in this case a Christian affects what he or she does. However, the action does not necessarily nullify (nor necessarily confirm) the truthfulness or falseness of a particular belief. (We should not assume there is a direct one-to-one correlation between thought and practice. Human behavior is more complex and there are many factors involved.) It's a fallacy to judge a belief to be true or false in light of someone's (bad or good) behavior.
- On the other hand, if you are going to "count" evil deeds and postulate that it encourages violence and injustice, then you should also "count" the good deeds done in the name of Christ as well. Christians have built more

hospitals, opened up more schools for education, and provided more for the "needy" than other religions of the world. (This point is not to brag or be arrogant. Rather, it's to point out that Christians have also done a lot of "good" for the world too.)

- Finally, while Christianity is a "religion," it is about a relationship. Christians are not following a religion per se, but following Christ. And while morality and ethics are an important topic within Christianity many people become "Christians" not because of the "good deeds" done, but rather, they acknowledge a spiritual condition (sin and separated from God; Rom 3.23; 6.23) and solution (Jesus offers forgiveness and reconciliation with God; Jn 3.16; 14.6; Rom 5.11; 2 Cor 5.18-19).

5. "Christianity cannot address the 'human condition' because all meta-narratives are dead."

- This postmodern statement itself is a "meta-narrative" (it seeks to provide a universal truth that speaks to the "human condition," namely, that all meta-narratives are dead). In their disdain for the Enlightenment project for providing neutral, objective, and universal truths have not postmodernists merely substituted their own criterion?
- This objection is based on questionable postmodern foundations
  1. Truth (or everything) is relative. However, this very statement is meaningless because it is asserting a truth about something and yet at the same time denying that such a truth can exist.
  2. The "Death of the Author" (no one can speak authoritatively). The identity and purposes of an author is irrelevant to the meaning of the text and thus their authority is undermined. However, if this is true, then the person making this (authoritative) claim ("all meta-narratives are dead") is also "dead" (his/her identity and purpose for writing this particular view is irrelevant) as well.
  3. "There is nothing outside a text" (all we have are our interpretations of interpretations of interpretations, *ad infinitum*). Thus, there is no objective reality outside of the text that can "control" or "determine" the meaning of the text. This statement ("there is nothing outside a text"), if true, then is also an interpretation of an interpretation and cannot "control" or "determine" meaning as well. If this is true, then how can it provide justification for its own merit? On the other hand, if God exists, then He exists outside all texts and can control and determine the meaning.

4. Hermeneutics of Suspicion: Within each text there are "power plays at work" underlining the author's ideas and words. Thus, texts have consciously or subconsciously supported or promoted a particular line of thought or viewpoint. In brief, this position argues that we subjugate or control the "other" (anyone not associated with privileged status such as minority races, women, homosexuals, etc.). However, this notion of "suspicion" is self-refuting because they too, may be writing, speaking, teaching from a "privileged position" and "consciously" or "unconsciously" promoting their particular viewpoint in order to define and establish "their brand of truth and meaning." Could we not also assert that these authors, professors, and culture critics undermine the very position they wish to establish?
5. All "narratives" have many readings and are "true" (in some sense). Briefly, this view asserts that empowering the reader is important because he/she is (now) free to create their own meaning and interpret the text according to their perspective. This understanding of many readings being "true" appears to be false, however, in light of "narratives" concerning the afterlife. For instance, we only have a few options including (a) annihilation, (b) reincarnation, (c) spiritual resurrection, and (d) bodily resurrection. How does empowering the reader lead to truth if all of these respective options are not viable at the same time and in the same relationship at the point of death?
- If Jesus resurrected from the dead, then Christianity is a meta-narrative.
6. "I'm a religious pluralist. I believe that many rivers lead into one ocean. Jesus cannot be the only way to God/salvation/liberation. This belief is bias, narrow-minded, and arrogant."
- First of all, let's address the issue of religious pluralism. If religious pluralism is true (all "ethical" religions lead to salvation/liberation), then all world religions (e.g., Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, etc.) are wrong (since none of these religions would agree that all "ethical" religions lead to salvation/liberation in light of their respective teachings and practices).
  - It's also important to note that the different religious traditions possess conflicting truth claims concerning the ultimate reality, the spiritual condition of humanity, the answer to humanity's condition, and the nature of the afterlife. If the various religious doctrines contradict one another then how is it possible that all of them are right at the same time and in the same relationship? (Perhaps one could be correct, but not all of them.) We need to ask those who believe in religious pluralism for their justification for

believing it to be true. For example, do they base their reasoning on an ethical criterion, scriptural revelation, and/or spiritual experience?

- It is simple "logic" to reject those beliefs that are incompatible with one's belief system. For instance, I believe that water is composed of one atom of oxygen bound to two atoms of hydrogen, but you believe that water is composed of three atoms of oxygen bound to three atoms of hydrogen. Doesn't simple "logic" compel me to reject your understanding of what properties constitute water? Are people accused of being "arrogant," "bias," and/or "narrow-minded" for believing that water is composed of one atom of oxygen bound to two atoms of hydrogen?
- Couldn't we also say that religious pluralists are just as "arrogant," "bias," and "narrow-minded" as Christians because they are claiming to "know" the truth? The very claim of "religious pluralism" is also a religious truth claim (all ethical religions will lead to salvation/liberation). Pluralists, not only Christians, also claim to "know" what is true.
- Also, don't you as a pluralist reject my view (Jesus is the only way to be reconciled to God and forgiven) as a Christian? If it is permissible for you to reject my religious truth claim (and not be regarded as "arrogant," "bias," and "narrow-minded"), then it should also be permissible for me to reject your religious truth claim as well without such accusations.
- Regarding Christianity in general and Christology in particular, Jesus is the most unique person to have ever lived (virgin birth, fully and completely divine/human, morally perfect, died on the cross for sinners, resurrected from the dead, our advocate against false accusations, and makes intercession for his people).
- If Jesus lived a perfect life and died on the cross as a perfect sacrifice, then only through Jesus can we be forgiven (his perfect life of obedience—his righteousness is accredited to us and his death pays the price for our sins) and reconciled to God because God's holy standard can only accept a perfect sacrifice for the payment of sins (see 2 Cor 5.21).
- If Jesus was raised from the dead, then he is unique (like no one else) and possesses God's (the Father's) "stamp of approval" on his life, teaching, and service. Some of Jesus' claims include John 14.6: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no one can come to the Father through Me." (cf. Mt 11.27-30; Mk 2.1-12; Jn 4.13-14; 5.24-27; 6.35-40; 10.7-10) Jesus speaks

with ultimate authority and truth and he clearly and universally teaches that salvation is found in him alone.

- Jesus' resurrection demonstrates that he has conquered sin and death. However, we know that only "God" can conquer sin and death. Thus, the early followers of Jesus came to the realization that Jesus, too, in some mysterious way must also be "divine." (The New Testament teaches first implicitly, then explicitly that Jesus is divine.)

#### **Part Four: Science**

##### 1. "All that exists is composed of material entities."

- Where did all of these "entities" come from? (Most likely, they will assert that it ultimately came from the Big Bang. The Big Bang is the effect of something and needs a cause. What or who created the Big Bang? (You may claim that science cannot answer this question.) Whatever (or whoever) created the Big Bang must exist outside of our universe, and is perhaps even eternal.
- How did the origin of life begin? (Most likely, they will discuss some primordial "soup" where life was created.) However, how can we get "life" from "non-life?" If non-life cannot create life then how can we explain "life's origin?" Does this not suggest something "living" is the cause of the origin of life in our universe?
- Would you please explain how "materialism" (the belief that all that exists is composed of "material" entities) can explain and account for complex things such as human personality, consciousness, creativity, behaviorism, depravity, and spirituality?
- If Jesus resurrected from the dead, then for this one instance, the universe was not closed. If Jesus resurrected from the dead, then all that exist is not composed of material entities.

##### 2. "In contrast to Christian theology, science is the true interpretation of reality because its hypothesis and theories can be tested."

- John Polkinghorne suggests, however, that science and Christian theology have similar methodologies in their approach to interpreting reality and truth. Both science (light as wave and particle) and theology (Jesus' death and resurrection) have moments of radical revision in which new phenomena lead to new insights.

- Both science (Bohr's theory of the hydrogen atom) and theology (discussing the nature of Jesus in purely human categories) have periods of confusion in which old and new ideas stand side by side in unresolved tension.
  - Both science (modern quantum theory) and theology (Trinity at Nicea and Constantinople, Christology at Chalcedon) reach a new synthesis and understanding in which a theory is revealed.
  - Both science (measurement problem in quantum theory) and theology (hypostatic union: kenosis, inspiration, degree) continue to wrestle with unsolved problems.
  - It is important to note that science itself has had its own share of paradigm shifts throughout its long history (as noted above).
3. "Evolution is a testable model but Christianity's belief that God created the universe and Earth cannot be tested and therefore not verifiable."
- Some would contend that evolution is not testable and not verifiable because its present findings are not reliable due to its "dating" methodologies (e.g., carbon dating), problematic interpretations (e.g., the majority of the fossil record for "hominids" consist of small pieces and portions rather than full and complete fossils), and lack of information (a universal flood would radically alter our interpretation of the geological record).
  - Others would argue that it can be tested and offer a "working model" (e.g., Rana and Ross, *Origins of Life*, 43-44).
    1. Life appeared early in Earth's history while the planet was still in its primordial state (*Gen 1.2*)
    2. Life originated in and persisted through the hostile conditions of early Earth (*Gen 1.2*)
    3. Life originates abruptly.
    4. Earth's first life displays complexity.
    5. Life is complex in its minimal form.
    6. Life's chemistry displays the hallmark characteristics of design.

7. First life was qualitatively different from life that came into existence on creation days three (plants), five (marine invertebrate and fish, marine mammals, and birds), and six (specialized land mammals).

- God's is by nature invisible (He is a spirit) and thus you cannot "test" his existence in a "scientific" manner. One can only see the effect of something (e.g., creation) and infer God as the cause due to his nature. However, it is a categorical fallacy to claim God does not exist because his very nature transcends the category itself.

4. "How can Christians believe in Genesis 1 (the "days of creation") when it is contradicted by current scientific evidence?"

- Two of the three "Christian" positions on science and Genesis (progressive creationism and theistic evolution) do not interpret the "days" of Genesis in a literal manner. They note that "day" could be interpreted literally or figuratively (long periods of time or eons). Moreover, both agree with the current astronomical findings regarding the old age of the universe and earth. Although progressive theism rejects "evolution" (life cannot be traced to a common ancestor, species multiply according to their own kind) theistic evolution agrees that evolution is a secondary mechanism for creating the world (God being the primary one). Both would hold to a relatively old age for modern humans as well (old earth theism: 10,000-100,000; theistic evolution: 40,000-250,000 years ago).

One of the primary differences in dating between these two views is that progressive creationism may seek to identify when humanity shows definitive evidence that they were created in God's image (e.g., worship relics found have been dated between 8,000 to 24,000 years ago) and theistic evolution includes tool use, burial practices, art, and music as definitive signs of spirituality for human beings.

- In particular, some advocates of progressive creationism maintain that God created the heavens and the earth in Genesis 1.1 and interpret the rest of the creation days from the vantage point of above the surface of the water while looking up towards the sky and across the horizons. Thus, the formless and void of Genesis 1.2 refers to the gases and cooling off of the earth (hence the human observer could not see earth). Thus, when light is created (Gen 1.4) it's not referring to when God created the sun, moon, and stars. Rather, it refers to when the sun, moon, and stars were now able to be seen.
- On the other hand, some progressive creationists believe that Genesis 1 is "poetic" in nature and should not be interpreted literally since the biblical

worldview predated modern science. Hence, the "days" of *Genesis* provide the reader with a "framework" to understand God's creation (e.g., day one, day two, day three, etc.) with the seventh day symbolically meaning "very good" (seven means complete in Hebrew). Moreover, this view observes many reasons for rejecting a "literal" interpretation of the "days" in *Genesis* 1 (erroneous chronology, symmetrical natural of the account, similarity of pattern with ancient Near East cosmologies, metaphoric/anthropomorphic language).

- In contrast to these two views, a young earth creationist believes that the "days" in *Genesis* should be interpreted literally and therefore does contradict current scientific findings. The most natural interpretation of "day" is a twenty-four hour time period. Regarding the age of the universe and earth many would contend that the dating methods employed by most scientists are flawed. Concerning the geological timetable if one holds to a universal flood then we should not expect to find "correct" measurements or dating conclusions as well.
- In summary, although all three positions cannot be correct, all three may be classified as "Christian views." Progressive creationism agrees with much of the scientific data (e.g., geology, astronomy) and theistic evolution combines the belief of God with evolution. Consequently, the challenge of interpreting the "days of *Genesis*" does not constitute a problem for being a follow of Christ (Rom 10.13).

### **Part Five: Morality, Evil, and the Bible**

1. "There are no such things as absolute, objective, and universal morals"
  - In contrast to this view, C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* argued for a universal moral law.
  - There must be a universal moral law, or else
    1. Moral disagreements would make no sense (they demand standards)
    2. All moral criticism would be meaningless (is something better or worse?)
    3. It is unnecessary to keep promises or treaties (we assume that it is)
    4. We would not make excuses for breaking the moral law (we all do)
  - The moral law is not human instinct
    1. Stronger impulse would always win but it does not
    2. We sometimes act selflessly rather than from instinct (when we help)
    3. Instincts would then always be right (but sometimes they are wrong)

- The moral law is not social convention
    1. Same moral laws can be found in all societies (a coward is not virtuous)
    2. Can't make judgments about social progress if society were the basis of judgment
  - Other Problems: This position implies that "Everything is Relative"
    1. Self-refuting (can't prove it's right if it too is relative)
    2. Absolute statement (nothing can be "everything" if it's relative)
2. "It's not fair for us to be held responsible for Adam's sin."
- Some believe that we do not inherit Adam's sinful nature. If you are one of them, that's fine, but are you less than perfect from a moral standpoint? If so, then may we not say that you will be judged for your own sins anyway?
  - Perhaps your objection is rooted in your/our culture of individualism? Some countries, for instance, in Asia and the Middle East, believe in "solidarity" where the group takes precedence over the individual.
  - Concerning this notion of "representation" and "solidarity" it occurs in other contexts as well. For example, in the United States, children born outside the United States may be granted US citizenship if their parents possess US citizenship.
  - While one could argue in theory that it's not "fair" to inherit Adam's sinful nature, I would counter that it's not "fair" for one man (Jesus) to pay the penalty for our sins and die in our place as well. In short, your claim of "Adam's sin" being unfair is countered by God's grace and mercy at the cross (Rom 5.12-21). Thus, the question still remains, "Do you believe that you have sinned and need to put your trust in Christ for the forgiveness of your sins?"
3. "How can anyone believe in an all-powerful and all-loving God when so much evil and suffering exists in the world?"
- This question implies that this person has more knowledge and wisdom than God in light of "running the universe." How can a finite human being, however, understand the plans of an infinite and transcendent God?
  - Furthermore, this view suggests that because evil is not yet destroyed then God cannot or will not destroy it. Christians reject this assumption and may argue that because God is all-powerful and all-loving, then God can and will defeat evil in the future (at Christ's second coming).

- If God was to destroy evil today, then Jesus would be returning to judge humanity. God's decision to not "wipe out" evil (yesterday, for instance) may also be interpreted as a sign of His grace because God is providing more opportunity for people to repent and be saved (2 Pet. 3.9).
  - Interestingly, for a person "outside of the Christian faith" to ask God to destroy evil is in essence to ask God to judge him or her for their sins. In short, to ask God to destroy evil (now) from a "non-believer" standpoint is to ask God to judge them now.
  - Although evil and suffering appears to be senseless there are a few reasons for God allowing "some" evil and suffering. Sometimes God allows "evil and suffering" as an act of judgment (e.g., the Flood, Babylon used to punish Israel). Furthermore, the existence of evil also testifies to the brevity of life—we need to repent for we never know how long we have to live. Finally, some (e.g., Joseph, Naomi, Job, Apostle Paul) bring God more glory in light of how they deal with their suffering and pain.
4. "God's response to evil is too slow and capricious."
- God created human beings with the capacity to sin or not to sin. The presence of evil in the world is due to the free will of humans and consequences of the fall. (Thus God is indirectly but not directly responsible for the origin of human evil.) Although this is not the best world (heaven) it is the best way (allowing humans the free will to choose, mature, develop character, persevere, etc.) to the best world.
  - But why does God "wait" and allow so much evil? Why does it take six million Jews, for instance, to die in order for God to "stop" evil? Isn't one million deaths enough for God to respond to our cries? In humanity's "darkest moments" wicked people cause suffering at an enormous level. God is "patiently waiting" for human beings to work with Him in order to destroy evil. In this case (Nazi Germany during World War II) it did, contrary to our understanding, take six million deaths in order to respond to the crisis. (In other words, we "complain" that God didn't act fast enough and yet humanity in general, was "slow" to act as well to the evils perpetrated during WWII.)
  - God's answer to sin was to send the Messiah. Thus, to understand the importance of God's answer to evil we must know who the Messiah is, what the Messiah did, does, and will do. In brief, the Messiah is Jesus, he lived a perfect life, died on a cross, and offers salvation to humanity. Jesus is our advocate and Great High Priest interceding for his people. As King he

spiritually reigns in the heavens and in our hearts, but will one day physically set foot on earth to destroy evil.

- The Messiah's death and resurrection paves the way for defeating evil in four ways. (1) The Messiah received a glorified body and so will we. Thus, there will be no cancer, no HIV, no blindness, no Alzheimer, and so forth for those with glorified bodies. (2) Those in Christ are no longer slaves to sin for its power has been broken. Eventually, we will be in heaven, in God's presence, and thus not on earth where sin is proliferated throughout the world. (3) The Messiah has given Satan and his demons a fatal blow to the head; both will be judged and thrown into the lake of fire—never to tempt, lie, and “control/influence” people again. (4) Creation is groaning and natural disasters (hurricanes, tsunamis, fires) wreak havoc on humanity (Rom 8.18-25). However, with the Messiah's resurrection he initiated a global transformation in the universal physical world; like humanity, the world is waiting for the Messiah to reveal himself again. In short, creation will be recreated, redeemed, and restored at Christ's return and thus earthquakes, fires, tsunamis, hurricanes, will no longer cause human affliction.
  - God, our Father, can empathize with us because He knows how it feels to lose a “son.” He had to watch “helplessly” as his Son, the Messiah, was led to his painful and suffering death. Furthermore, the Father knows what it feels like to see an innocent victim suffer and die at the hands of evil perpetrators.
  - Finally, let's not forget that human beings have also been given the responsibility and challenge to “stamp out” evil. (Taken in this sense, God works in, with, and through humanity to “wipe out” evil.) For example, we can use political means (e.g., ending slavery), make medical/technological advances (treating diseases, performing operations), and provide comfort (e.g., love, mercy, counseling) for those suffering.
5. “If God is love, then why is there an eternal hell? Wouldn't it be more loving if God simply 'annihilated' people?”
- While God is love, He is also holy (He has a perfect moral standard). One consequence of God's holiness is that He cannot tolerate imperfection (the Bible calls this “sin”) and thus He must judge sin.
  - Let's set up an analogous situation and assume (for argument's sake) that there is a “guilty” person (we have undisputed evidence including eyewitnesses, DNA testing, technological recordings, etc.) who premeditated the torture and murder of five people. The jury and judge, however, allow

the "guilty" person to be set free without any prison time, community service, or psychological rehabilitation (the person does not suffer from any psychological problems and has been pronounced "fit" for the trial) because the jury and judge felt compassion for the person because he never felt loved as a child. Do we think justice has been served?

- It is true that a finite sin against a finite person (I steal from someone) deserves a finite punishment (temporal; "eye for an eye"). However, if a person's sin is ultimately against God (and not another human being), then is it not possible to categorize this as an "eternal" and "infinite" sin against God's majesty? If so, then it makes sense to argue that an eternal hell is predicated on the notion of an "eternal" and "infinite" sin against God.
- No one is in hell that does not want to be there. They have chosen this path instead of the other path prescribed by in the Bible. God is impartial and will only send people to hell who not only want to be there (they have rejected God for their entire life; it's now too late to choose the "heavenly" route after they have arrived in "hell) but they also deserve to be there because of the consequences of their sin and God's holiness.
- Perhaps you still think God is unfair for sending some to hell as a general principle, but let's make it pragmatic and personal, right now. Rather than focusing on God's judgment and hell we should also consider His mercy (God withholding the judgment we deserve) as well. At the cross both holiness and mercy come together as God pours out his wrath on His son who becomes our substitute for our sins.

6. "Your God is immoral and/or too vengeful. We should not trust and obey a God that sends a flood to judge the whole earth, rains burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah, and commands his people to take the lives of all the Canaanites."

- We need to first begin with the idea of God's holiness. Because God is holy He has an absolute and perfect standard for morality. When people fail to live up to this perfect and absolute standard the Bible calls it "sin." Every sin deserves punishment. Also, God is majestic, that is, He is magnificent. God's very being is absolutely and completely full of splendor, brilliance, and grandeur. Sin may be viewed as an "attack" upon God's majesty. Hence, when God punishes sin, He is also "restoring" his majesty.
- In the above examples, God gave the people a chance to repent and change their ways. The very fact that God did not judge the earth by flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, and Canaan immediately testifies to His mercy of withholding judgment. God is not immoral in these instances because they were guilty

and their sins were an abomination to God (Gen 6.1-7; 18.16-33; the Canaanites were known in history for their wickedness).

- God was very patient and long suffering towards the "evil" and "sin" in light of human wickedness during Noah's time, Sodom and Gomorrah, and Canaanites. Because we can only catch a "glimpse" of God's holiness (via our own experience of a tainted "moral goodness") we cannot understand how "painful," "distressing," "anguishing," etc. it is for God, who is holy, to "sit back" and observe sin without punishment.
- Furthermore, God's majesty was insulted by the sins committed during Noah's time, Sodom and Gomorrah, and Canaanites. Because we cannot understand God's majesty, we have no idea how offensive it is for creatures to consistently and continuously outrage God's majesty. Thus, when God "judges" in these examples it appears to be a "whimsical" or "knee-jerk" response, but in actuality His decision to judge demonstrates His patience (it has been a "long time coming"), holiness, and majesty.

7. "Slavery is unjust and yet the God of Christianity permits the nation of Israel and Christians to have slaves."

- First and foremost, slavery as an institution (e.g., slave trade with Africa) should be condemned. Anytime a person is under the "ownership" of another, deprived of their personal freedom/liberties, and forced to perform services we should vehemently oppose such a practice. The Bible, however, does not support such a practice.
- In the Old Testament, there were two kinds of slaves including a "prisoner of war" and an Israelite who "sold himself" to raise money. Concerning the latter, the underlining purpose was to help the poor not for "slave owners" to get rich and wealthy. Furthermore, it was a voluntary decision (not forced upon by another) that an Israelite entered into this agreement. In addition, a slave could own his own property (a traditional understanding of slavery gives all property to the owner). A slave could work for only a maximum of six years (but they could buy their freedom earlier), had one day off to rest (Ex 20.10), and could be set free if he was mistreated (e.g., hit with a rod leaving an injury; Ex 21.20-27; Lev 25.44-46). In short, this kind of slavery ("selling oneself") is radically different than the "traditional" understanding of slavery.
- Regarding the former, non-Israelites slaves (prisoners of war) were "permanent slaves" of the Israelites (if they were willing) with the same rules of rest, mistreatment, and potential release (if harmed) applied to

- them as well. Interestingly, Duet 25.47 teaches that these non-Israelites could gain wealth and even have an Israelite as a slave who sold himself to the "alien." Leviticus 19:34 and Deuteronomy 10:19 also declare that Israelites should treat these non-Israelite slaves as if they were Israelites themselves. Again, the practice of having non-Israelite slaves is not similar to the "traditional" understanding of slavery.
- Duet 23.15 teaches that a runaway slave from another country should find freedom and sanctuary in the land of Israel and not returned to the land from which he fled. Again, no such "practice" existed in our traditional understanding of slavery.
  - For "slavery" in the New Testament we must discover what slavery was like under Roman rule. There are several observations worth mentioning (1) Any discussion about slavery is complex because of the variety of ways it was practiced. (2) Slaves lived in a variety of settings from dormitories to under the same roof as their owners to material environments (for highest class). (3) The law restricted the slave owner's treatment of slaves. (4) Slaves had the right of legal recourse (to represent themselves in a court of law, bring charges against their owners for mistreatment, request asylum). (5) Slaves could own property, make legal transactions, manage their owner's property, and own their own slaves. (6) It has been estimated that two to three million people were slaves (30% to 40% of the total population). Many of these slaves were infants, children, and elderly. (7) Given such a high percentage of "needy" slaves it would be unwise to simply "free all slaves" (social services would never be able to cope with such a social crisis) during this time. On the contrary, it would be wiser to "end" the "slavery" of the Roman rule through the gradual and progressive improvement of the slaves' privileges, rights, property, wealth, and status.
  - In conclusion, the "practice" of slavery that existed in the Old and New Testament was radically different than our "traditional" understanding of slavery.

### **Part Six: Personal**

1. "People at church are hypocrites."
  - What is a hypocrite? A hypocrite is someone who believes in some kind of standard and yet fails (sometimes) to reach this standard. Taken in this sense, isn't everyone a hypocrite? (Don't we all fall short of our own standards?) So, how would you be different?

- Yes, people at church are hypocrites (use the above explanation). In fact, that is why we need Jesus; we are not perfect and fall short of God's perfect moral standard. Consequently, we will incur God's judgment (since He is holy and must judge imperfection). But Jesus wasn't a hypocrite (he did not sin), loves you so much that he paid the price for your sins (remember, all of us our hypocrites). Look to Christ not Christians.
- If everyone is a "hypocrite," and if all "hypocrites" are sinners, and if the church is for sinners, then it appears that the church is also for hypocrites. Since everyone is a hypocrite it seems that church is for everyone.

2. "People who believe in God are weak(er)—they need a 'spiritual crutch' to live. God fulfills their emotional need."

- To begin with, many people affirm that belief in God, the Bible, in Jesus is rational faith (not blind faith). Blind faith is to jump out of a building on fire without knowing there is something to catch your fall. (You jump without considering the consequences.) Rational faith says there are good reasons to believe that we will be safe if we jump out of the burning building (there are firemen below, there is a safety net, others testify that they jumped down and are "safe," etc.) Thus, it's not necessarily a "weakness"; rather believing in Christ may be an example of "reasonable faith/belief."
- Are you presently in a relationship? Been married? Had a past girl/boyfriend before? Did/Does this relationship exist primarily because of an "emotional need?" Or is being "emotionally fulfilled" a by-product of being in a relationship? While we do not believe in God solely exists to fulfill our emotional needs (our primary need is spiritual) we acknowledge that having an intimate and dynamic relationship with God also provides us with emotional support and peace.
- By using the same logic, could we not (hypothetically) turn this argument against the other person? "People who do not believe in God are not as rational as those that do—they do not evaluate all the evidence for His existence." Or, "People who do not believe in God are full of arrogance and pride—they need to protect their 'egos' in order to fulfill their selfish needs." Or, "People who do not believe in God are running scared—they need an excuse to deny God's holiness because they are afraid of what God says about us ('we are sinners')."
- Who would postulate such a God that Christianity believes in? In other words, if you created a God would you create beliefs such as the Trinity, the complete and full divine and human nature of Christ co-existing in one

person, God's holiness, God's judgment, hell as everlasting punishment? If I am so "weak" then I would be more inclined to create a "softer" God.

- This argument is similar to the idea that it is permissible for children to have imaginary friends, but it's not wise for adults to have an imaginary friend (God). However, we "know" that our child's imaginary friend does not exist, but the same case cannot be made against the existence of God.

3. "I'm a good person. I haven't needed God before and have done fine by myself. Why would I need Him now?"

- How did you reach this conclusion that you are "good?" Where did your standard of "goodness" come from? If it's from your own standard then isn't that a "relative goodness?" (Mk 10:17-31) How can you explain how society reaches the conclusion that certain actions and behaviors are "good" and others are "bad?"
- While I don't doubt your "goodness" this goodness is a "relative goodness" and when measured with God's "absolute" and "perfect" goodness it falls short of God's standard of absolute goodness. Jesus taught that murder, for instance, is not just taking the life of another person. Rather, murder is also having thoughts of "anger" towards that person (Mt 5.21-22). Furthermore, to be innocent of a particular crime ("thou shall not murder") is not enough. We must be totally righteous as well (to provide and protect the sanctity of life). In other words, not only do you need to not transgress God's moral law (all the time), but you must fulfill its righteousness (all the time) as well.
- I don't deny that non-Christians can be just as or more moral and ethical than Christians. I don't deny that non-Christians can be just as or more moral than Christians without reading or obeying the Bible. However, isn't it possible that this goodness and morality is, nevertheless, a result of God's grace and being created in His image? If this is theoretically possible, then would be wise to investigate as to whether "this God" exists or not?
- God's existence is not premised on whether you have lived a "good and moral life." God exists irrespectively also of your car, finances, and status. Perhaps success and finances aren't the most important/ultimate needs in life? What about spiritual needs?

4. "I want to be spiritual, not religious" (postmodern spirituality); I don't need a religious organization (church) to help me grow spiritually (they have too many rules to follow and inhibit my spiritual freedom)."

- Admittedly, churches could and should be more "spiritual," that is, to be more "open" to the person, presence, and power of the Spirit. Churches should consider, for instance, the role of "spiritual disciplines" (e.g., prayer, fasting, solitude, silence) in their overall preaching, teaching, education, and discipleship ministries.
  - Although it depends on one's definition of "spirituality" and "religious" it appears that this position forces us to choose between an "either/or" option. However, it's not apparent that there are no spiritually religious churches or religiously spiritual churches. Cannot both "traits" exist in one church? In addition, it appears that this position "may" produce a false disjunction between "spirituality" and "doctrine" as well.
  - By throwing out the "bathwater" have you also thrown out the "baby?" Is it possible that you have overreacted or lack understanding and patience in reaching your conclusion? (You could, for instance, look for another church or perhaps even reform your own church to be more "spiritual.")
  - In general, you will not be as effective if you attempt to "grow spiritually" by yourself (via your own beliefs, styles, and means). This view represents an "autonomous" (self-law) understanding of spiritual growth that lacks the knowledge, wisdom, experience, and history that a "tradition" and "church community" possesses.
  - At times, this view may also represent a "pluralistic" interpretation of religion and spirituality. Thus, seeing truth as "pragmatic" and "eclectic" they seek to borrow "spiritual practices" from different religious traditions in their quest for creating a "montage" form of spirituality irrespective of each respective religion's doctrines and beliefs.
  - In an attempt to break free from the "organizational church" you have become your own "criteria" for determining what is "good" and "right." Is it possible the "real issue" is not necessarily and only "spiritual," but also a problem of the ego and authority as well?
5. "God doesn't answer my prayers so He must not exist or care for me."
- Many people have acknowledged that God has and continues to answer their prayers.
  - Perhaps there are good reasons (that are beyond our understanding) for God not answering our prayers (use the analogy of parents not giving "everything" to their children).

- Theology of God: God has the first word (He created the universe, the world, human beings, metaphysically speaking He is also primary) and prayer is our response to God (the second word/movement). We cannot know and learn how to pray unless we first understand that prayer is also our response to who God is, what God has done, what God is doing, and what God will do. Thus, a "proper" understanding of God ("being in" relationship with Him) is foundational to understanding and developing a life of prayer.
  - Theology of Prayer: Is it primarily a means of receiving something from God? (God is like a "genie" or "Santa Claus.") Or is prayer a means of submitting ourselves to God's will? In other words, some suggest that prayer is "getting" our wills in line with God's will.
6. "If I am Christian, then all my sins and wrongdoings are forgiven, right? Doesn't God's forgiveness give me a license to sin?"
- To begin with, "yes, all your sins and wrongdoings—past, present, and future are forgiven if you have chosen to ask Jesus to forgive you of your sins/wrongdoings and pledged your allegiance to follow him."
  - This is a "hypothetical" question that a "true" believer may (on occasion) ask, but rarely applies because he or she no longer thinks in this manner. When a person becomes a "true" Christian, then he or she is not only forgiven, but they are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Because of this "new life" of the Spirit living within us, Christians now have a desire to please and obey God (rather than sin and please ourselves).