



## WHAT I BELIEVE

Christianity is a worldview, a system of beliefs. Everyone has a worldview and each person thinks their worldview is the correct one. Christians are often faulted, however, for believing theirs to be true.

All worldviews are not equal. Some more accurately explain reality than others. There is no point in debating “my truth” versus “your truth.” Some beliefs are true, others are not. If a worldview is not entirely accurate, then it’s not the truth. Some pieces of some worldviews may be fine, but if not all of them are correct, then the worldview is not correct. It’s sort of like putting a puzzle together. If you have missing pieces (or wrong pieces), you won’t get the full picture.

What happens after you die? Some worldviews believe you go to heaven, others believe you are reincarnated, while others believe you disappear into nothing at all. They can’t all be true at the same time. Another example: Christians, Muslims, and Jews all believe God is a personal being. But Hindus do not. They believe God is simply a “force” that exists everywhere. But God can’t be both personal and impersonal at the same time. So, some worldviews are wrong, mistaken, and delusional. And if someone is right and someone is wrong, the smart thing to do is figure out which one is right.

### THE BEGINNING

Let’s start at the beginning and get the basic plot line for what I believe and why. First, God is the creator of everything. The Bible starts out this way and most Christian creeds include it as a foundational truth. Perhaps we can all agree that the universe started with a “big bang.” Something out of nothing. Christians just believe that some**One** created something out of nothing. In other words, the big bang needed a big banger.

## **GOD**

God is maker and sovereign over creation [John 1:3, Colossians 1:16]. This puts God as the main central character (not us). HE is a person, this is HIS story, and everything belongs to HIM. God is distinct (separate) from nature. He created nature; He is not nature. His role is a King over a kingdom. Our role is to glorify the King. It's not so much about God's plan for your life as it is about your life for God's plan. Let that sink in. God's purposes are central, not yours. Once you are completely clear on this, many things will change for you.

We are not gods (as in Hinduism or New Age worldviews). If that were true, Jesus was wrong about almost everything He said. And remember, both worldviews can't be correct at the same time. We are dependent on external things for our existence, our survival. Therefore, we are not gods. We are not supernatural beings, not the center of the universe, not all-powerful, and not all-knowing. We owe our very existence to God who made us from dust, sustains us, and will return our mortal bodies to dust one day.

## **MAN**

It does not mean we are not special though! We are not gods, but we are not junk either (it doesn't have to be one extreme or the other). We have built-in value, simply by being human. We are "fearfully and wonderfully" made, essential from the beginning [Psalm 139:14]. We do nothing to gain our value, and nothing can take it away. Of all creation, our lives are unique and special and different – bearing the very image of God (His likeness) with His imprint on our souls.

This belief makes Christianity dramatically different from any other worldview, and it changes everything in two important ways:

- Because we are valuable from the beginning (no matter our age, race, gender, etc.) – our lives are worth protecting, whether we are the smallest embryo or feeble and drooling in our twilight years
- His imprint on our souls allows us to be friends with God (not an equal, but a friend). Our King is not distant like a royal, but close like a Father. That is what people mean when they say they have a "relationship" with God. It is what we were made for.

God provided everything humans would need to be happy, fulfilled, productive, and purposeful. Most importantly, He provided a relationship with Himself. But, while humans are beautifully and wonderfully made, they are also broken. There's no getting around it. Something went wrong somewhere along the line...and it had nothing to do with poverty, lack of education, or genetics. Our society didn't cause this. It happened way back at the beginning, from the very start.

## **SIN**

Does all seem perfectly well with the world to you? Or does it seem like something has gone terribly wrong – like it somehow got broken along the way? Yes, something is wrong with the world, and we all know it.

God has always been in charge, but He gave humans – His most valuable creation – considerable free will. The first humans chose to sin (rebel against God) with their free will. As a result, they broke the world. It's a mess now, being run by strong-willed children doing as they please.

The problem of “evil” in the world is that it is *within* us. We are guilty and we know that too. The brokenness of the world started with brokenness in us. But we are not simply malfunctioning machines that need to be fixed. We are sinners who need to be forgiven by a holy God who created us. We have all sinned and that sin must be paid for, atoned for, answered for. Forgiving yourself won't fix the problem. While that approach is currently popular, you simply can't provide your own pardon. The pardon must come from the one who was wronged (God).

Perhaps you don't think you're so bad. Have you ever broken one commandment? What then? Have your motives always been good? Yes, there is always someone worse than you, but don't fool yourself. No one comes close to what is actually required – and that is perfection. There is only one standard that matters; the one our lives will be tested against at the end.

Are you beginning to see just how broken we are? Sin is the problem with the world today. Our sin. The thing that went wrong with humans caused what went wrong with the world. There was a real place in real time when real disobedience (sin) occurred on earth, and that rebellion forever changed the world and everything in it. This rebellion did not bring its promised freedom, enlightenment, or independence. Instead, it brought brokenness, guilt, and struggle.

## **SPIRITUAL WARFARE**

Satan, the tempter, is very real. His suggestion to eat the fruit of a certain tree in the Garden of Eden was a test of Adam & Eve's trust in God. His deception started a real war in the invisible (spiritual) realm. Jesus certainly believed the devil and his minions were real, and he dealt with them frequently.

Yes, there is an invisible war going on and the devil commands the opposing army. We are living in the part of the universe currently occupied by the rebels. Enemy-occupied territory – that's what this world is now. The Bible makes it quite clear that man's conflict in the visible realm is tied to a battle going on in a realm that is not visible but is still completely real. And the things we do not see matter a lot more in this struggle than the things we do see [Ephesians 6:12].

Was it worth the risk for God to give us free will? It's hard to know how He truly feels about it. Yes, free will is what made evil possible, but it's also the only thing that makes love and goodness and joy possible (or worth having). God wanted His creatures to *voluntarily* choose to be united with Him. And for that, they must be free.

Humans did not use their freedom well, that's all we know for sure. We used it to rebel. When Adam & Eve disobeyed at the very beginning, they betrayed God and damaged everything. Now bad things happen in a broken world. That is not what He originally intended nor hoped for.

Many ask why a good God would allow evil in the world. God is not obligated to use His power to prevent all evil. He gave man free will and man does not always choose wisely. And occasionally, God will allow some evil in order to produce a greater good later (like a parent allowing their child to get a necessary, but painful, shot).

God is both loving and just. As such, there must be payment for evil and sin. Man must pay for his sins but cannot do so on his own. He must be "freed" from them. But slaves can't free themselves. They need a rescuer.

## **JESUS**

God initiated a rescue plan: JESUS. Scholars, both liberal and conservative, overwhelmingly agree that Jesus of Nazareth was a real man in history and that the Gospels, for the most part, tell the story of His life accurately. There is an abundance of reliable historical evidence with many mentions of Jesus from a wide variety of sources. People who think Jesus never existed are simply not acquainted with the ample research (even by secular historians) that provides abundant evidence for His life.

Jesus was a real human just like us (albeit born via a miraculous virgin birth). While on earth, He claimed to be God. This earned Him a death sentence. Now this man was either just what He said or a lunatic. It seems obvious to me that He was not a lunatic, so however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God, in human form.

Why? What was the purpose of His coming to earth? Because He had to undo what the devil had done in the Garden of Eden.

Jesus didn't just come to "teach." God had already sent plenty of prophets to do that before. He also didn't come to address "social justice" issues. John's favored account of the Gospel doesn't even address social justice. Jesus helped EVERYONE that came to Him – rich or poor. The divide for Jesus was not rich versus poor, but repentant versus proud. Miss that and you miss everything.

Look into any Christian writing and you will find that they are constantly talking about Jesus' death. It is obvious that Christians think the main point of the story lies there. They believe the primary thing He came to earth to do was to suffer and be killed.

As a result of sin and rebellion, man owed a debt he could not pay. God Himself, perfect, would give His own Son as the payment. A sacrifice, so to speak. There is no other worldview that describes a personal, humble, Savior giving up His life like Jesus did. It was an unimaginable sacrifice to be sure.

## THE CROSS

In Jewish culture and custom of that time, animals were sacrificed for the sins of the people. The innocent had to forfeit their life for the guilty. This provided a temporary fix, but the sacrifices had to be repeated as sins were repeated.

Jesus surrendered His own life as a sacrifice to save us sinners. He was born to die. He was not a victim. This is what He chose; what He wanted to do. And this we find in the birth narratives everywhere. God tells Joseph that Mary "will give birth to a son, and you will give him the name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" [Matthew 1:21]. Thirty years later, John the Baptist points at the Lord Jesus Christ and says, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" [John 1:29].

On this point, Jesus speaks clearly about Himself:

- God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him [John 3:17].
- The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost [Luke 19:10].
- I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance [Luke 5:32].
- I lay down my life so that I may take it up again. No one has taken it away from me, but I lay it down of my own initiative [John 10:18].
- The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many [Matthew 20:28].

Before He died, a single word fell from His lips. It was **tetelestai**: meaning "it is finished, it is accomplished, the debt has been paid." This "marvelous exchange" explains why Jesus is the only way to salvation. *He's the only one who fixed the problem.*

Is there only one way to heaven? It does seem narrow-minded. But Christians promote this view because Jesus said it Himself – we didn't make it up. That's why the early church was called "The Way." Christians believe that Christ was killed for our own benefit, that His death washed away our sins, and that by dying He disabled death itself. That is the story. That is Christianity. That is what must be believed.

## **RESURRECTION**

On the third day, Jesus was raised to life. The authors of the Gospel accounts staked their very lives on what they shared about the resurrected Jesus. What did they have to gain by exaggerating or misrepresenting the facts? Nothing. There is no motive, nor evidence, that their account of the resurrection is distorted.

The vast majority of scholars – religious or not – agree on these four facts of history:

1. Jesus died on a Roman cross Friday and was buried in a tomb.
2. The tomb was empty on Sunday morning. No body was ever found.
3. Numerous witnesses testified – at their own peril – that they saw Jesus alive again after He died. He talked and ate with them.
4. Even skeptics (such as James, Thomas, and Saul) became so convinced that Jesus rose from the dead that they gave up their own lives for it.

Perhaps it was their imagination? No, there were too many witnesses (500+), too many times, in too many different places. They all hallucinated the exact same thing? No, imagining a risen Jesus will not do as an explanation and it does nothing to explain the empty tomb and the missing body. You can see why so many scholars are skeptical of that theory.

The resurrection facts have been confirmed by an exhaustive analysis of over 1400 academic sources. And who would lie or invent a story that would get them killed? No one ever recanted their testimony, even those who were tortured generations later. There's no real way to refute the resurrection, there's too much solid proof. And if the resurrection happened, everything else must be true as well. Why would God raise a heretic from the dead?

We have a resurrected Savior who died to save us from our sins. But that is not the end of the story...yet. There is more to come and we are now living somewhere in the "in between." Not everyone who will ask forgiveness from God has done so yet. So, we wait.

## **THE END**

We live somewhere between Genesis and Revelation (the beginning and the end), and that is dangerous territory. From the moment of that original sin, the human race has been in the grip of a terrible conflict. A war rages, and every war has its battles, and every battle has its casualties.

We also know this war will have an end because the Author Himself has told us it will. There will be a victory. Evil will be punished. Wounds will be mended. Tears will be wiped away. The world will be made right again. Justice will have its day and multitudes will feel its force. In the meantime, those

who trust Him are not alone in the struggle, even though we take casualties. He is with us, always, in everything. That is His promise [Matthew 28:20, Hebrews 13:5].

The Bible ends with everyone living forever. But where? It turns out, most people do believe in a literal hell. Apparently, few believe they personally will be going there.

In the final days, certain books will be opened. God has kept a complete record of every sin – nothing missed. In the end, there will be both justice and mercy. In the Book of Life will be the names of those who requested mercy through Jesus, their Savior. Anyone whose name is not found in the Book of Life will be thrown into the lake of fire [Revelation 20:15]. This hell is an example of God's justice. Many will choose to decline His love and mercy while on earth, but they will not be given the option to decline His justice in the end.

In heaven, those who trusted in Jesus will be transformed, just like Him. We will have new perfect bodies. We will be reunited with loved ones who also believed. The city will be beautiful, with streets of gold, pearly gates, walls of brilliant jasper, and a river, clear as crystal, flowing from a throne nourishing a tree of life that bears fruit for the healing of the nations. The sound of these words washes over our souls, comforting us, reminding us of a purity that, because of Jesus, we possess before God. When we finally go home, we will not need these reminders. Purity will penetrate us so completely we will feel nothing else – no guilt, no brokenness, no shame. Mercy makes it so.

## **YOUR CHOICE**

Christianity offers something for nothing: actually, Jesus offers *everything* for nothing. In a sense, the whole Christian life consists of accepting this very remarkable offer. But the difficulty is recognizing that all we have done and can do is nothing.

When you put your trust in Jesus, it marks a radical change in loyalty. There is a change of mind that results in a change of heart that results in a change of direction. There is trust in the deepest sense, not just trust *for* something, but trust *in* Someone. Like the prodigal son, you are returning to the Father. There is a word for this turnaround, it's called repentance. You are turning from a life of selfishness and self-centeredness in which you are the center of everything to a life where God is the center of everything.

Why should you choose the Christian worldview? It's not the easiest path. Our culture is getting more and more hostile to it. You'll likely be called a hypocrite at some point. You don't get to be your own god anymore. It's not convenient. You must wrestle with sin instead of ignoring it. You must surrender your own plans and agenda. You must pick up your own cross and carry it. You must be willing to lose it all. But you can't ignore the facts presented here, even if you don't like them. It turns out that the Christian worldview is the best, most logical, explanation for this life and beyond.

The Christian faith is not “blind faith.” It’s built on a solid foundation of historical evidence. Some of that evidence has been there for 2000 years for all to see. There’s never been one scientific or archeological discovery that disputes one verse of the Bible – instead, they all confirm it. Skeptics say, “You have to ignore the facts to be a Christian!” Actually, in modern times, it’s the opposite now. If you are intellectually honest and deal fairly with all the data that exists, there is no other viable explanation or alternative worldview that makes sense. Atheism, at this point, is simply irrational.

Being a Christian doesn’t mean you have to believe that all other worldviews are wrong on every point. Some other religions contain at least some hint of the truth. But, of course, being a Christian does mean believing that where Christianity differs from other worldviews, Christianity is right, and others are wrong. As in math, there is only one right answer to a sum, and all other answers are wrong.

This is my story. If you are already a Christian, this is your story too. If you are not a Christian, this is also your story, because this isn’t a religious fairytale. This is the story of reality – the way things really are and will be forever.

The thoughts expressed on these pages are not new. Insights have come from the following sources:

1. Koukl, Gregory (2017). *The Story of Reality: How the World Began, How it Ends, and Everything Important that Happens in Between*. Harper Collins Press.
2. Lewis, C. S. (1942). *Mere Christianity*. Harper Collins Press.
3. Christ Revealed (2018). DVD Series, <https://series.christrevealed.com/trailer/>