

5 Things You Need to Know About Jesus

Tom Davis provides an overview of 5 extremely important aspects of Jesus' life: his birth, baptism, claims to deity, death and resurrection, and ascension.

The Birth of Jesus

Knowing about Jesus, who he was, what he did, and what he taught is essential for Christian discipleship. By studying Jesus, we know how we ought to live and what the redemption that he provides for us means. In this article we discuss five things you need to know about Jesus, starting with the meaning of the birth of Jesus.

The story of His birth is found in Matthew chapters 1 and 2, and in Luke chapters 1 and 2. Matthew gives us his understanding of what Jesus' birth meant in the angel Gabriel's proclamation to Joseph and in an Old Testament prophecy.



When the angel appeared to Joseph the angel told him that Jesus will “save his people from their sins.”[\[1\]](#) Jesus left heaven to come down to His people at His birth.

In order for His people to be saved from their sins Jesus must come to His people. The virgin birth of Jesus is directly linked to His death and resurrection.

The first prophecy is, “See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel.”[\[2\]](#) This prophecy comes from Isaiah 7:14. In Isaiah this prophecy is a promise to King Ahaz of Judah that God will defeat His enemies. Immanuel is an important name because it means “God with us.” Matthew is telling us that through the virgin birth

of Jesus God is with us, and is a sign that sin and death will be defeated.

In Luke, the praise of a man named Simeon and the proclamation of the heavenly host helps tell us what Jesus' birth means.

When Simeon saw Jesus in the temple he prayed, "For my eyes have seen your salvation. You have prepared it in the presence of all peoples-a light for revelation to the Gentile and glory to your people Israel."[\[3\]](#) Simeon tells us that Jesus will reveal God to all people. God's salvation is for all people, not only for the Jews.

When the heavenly hosts appeared to the shepherds out in the fields they proclaimed, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people he favors!"[\[4\]](#) The proclamation of the angels tells us that the people Jesus favors, those who follow and trust Him, will have peace.

To recap, we see that the birth of Jesus is God coming down to be with us, and to save us from our sins. This salvation is not only for the Jews, but is for all people.

Jesus' Baptism

Matthew, Mark, and Luke mention that when Jesus was baptized the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove.[\[5\]](#) A voice from heaven said, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well-pleased."[\[6\]](#)

Jesus was sinless, so why does he receive baptism from John? Jesus told John it was to fulfill righteousness. Jesus is identifying with Israel, and all mankind, and fulfilling righteousness for our sake. Because Jesus identifies with us and our sins, His baptism is the beginning of His ministry of atonement that is accomplished at His crucifixion.[\[7\]](#)

All the gospels mention that the Holy Spirit descended in the

form of a dove. Have you ever wondered why in the form of a dove? In Genesis when God created the heavens and the earth the Spirit of God hovered over the waters. This signifies God's presence at creation. Some biblical scholars think that Noah sending the dove out from the ark signifies a kind of new creation after God destroyed the world with a flood. In the same way, the Spirit appearing in the form of a dove and descending on Jesus means that Jesus is the beginning of new creation.[{8}](#)

At Jesus' baptism the Father pronounced, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well-pleased."[{9}](#) What does this mean? Most Bible scholars think this statement references Psalm 2:7[{10}](#) and Isaiah 42:1.[{11}](#) Psalm 2 is a Psalm that was used at the coronation of a new king. Isaiah 42 is about God's suffering servant who will bring "justice to the nations." Biblical Scholar Craig Blomberg concludes, "Therefore it would appear that God is forthrightly declaring Jesus to be both kingly Messiah and suffering servant."[{12}](#)

Jesus' baptism means that Jesus identifies with us. Jesus is the beginning of new creation and begins His ministry of atonement for our sins. God's voice from heaven also declares that Jesus is the kingly Messiah and the suffering servant.

Jesus' Claims to Deity

Jesus claimed to be God in several ways. He not only used words to make these claims, but His actions also made a claim to deity.

Jesus' actions showed that he had authority over evil spirits by repeatedly casting out demons. Jesus commanded the weather. This is something mortal men do not do, but God and heavenly beings do. Jesus was a man, but this event shows that he was more than a man, he was God in human flesh.

But let's look specifically at how Jesus claimed to be the

divine Son of Man during His trial by the Jewish authorities. The night before His trial Jesus was arrested and tried by the Jewish authorities. There were many who accused Jesus of various things. The problem was that the testimony of the witnesses who were accusing Jesus did not match. This led to the high priest asking, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus answered, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power and coming with clouds of heaven." The Jewish authorities then condemned him for blasphemy.[{13}](#) Why?

Jesus was condemned because he identified himself with the Son of Man in Daniel 7. In this chapter the Ancient of Days, God the Father, is sitting in judgment when the Son of Man comes with the "clouds of heaven" and approaches the Ancient of Days. The Son of Man is given dominion, glory, and a kingdom that will not be destroyed. The Son of Man is a human and divine figure who seems to sit in judgment alongside the Ancient of Days. When Jesus claims to be the Son of Man he is claiming to be a human and divine figure. Jesus is claiming that he will be vindicated and that the Jewish authorities will be condemned by God.[{14}](#)

Jesus claimed to be God by casting out demons, calming a storm, and by claiming to be the Son of Man in Daniel 7.

Jesus' Death and Resurrection

Jesus' death and resurrection is the foundation of Christianity. The death and resurrection of Jesus is a climactic confrontation between God and Satan that involves forgiveness of sin, the abolition of death, and the defeat of evil.

The narratives of this event are found in all four gospels. However, the most important passage that helps us understand the meaning of the resurrection is not in one of the Gospels;

it is in one of Paul's letters, 1 Corinthians 15.

In verse 3, Paul states that "Jesus died for our sins." In Hebrews 9 and 10, the author explains that in the Old Testament sacrificial system bulls, goats, and sheep had to be sacrificed every year to purify the people. However, Jesus only had to die once to cover the sins of all people. Therefore, the death of Jesus for our sins is superior to the sacrificial system and makes it obsolete.

Paul states, "For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive."[{15}](#) We live life knowing that someday we will die. We live in the shadow of death's approach. Jesus confronts death on the cross, then returns from the grave three days later. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, death has been abolished. New Testament scholar Craig Keener states, "As death in every case is established in Adam, so life in all cases is established in Christ."[{16}](#)

In Colossians 2:15 Paul is addressing the implications of Jesus' resurrection. He writes, "He (Jesus) disarmed the rulers and the authorities and disgraced them publicly; he triumphed over them in him." The rulers and authorities that Paul mentions are Satan and his demons.[{17}](#) Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, Satan and his demons are defeated publicly. When Christians proclaim the resurrection, these rulers and authorities are humiliated publicly for everyone to see.

The death and resurrection of Jesus cleanses us of our sins, pays the penalty for our sins, abolishes death, and defeats Satan and the forces of evil.

Jesus' Ascension

Jesus' return to heaven is described in Acts 1:9-11. After His resurrection Jesus spent forty days with His disciples. After forty days the disciples watched Jesus ascend into heaven in a

cloud. But what does this mean?

In John chapter 16 Jesus told His disciples that he will be leaving them. Jesus said, "It is for your benefit that I go away, because if I don't go away the Counselor will not come to you. If I go, I will send him to you."[{18}](#) The Counselor that Jesus referred to is the Holy Spirit. Jesus' promise to the disciples is fulfilled on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Jesus told His disciples "When the spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth."[{19}](#) When Jesus ascended into heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit to us. The Holy Spirit does not only counsel us; he guides us to truth and intercedes for us.

Jesus' ascension has other implications as well. Paul tells us, "Christ Jesus is the one who died, but even more, has been raised; he also sits at the right hand of God and intercedes for us."[{20}](#) There are two things to pay attention to in this verse. First, Jesus now sits at the right hand of the Father. Jesus is on His throne, which means he is ruling now. Second, Jesus also prays for us. There are many other things that could be mentioned in a discussion of things we need to know about Jesus. One example is Jesus' temptation in the desert. When Adam and Eve were tempted in the Garden of Eden, they failed to resist Satan's temptation. Jesus succeeded in resisting Satan.

When we consider Jesus' birth, baptism, claims to deity, temptation, casting out evil spirits, death, resurrection, and ascension, we have an image of a God that became man. God rescues us from our sin and from the evil powers and principalities that are active in this world. Jesus will return and make all things new with the new creation and new Jerusalem in Revelation 20 and 21. The first Christians saw all of this. New Testament scholar N. T. Wright sums things up this way, "The first Christians saw the message and accomplishment of Jesus as the long-awaited arrival of God's kingdom, the final dealing-with sin that would undo the powers

of darkness and break through to the 'age to come.'" [\[21\]](#)

Notes

1. Matthew 1:21
2. Matthew 1:23
3. Luke 2:30-32
4. Luke 2:14
5. Jesus' baptism is found in Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-22, and is alluded to in John 1:29-34.
6. Mark 1:11 CSB
7. Keener, Craig S., *Matthew* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 1997), 85.
8. Evens, Craig A., *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Matthew-Luke*, (Colorado Springs, Victor, 2003) 78.
9. Mark 1:11 CSB
10. I will declare the Lord's decree. He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father. – Psalm 2:7 (CSB)
11. This is my servant; I strengthen him, this is my chosen one; I delight in him. I have put my Spirit on him; he will bring justice to the nations. – Isaiah 42:1 (CSB)
12. Blomberg, Craig L. *Jesus and the Gospels* (Nashville, Broadman & Holman Press, 1997), 222.
13. Matt. 26:62-65; Mark 14:60-6
14. Quarles, Charles L. "Lord or Legend: Jesus as the Messianic Son of Man," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* Vol. 62, No. 1 (2019) 103-124. Heiser, Michael S. *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham: Lexham Press), 249-151.
15. 1 Corinthians 15:22 CSB
16. Keener, Craig S., *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IVP Academic 2014) 494. Gilbrant, Thoralf Ed. *The Complete Biblical Library: The New Testament Study Bible Romans-Corinthians* (Springfield, World Library Press 1986) 465.
17. Ibid., 574.
18. John 17:7 CSB
19. John 16:3 CSB

20. Romans 8:34 CSB

21. Wright, N. T. *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus's Crucifixion* (San Francisco, HarperOne, 2016), 280.

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The Self-Understanding of Jesus

Dr. Michael Gleghorn examines some sayings and deeds of Jesus, accepted by many critical scholars as historically authentic, to see what they imply about Jesus' self-understanding.

Jesus and the Scholars

You might be surprised to learn that today many New Testament scholars don't believe that the historical Jesus ever claimed to be the Son of God, the Lord, or even the Messiah.^{1} But if that's the case, how do they explain the presence of such claims in the Gospels? They believe the Gospel writers put them there! The actual Jesus of history never made such exalted claims for *himself*. It was the early church that started all that business.



Is this true? What are we to make of all this? Let's begin with a deceptively simple question: How did the early church come to believe in—and even worship—Jesus as both Lord and Messiah, if he never actually claimed such titles for himself? Just think for a moment about how strange this would

be. Jesus' earliest followers were Jews. They firmly believed that there is only one God. And yet, shortly after his crucifixion, they began worshiping *Jesus* as God! As Dr. William Lane Craig asks, "How does one explain this worship by monotheistic Jews of one of their countrymen as God incarnate, apart from the claims of Jesus himself?"^{2} In other words, if Jesus never made such exalted claims for *himself*, then why would his earliest followers do so? After all, on the surface such claims not only seem blasphemous, they also appear to contradict the deeply held Jewish conviction that there is only one God.

But there's another issue that needs to be considered. Although many critical scholars don't believe that Jesus ever made such radical personal claims, nevertheless, they *do* believe that he said and did things that seem to imply that he had a very high view of himself. In other words, while they might deny that Jesus ever *explicitly* claimed to be Israel's Messiah, or Lord, they acknowledge that he said and did things which, when you get right down to it, seem to imply that that's precisely who he *believed* himself to be! If this is correct, if Jesus really believed himself to be both Israel's Messiah and Lord, then notice that we are brought back once again to that old dilemma of traditional apologetics.^{3} Jesus was either deceived in this belief, suffering from something akin to delusions of grandeur. Or he was a fraud, willfully trying to deceive others. Or he really was who he believed himself to be—Messiah, Lord, and Son of God.

In the remainder of this article, we'll examine some of the sayings and deeds of Jesus that even many critical scholars accept as historically authentic to see what they might tell us about Jesus' self-understanding.

Jesus and the Twelve

Today, even most critical scholars agree that Jesus probably

chose a core group of twelve disciples just as the Gospels say he did. In fact, Dr. Bart Ehrman refers to this event as “one of the best-attested traditions of our surviving sources . . .”[\[4\]](#) Now you might be thinking that this sounds like a rather insignificant detail. What can this possibly tell us about the self-understanding of Jesus? Does his choice of twelve disciples give us any insight into what he believed about himself?

Let’s begin with a little background information. E. P. Sanders, in his highly acclaimed book, *Jesus and Judaism*, observes that “. . . in the first century Jewish hopes for the future would have included the restoration of the twelve tribes of Israel.”[\[5\]](#) Now this hope was based on nothing less than God’s prophetic revelation in the Hebrew Bible. Sometimes the primary agent effecting this restoration is said to be the Lord (e.g. Isa. 11:11-12; Mic. 2:12). At other times it’s a Messianic figure who is clearly a human being (e.g. Isa. 49:5-6). Interestingly, however, still other passages describe this Messianic figure as having divine attributes, or as being closely associated with the Lord in some way (e.g. cp. Mic. 2:13 with 5:2-4). But why is this important? And what does it have to do with Jesus’ choice of twelve disciples?

Many New Testament scholars view Jesus’ choice of twelve disciples as symbolic of the promised restoration of the twelve tribes of Israel. The restoration of Israel is thus seen to be one of the goals or objectives of Jesus’ ministry. As Richard Horsley observes, “One of the principal indications that Jesus intended the restoration of Israel was his appointment of the Twelve.”[\[6\]](#) But if one of Jesus’ consciously chosen aims was the restoration of Israel, then what does this imply about who he believed himself to be? After all, the Old Testament prophets attribute this restoration either to the Lord or to a Messianic figure possessing both divine and human attributes.

Might Jesus have viewed himself in such exalted terms? Some

scholars believe that he did. Dr. Ben Witherington poses an interesting question: "If the Twelve represent a renewed Israel, where does Jesus fit in?" He's *not* one of the Twelve. "He's not just part of Israel, not merely part of the redeemed group, he's forming the group—just as God in the Old Testament formed his people and set up the twelve tribes of Israel."[\[7\]](#) Witherington argues that this is an important clue in uncovering what Jesus thought of himself. If he's right, then Jesus may indeed have thought of himself as Israel's Messiah and Lord!

Jesus and the Law

What was Jesus' attitude toward the Law of Moses? Some scholars say that Jesus was a law-abiding Jew who "broke neither with the written Law nor with the traditions of the Pharisees."[\[8\]](#) Others say the issue is more complex. Ben Witherington observes that Jesus related to the Law in a variety of ways.[\[9\]](#) Sometimes he affirmed the validity of particular Mosaic commandments (e.g. Matt. 19:18-19). At other times he went beyond Moses and intensified some of the commandments. In the Sermon on the Mount he declared, "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:27-28). We shouldn't skip too lightly over a statement like this. The prohibition against adultery is one of the Ten Commandments. By wording the statement as he did, Jesus apparently "equated his own authority with that of the divinely given Torah."[\[10\]](#) Indeed, it's because of sayings like this that one Jewish writer complained: "Israel cannot accept . . . the utterances of a man who speaks in his own name—not 'thus saith the Lord,' but '*I* say unto you.' This '*I*' is . . . sufficient to drive Judaism away from the Gentiles forever."[\[11\]](#)

But Jesus went further than this! In Mark 7 he declared all

foods “clean” (vv. 14-19). That is, he set aside the dietary laws found in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. To really grasp the radical nature of Jesus’ declaration one must only remember that these dietary laws had been given to Israel by God Himself! But what sort of person believes he has the authority to set aside the commandments of God? Ben Witherington notes, “Jesus seems to assume an authority over Torah that no Pharisee or Old Testament prophet assumed—the authority to set it aside.”[\[12\]](#) And Jacob Neusner, a Jewish scholar, seems to agree: “Jews believe in the Torah of Moses . . . and that belief requires faithful Jews to enter a dissent at the teachings of Jesus, on the grounds that those teachings at important points contradict the Torah.”[\[13\]](#)

How does this relate to the self-understanding of Jesus? Think about it this way. What would Jesus have to believe about himself to seriously think he had the authority to set aside God’s commandments? Although it may trouble some critical scholars, the evidence seems to favor the view that Jesus believed that in some sense he possessed the authority of God Himself!

Jesus and the Demons

One of the amazing feats attributed to Jesus in the Gospels is the power of exorcism, the power to cast out demons from human beings. Although this may sound strange and unscientific to some modern readers, most critical scholars agree that both Jesus and his contemporaries at least *believed* that Jesus had such power. Of course, this doesn’t mean that the majority of critical scholars believe that demons *actually* exist, or that Jesus *actually* cast such spirits out of people. Many of them do not. But they do think there is persuasive historical evidence for affirming that both Jesus and his contemporaries *believed* such things.[\[14\]](#) In fact, Dr. Bart Ehrman notes that “Jesus’ exorcisms are among the best-attested deeds of the Gospel traditions.”[\[15\]](#) But why is this important? And what

can it possibly tell us about Jesus' self-understanding?

Most scholars are convinced that the historical Jesus declared, "But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt. 12:28). Prior to making this declaration, the Pharisees had accused Jesus of casting out demons "by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons" (12:24). Jesus responded by pointing out how absurd it would be for Satan to fight against himself like that (v. 26). What's more, the charge was inconsistent. There were other Jewish exorcists in Jesus' day and it was widely believed that their power came from God. Wouldn't it be more reasonable, then, to conclude that Jesus' power also came from God?

If so, then notice the startling implications of Jesus' claim: *"If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."* At the very least, Jesus appears to be claiming that in himself the kingdom of God is in some sense a present reality. But his claim may actually be even more radical. Some scholars have observed that in ancient Jewish literature the phrase, 'kingdom of God,' is sometimes used as a roundabout way for speaking of God Himself. If Jesus intended this meaning in the statement we are considering, then William Lane Craig's conclusion is fully warranted: "In claiming that in himself the kingdom of God had already arrived, as visibly demonstrated by his exorcisms, Jesus was, in effect, saying that in himself God had drawn near, thus putting himself in God's place."[16](#)

It increasingly appears that Jesus thought of himself as much more than just another teacher or prophet. Even when we limit ourselves to material accepted as authentic by the majority of critical scholars, Jesus still seems to unquestionably communicate his divinity!

Jesus and the Father

In one of the most astonishing declarations of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel he states, "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (11:27). Many scholars believe that this verse forms a unit with the two preceding verses. It's clear from the context that the "Father" referred to by Jesus is God, for Jesus begins this section by saying, "I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth" (11:25). So in the verse we are considering, Jesus claims to be God's Son in an absolutely unique sense. He refers to God as "My Father," and declares that no one knows the Father, "except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." Jesus not only claims to be God's unique Son, he also claims to have special knowledge of the Father that no one else can mediate to others!

Because of the radical nature of these claims, it's hardly surprising to learn that some critical scholars have denied that Jesus ever really said this. Nevertheless, other scholars have offered some very good reasons for embracing the saying's authenticity. Dr. William Lane Craig notes that this saying comes from the hypothetical *Q* source, a source that both Matthew and Luke may have used in writing their Gospels. If that's true, then the saying is quite early and thus has a greater likelihood of actually going back to Jesus. Additionally, "the idea of the mutual knowledge of Father and Son is a Jewish idea, indicating its origin in a Semitic-speaking milieu."[\[17\]](#) Finally, Dr. Ben Witherington notes that the eminent New Testament scholar Joachim Jeremias showed "how this saying goes back to an Aramaic original" which "surely counts in favor of it going back to Jesus."[\[18\]](#) Aramaic was probably the language most often used by Jesus and his disciples. After discussing this saying in some detail, Witherington concludes, "In the end, all the traditional bases

for judging this saying to be inauthentic no longer will bear close scrutiny.”[{19}](#)

In this brief overview of the self-understanding of Jesus, I’ve attempted to show that even when we limit ourselves to Gospel traditions that are generally considered historically authentic by a majority of scholars, Jesus still makes impressive claims to deity. But as Dr. Craig observes, “. . . if Jesus was not who he claimed to be, then he was either a charlatan or a madman, neither of which is plausible. Therefore, why not accept him as the divine Son of God, just as the earliest Christians did?”[{20}](#)

Notes

1. William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1994), 242-43.
2. Ibid., 243.
3. Ibid., 252.
4. Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 186.
5. E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 98.
6. Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 199.
7. Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 134.
8. Donald A. Hagner, *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus: An Analysis and Critique of Modern Jewish Study of Jesus*, ed. Gerard Terpstra (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 109-10. This quotation does not represent Hagner’s own position.
9. Ben Witherington, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 65.
10. Craig, 246.
11. Ahad ha’ Am, “Judaism and the Gospels,” in *Nationalism and the Jewish Ethic*, ed. H. Khon (New York: Schocken, 1962), 298, cited in Hagner, 101-02.

12. Witherington, 65.
13. Jacob Neusner, *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), xii, cited in Craig, 247.
14. Ehrman, 197.
15. Ibid.
16. Craig, 249.
17. Ibid., 246.
18. Witherington, 224.
19. Ibid., 225.
20. Craig, 252.

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The Scandal of Blood Atonement: “Why All the Blood and Cross-Talk, Christian?”

The story of Jesus’ death and resurrection raises accusations that Christianity is obsessed with blood. Many believers struggle with this too. Byron Barlowe explores the biblical reasons for the focus on Christ’s blood and why its shedding was necessary.

The Bloody Cross: A Tough Thing to Handle

Easter season is all about the death and resurrection of Christ—which centers on the blood sacrifice He endured. Christianity is called a bloody religion, focusing on the execution of Jesus Christ on a cross. Why is this true and what does it mean when we say His blood atones for our sin?



Millions of Americans—and billions of Christians around the world—celebrated the death and Resurrection of Christ during Passion Week and Easter Sunday. The topic was everywhere from sermons to a CNN docudrama titled *Finding Jesus: Faith, Fact, Forgery*.

You may have questions about all the talk of “the blood of Christ” and songs saying things like “Jesus’s blood washed away my sins.” This bloody theme does raise understandable concerns that are shared by believers, seekers and skeptics alike.

In fact, more and more skeptics are posting on the Internet things like this book promotion:

“Christians are obsessed with blood! They sing about it, declare they are washed in it and even drink it! In this book you will discover the crazy background to this Christian obsession and the truth about the bloodthirsty God they claim to know and serve.”[\[1\]](#)

In this article, we’ll discuss whether these charges are true and fair and explain the doctrine of blood atonement.

Again, even many Christians—including me—have wondered deeply about all the biblical imagery of shed blood, what some call the Crimson Thread of Scripture. I mean the grotesqueness of Old Testament animal sacrifice and the belief in Jesus’s torturous slaying as the core of salvation. Radical stuff for modern ears.

So what is blood atonement and why does it matter? In historic orthodox Christian thought, God’s Son is at the very center of history doing these things:

- reconciling man to God,
- ransoming humans from slavery to sin and well-deserved death and

- justly recompensing God for the horrific offense of rebellion and disobedience to Him.

Thankfully, the gospel (or good news) is simple. The Bible claims, “Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.”[\[2\]](#)

The bottom line for all people is this: out of Christ’s death came the hope of eternal life—and His resurrection proved this. Our sin caused God’s Son to suffer and die. By grace, through faith, we can benefit. Otherwise, we suffer eternally for staying with the cosmic rebellion that started in a perfect Garden long ago.

Yet, this blood-centered good news is a scandal to both those who believe and those who deny it. In fact, the Greek root word *skandalon* is used for Christ Himself.[\[3\]](#) You see, Jews denied Christ as the Promised One and Gentiles thought it was all nonsense. Nothing has changed for mankind: the choices are either do-it-yourself religion, being too smart for all that, or believing in this radical hope.

The Reason Someone Had to Die

Why did anybody have to die? God’s justice and holiness demands a death penalty for the sinner.

We are all in a serious spiritual and moral pickle. Biblical Christianity declares that each person ever born is stuck under an irreversible “**sin**drome” for which there is no human answer. History sadly records the habitual and continual effects of sin: oppression, addictions, self-promoting power plays, deceit, war, on and on.

Now for a reality check: no moral order, either in a family, a company, military unit or society survives ambiguity or failure to enforce laws. Just ask the victims of unpunished criminals set loose to perpetrate again. If the Creator were

to simply wink at sin or let people off scot-free, where would justice be? What kind of God would He be?

God is holy and He called Himself the Truth. There is no way God would be true to Himself and the moral order He created and yet fail to punish sin. Such impunity would mock justice. As one theologian puts it, "Pardon without atonement nullifies justice . . . A law without penalty is morally unserious, even dangerous."

Ok, but penalties have levels of harshness. Why is death necessary? Scripture spells out clearly the decree that sinners must die. In God's original command He stated, "When you eat of [the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] you will surely die" (Genesis 2:17). In Ezekiel the same formula appears slightly reworded: "The soul who sins is the one who will die" (Ezekiel 18:4, 20). Paul boiled it down this way: "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

God's justice and holiness demand death for sin. Blood must be shed. Detractors of the cross tend to underestimate sin and know nothing of its offense to a holy God. Everyone wants justice—for others.

Ok, so what does a just and holy God do with impure, treasonous creatures He made to bear His image? God was in a quandary, if you will.

Yet, even in the Garden, He was already hinting at a plan to reconcile this dilemma. "God so loved the world" that he sent down His own Son as a man to pay the death penalty.[{4}](#)

Thomas Oden writes, "God's holiness made a penalty for sin necessary . . . Love was the divine motive; holiness [was] the divine requirement. [Romans 5:8 reads] 'God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us'. [And as Romans 8 teaches,] This love was so great that God 'did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all' (Romans 8:32)."[{5}](#)

Christ's Death and Resurrection Was Unlike Other Religious Stories: It Was All for Love

God's morally just demand for a death-payment is not the same as pagan gods, who maliciously demanded sacrifices. True for one big reason:

Isn't this crucifixion thing simply about a grouchy god acting all bloodthirsty, as some atheists like popular author Richard Dawkins say? Should good people find this repugnant? One unbelieving critic wrote,

“Unfortunately, much of Christian art consists of depicting the sufferings and agony of Jesus on the Cross. This reflects the obsession of Christianity with the Crucifixion . . . “Crosstianity” [in the contemptuous words of one skeptic]. The obsession with ‘our sins’ having been ‘washed away by the Blood of the Lamb’ would be regarded as evidence of a serious mental illness . . . but when this is an obsession of millions of people it becomes ‘religious faith’.”[\[6\]](#)

Wow! Did you know that you, if you are a believer, are part of an insane global crowd? This vividly illustrates the scandal of the cross: “which is to them that are perishing foolishness” as the Apostle Paul described it.[\[7\]](#)

No, biblical sacrifice is not a bloodfest, but the way to deal with a sad reality. Put it this way: If God said, “Nah, don't worry about rebelling against your Creator,” would that be a just and righteous God? Would a deity who fails to punish wrongdoing be worth following? Would His laws mean anything? Yet, we are unable to keep laws, so He steps in to pay that penalty. With His lifeblood. This storyline is utterly unique in the long human history of religions. And the resurrection Christians celebrate shows its truth in actual time and on

this dirty earth.

Pagan myths of savior gods who rise from the dead have only a surface resemblance to the biblical resurrection. Such deities are more like impetuous and tyrannical people than the one and only Yahweh. The biblical God's love fostered the unthinkable: set up a sacrificial system for a one-of-a-kind people—the Israelites—that served as a foretelling of His *coup de grace*: dying in man's place as the spotless sacrificial Lamb. What a novel religious idea that only the true God could dream up! Theologian Thomas Oden says it this way: "It was God who was both offering reconciliation and receiving the reconciled." [\[8\]](#)

God's merging of perfect holiness, just retributive punishment and allowance of His Son's execution was actually a beautiful thing. Francis of Assisi wrote that "love and faithfulness meet together [at the cross]; righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven." [\[9\]](#)

But Why a Violent, Bloody Death?

I get that death was demanded of someone to pay for sin. So why a bloody suffering and execution? Why the constant shedding of blood?

Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* hit movie theaters in 2004 to mixed reviews. It earned its R-rating for gory bloodshed and, ironically, became a cultural scandal itself. Seems that the bloody realism was too much for both soft-core Christians and high-minded unbelievers. But this vividly poignant portrayal of Christ's blood-stained Passion did raise a good question.

When it came to saving mankind, why the shedding of blood? Could God not have found another way? Church Father Athanasius believed that, if there were a better way to preserve human free will and still reconcile rebellious man to a holy God, He

would have used it. Apparently, Christ's suffering and death was the only solution.

The Apostle Paul summarized Christ's entire earthly ministry this way: He "humbled Himself and became obedient unto death" (Philippians 2:8). At the cross, "human hate did all the damage it could do to the only Son of God."[{10}](#) God used the realities available to Him, including the masterfully grim method of crucifixion, honed to a fine art by Roman pagans who viewed human life as dispensable.

Again, why is death demanded of God to atone for sin? The grounding for such a claim appears early in the Bible, after the murder of Abel by his brother Cain. In Genesis 9 Yahweh declares, "I will require a reckoning . . . for the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in His own image."[{11}](#) Apparently, God has put the price of a man's life as that of another's life.

The highlight of Christ's death was its substitutionary sense. The Apostle Peter wrote, "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit."[{12}](#) Justice, fairness, reality itself demanded a bloodguilt payment for sin. Christ paid it.

Substitutionary sacrifice was nothing new for the Jews who unwittingly had the Messiah crucified. From the beginning of God's dealings with His people, agreements were blood covenants. What else could carry the weight of such momentous things? And, as the book of Hebrews teaches, "Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and **without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.**"[{13}](#)

One theologian plainly said, "Through this sacrificial system, the people of Israel were being prepared for the incomparable act of sacrifice that was to come in Jesus Christ."[{14}](#)

His suffering, death and resurrection conquered sin and

neutered the fear of death. Only blood could clean sin; only God's Son's blood could do it perfectly and forever.

Here's the scandal we spoke of: only a perfect sacrifice would do for washing mankind's sins away and reconciling us back to God.

Beautiful Obsession: God Was Glad to Allow This Brutality for Us!

God said it was His pleasure to pay the death penalty with His own self, in the Person of His son. Christianity's so-called blood-obsession is a beautiful picture of perfect divine love.

Theologian Thomas Oden summarized well our discussion of Christ's blood atonement. He wrote, "Love was the divine motive; holiness the divine requirement. 'God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us' (Romans 5:8)."

Such claims trump the understandable disgust of doubters. But the red blood leads to clean white.

Chick-fil-A restaurant employees are trained to say, "My pleasure" when serving customers. Imagine God saying that to believers regarding the cross of Christ! Paul explains in his letter to the Colossian church that "it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness of deity to dwell in Him . . . having made peace *through the blood* of His cross . . . He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death . . ."[{15}](#)

God was glad to stand in as the essential scapegoat to restore us to right relations with Himself, to buy us back from slavery to sin, fear and death, and to abolish sin and its effects. This doesn't sound like a bloodthirsty tyrannical deity demanding a whipping boy or abusing his own child, as some acidly accuse. "My pleasure" brings in new dimensions of

lovingkindness and servant-heartedness.

But wait, there's more! Scripture lists lots of wonderful effects created by the blood of Christ. These include forgiveness, propitiation or satisfaction of God's righteous wrath, justification or being made right, reconciliation with God, cleansing, sanctification, freedom from sin, and the conquest of Satan.

Yes, you could say that Christianity is blood-obsessed. As accused, even its hymns often focus on the benefits bought at the highest of prices: the life of the God-Man Himself. One famous hymn goes:

For my pardon, this I see,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
For my cleansing this my plea,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

This beautiful blood obsession finds its highest hope in Revelation. The following is a prophecy about persecuted believers:

"These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have *washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb* . . . For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."[\[16\]](#)

Maybe the revelations here are as crazy as skeptics say. The foolishness of God. We believe they are the most glorious story ever told.

Notes

1. Promotion at Amazon.com for *Obsessed with Blood: The Crazy Things Christians Believe*, Book 1, by Ex-Preacher.
2. 1 Peter 3:18, NASB.

3. Romans 9:33, 1 Corinthians 1:23, 1 Peter 2:8.
4. John 3:16.
5. Oden, Thomas, *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology* (New York: Harper Collins, 1987), 405.
6. Meyer, Peter, "Why I Am Not a Christian". Serendipity blog. Accessed 2-27-17, www.serendipity.li/eden/why_i_am_not_a_christian.htm.
7. 1 Corinthians 1:18.
8. Ibid., 414.
9. Ibid., 405.
10. Ibid., 389.
11. Genesis 9:4-6.
12. 1 Peter 3:18.
13. Hebrews 9:22-23, emphasis mine.
14. Oden, *Classic Christianity*, 413-414.
15. Colossians 1:19.
16. Revelation 7:14b-17, emphasis mine.

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In His H.A.N.D.S.: How We Can Know That Jesus is God

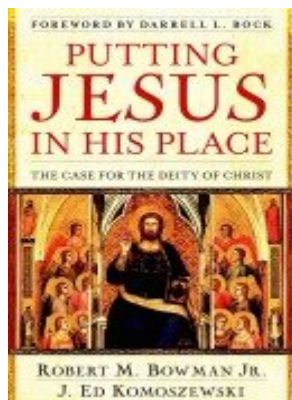
Don Closson explains the five lines of evidence that Jesus is God from the book Putting Jesus in His Place.

Jesus Shares the *Honor* Given to God

Defending the deity of Christ can be a source of anxiety for some believers. Perhaps it is because our defense often consists only of a couple of proof texts which are quickly challenged by Jehovah's Witnesses and others. Even worse, some



Christians themselves are troubled by passages that seem to teach that Jesus is something less than God, that He is inferior to the Father in some significant way. They are fine with Jesus being the suffering servant, the Messiah who died for our sins, but less sure of His role in creation or as a member of the triune everlasting “I Am” of the Old Testament.



A recent book by Robert Bowman and Ed Komoszewski titled *Putting Jesus in His Place* is a great confidence builder for those wrestling with this key doctrine. The book offers five lines of evidence with deep roots in the biblical material. The book is organized around the acronym H.A.N.D.S. It argues that the New Testament teaches that Jesus deserves the *honors* only due to God, He shares the *attributes* that only God possesses, He is given *names* that can only be given to God, He performs *deeds* that only God can perform, and finally, He possesses a *seat* on the throne of God.

Let's look at the first line of evidence for the deity of Christ, that Jesus deserves the honor that should only be given to God. To honor someone is to acknowledge “their place in the scheme of things—to speak about them and to behave toward them in a manner appropriate to their status and position.”^{1} As creator of the universe God deserves the highest level of honor and glory, since nothing can claim a higher degree of status or position. As a result, the Old Testament teaches that only God deserves the honor and glory that is part of human worship and He will not share this honor with anything else. In Isaiah 42 God declares that “I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols” (Isaiah 42:8).

So how does Jesus fit into this picture? In John 5 Jesus declares that the Father has entrusted judgment to the Son so that “all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father.” He adds that “He who does not honor the Son does not honor the

Father” (John 5:22, 23). Referring to his pre-existence with the Father before creation, Jesus says, “And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began” (John 17:5). In these passages, Jesus is claiming the right to receive the same honor and glory due to the Father; in effect, He is claiming to be God in the same way that the Father is God.

Jesus Shares the *Attributes* of God

If Jesus is honored in the New Testament in a manner reserved only for God, it follows that one who is given the honor and glory reserved for God is also worthy of worship. So it’s not surprising that the book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus is to be worshipped by the angels or that in Matthew’s Gospel the apostles worshipped him when he came to them walking on water (Hebrews 1:6; Matthew 14:33). Perhaps the most stirring image of Jesus being worshipped is in Revelation where every creature in heaven and on earth sing praises to the Father and to the Lamb, giving them both honor and glory and reporting that the four living creatures and the elders fell down and worshipped Him (Revelation 5:13-14).

The New Testament also teaches that Jesus shares divine attributes that only God possesses. When this claim is made, Muslims, Jehovah’s Witnesses and others protest by pointing out that Jesus exhibited the very human attributes of hunger, fatigue, and pain. This valid observation does not conflict with the traditional Christian teaching that Jesus possessed two essential natures—one divine and one human. There is no reason to assume that one set of attributes cancels out the other. It should be added that although Jesus shares a divine nature with the Father, He does not share the same properties within the Godhead or trinity. The Father sent Jesus into the world; Jesus died on the cross and assumed the role of our permanent high priest.

Jesus clearly states in John 14 that to see him is to see the

Father; both are equally God (John 14:10). In Colossians, Paul goes to great lengths to argue that all of God's divine attributes are present in Christ. He writes that Jesus is "the image of the invisible God" and that ". . . God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him (Colossians 1:15, 19). He summarizes the same idea by adding that "in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9). The writer of Hebrews concurs in the opening paragraph of that book, saying that "the Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Hebrews 1:3).

Jesus shares the Father's attribute of pre-existing the created universe and His own physical incarnation. John's Gospel tells us that Jesus was with the Father in the beginning when the universe was created, and Paul adds that Jesus is before all things (John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:16-18). In other words, Jesus has always existed and is unchanging. He has been given all authority on heaven and earth (Matt. 28:18). He deserves the honor, praise, glory, and worship of all creation.

Jesus Shares the *Names* Given to God

Those who question the deity of Christ complain that the New Testament just doesn't teach it, that it doesn't come right out and say that Jesus is God. Is this really the case?

The New Testament uses two key words for God: *theos*, the general Greek word for deity, and *kurios*, usually translated as "lord." *Theos* is the word most often used to designate God the Father and is also used a number of times in direct reference to Jesus, especially in the Gospel of John. John begins his book with the familiar proclamation that Jesus, the Word, was with God (*theos*) in the beginning, and that the Word (Jesus) was God (*theos*). Later in the chapter, John adds that "No one has ever seen God, but God (*theos*) the One and Only, who at the Father's side, has made him known" (John 1:18). Jesus, the Word, is described by John as being with God in

verse one, and at the Father's side in verse eighteen, and in both cases is given the title *theos* or God.

The Gospel John also contains the confession by Thomas that Jesus is his Lord (*kurios*), and God (*theos*). John makes sure that we understand that Thomas was talking about Jesus by writing "Thomas said to Him," that is, to Jesus, "'My Lord and my God.'"

Paul uses *theos* in reference to Jesus a number of times. In Romans 9:5 he describes Jesus as "Christ, who is God (*theos*) over all." And in Titus he writes that we are waiting for our "blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God (*theos*) and Savior, Jesus Christ (2:13)." Peter portrays himself as a servant of Christ who is writing to those through whom "the righteousness of our God (*theos*) and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours (2 Peter 1:1)."

All four gospels begin with John the Baptist's ministry of "preparing the way of the Lord" as fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 40:3. The prophet wrote, "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God." The Hebrew word translated LORD in this verse is the unspoken special word for God used by the Jews consisting of four consonants called the [*tetragrammaton*](#). The New Testament Gospels are applying the word Lord to Jesus in the same way that the Old Testament referred to Yahweh as LORD.

Jesus Does the *Deeds* that Only God Can Do

It was universally recognized by the Jews of Jesus' day that "God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1; cf. Isaiah 37:16)." So it might be surprising to some that the New Testament also gives Jesus credit for creation. Paul teaches in Colossians that Jesus created "all things." To make sure that no one misunderstands his point, he adds that "all things" includes "things in heaven and on earth, visible and

invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:16-17). Paul wanted to be clear: Jesus is the creator God of the universe.

While Jesus' role in creation is enough to establish his divine nature, He also exhibited supernatural divine power during His ministry on earth. Unlike the Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles, Jesus did not have to petition a higher power to heal or cast out demons. He had inherent divine power to accomplish his will. Other than giving thanks, Jesus did not pray before performing miracles. In fact, the apostles reported that some demons obeyed them only when they invoked Jesus' name. There were a number of occasions when Jesus realized that power had gone out from Him even without His intention to heal (Luke 6:19; Mark 5:30; Luke 8:46).

Jesus not only healed and cast out demons, but also had direct power over nature. When the disciples were frightened on a boat, He "rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm" (Matthew 8:26). When thousands were following him without food, He fed them miraculously (Matthew 14:20-21).

The New Testament teaching that salvation is possible through Jesus Christ alone would also have serious implications for Jewish readers. The Old Testament teaches that God is the only source of salvation. For instance, Psalm 62 teaches that "My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from Him. He alone is my rock and my salvation." How then does one explain the numerous references claiming Jesus to be the source of salvation? Matthew points out that Mary will call her son Jesus because he will save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). Jesus declares of himself that "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him (Jn. 3:17)." There are also instances where Jesus directly forgives the sins of individuals, thus attracting

hostile attention from the Jews (Luke 7:47-49; Mark 2:5-7).

The Psalmist writes that it is the Lord God “who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities” and that “Salvation belongs to the Lord.” John summarizes nicely when he writes, “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

Jesus Has a *Seat* on God’s Throne

Our last line of argument for the deity of Jesus Christ refers to his claim to have a place on the very throne of God. From this throne, Jesus rules over creation and will judge all of humanity. He literally possesses all authority to rule.

Jesus made this claim clear during His questioning by the high priest Caiaphas the night of his capture. Caiaphas asked him, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” (Mark 14:61) If Jesus wasn’t God, this would have been a great opportunity for Him to clear up any misconceptions. But instead of denying His divinity, Jesus says “I am,” admitting to being God’s unique Son, and goes on to say, “you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:62). The high priest’s response was dramatic; he tore his clothes and declared that those present had heard blasphemy from the lips of Jesus. They understood that Jesus was making a direct claim to being God, for only God could sit on the throne of the mighty one.

In His response to the high priest, Jesus draws from a number of Old Testament passages. The book of Daniel describes this “Son of Man” as having an everlasting dominion that will never be destroyed (Daniel 7:13-14). The passage adds that the Son of Man has been given authority to rule over all people and nations, and that men of every language will worship him. He is also described as coming with the clouds of heaven, imagery that is used a number of times in the Old Testament to indicate divine presence. Exodus describes a pillar of cloud

that designated God's proximity to the Jews, while the book of Psalms and the prophet Isaiah both picture God riding on clouds in the heavens (Psalm 104:3; Isaiah 19:1). The point here is that Jesus is connecting Himself to this "Son of Man" who will sit at the right hand of the Father, have everlasting dominion and authority, and will be worshipped by all men. This kind of language can only be used to describe God.

The New Testament makes it clear that there is nothing not under the authority and power of Jesus. John writes that the Father put all things under His power (John 13:3). Paul adds that the Father seated Jesus at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named (Ephesians 1:20-21). Jesus sits on the judgment seat, He sent the Holy Spirit, He forgives sinners, and is our perfect eternal high priest (2 Corinthians 5:10; Acts 2:33; 7:59-60; Hebrews 7-10).

The New Testament provides multiple lines of evidence to make the case that Jesus is God. The only question remaining is whether or not we will worship him as a full member of the triune Godhead, the only eternal, self-existing, creator God of the universe.

Note

1. Robert M. Bowman and J. Ed Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus In His Place* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 31.

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The Eclipse Declares the

Glory of God, v. 2024

Sue Bohlin is very excited to be the path of the upcoming total solar eclipse, where God shows off once again.

"The heavens declare the glory of God," Psalm 19 tells us. On April 8, 2024, millions of Americans will have an incredible opportunity to see His heavenly glory in a way most of us never have: through a total solar eclipse. On a path running from Texas to South Maine, observers on the ground will see the moon slip in front of the sun, blocking out all its light and dropping the temperature drastically (about 10 to 15 degrees Fahrenheit) and suddenly.

I am thrilled beyond words that by the grace of God, our home in Dallas, Texas is in the path of totality. All I have to do is go out in our back yard to experience this once-in-a-lifetime event! :::doing the happy dance:::

The glory of God isn't just seen, it's *felt* as well. Eclipse-chasers, and even those who have only experienced one total eclipse, report that at the moment of totality (when the moon completely covers the sun, plunging the land into an eerie darkness), people break out with yells and shouts and applause. Many report the hair on the back of their necks standing up. And both locals and visiting astronomers are equally in awe—and often in tears. Like one's first in-person look at the Grand Canyon, it is deeply emotional to be thrilled by something much, much bigger than oneself.

Illustra Media's wonderful DVD *The Privileged Planet*, based on the book by the same name by Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay Richards [{1}](#), exposed me to the magnificence of a total solar eclipse. I will never forget the goosebumps at learning that the sun is 400 times farther away than our moon, but it's also 400 times larger. This means that both of these heavenly bodies appear to be the same size to us on Earth. This

phenomenal “coincidence” also makes a total eclipse possible.

During an eclipse, *the heavens declare the glory of God* by

allowing us to see things about the sun we wouldn't be able to observe any other way, beautiful and gloriously resplendent. Just before totality we can see “Baily's Beads.” Only seen during an eclipse, bright “beads” appear at the edge of the moon where the sun is shining through lunar valleys, a feature of the moon's

rugged landscape. This is followed by the “diamond ring” effect, where the brightness of the sun radiates as a thin band around the circumference of the moon, and the last moments of the sun's visibility explode like a diamond made of pure light. After the minutes of totality, the diamond ring effect appears again on the opposite side of the moon as the first rays of the sun flare brilliantly. These sky-jewelry phenomena are so outside of mankind's control that witnessing them stirs our spirits (even on YouTube!) with the truth of Romans 1:20—“God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.”



A total solar eclipse offers so much more, though, than Baily's Beads and the Diamond Ring. At the moment of totality, the pinkish arc of the sun's chromosphere (the part of the sun's atmosphere just above the surface) suddenly “turns on” as if an unseen hand flips a switch. I knew God is very fond of pink because of how He paints glorious sunrises and sunsets in Earth's skies, but those

fortunate enough to see a total eclipse can see how He radiates pinkness from the sun itself! ***The heavens declare the glory of God!***

But wait! That's not all! Along with the flare of the sun's pink chromosphere, a rainbow-like band called the "flash spectrum" appears when the sun is viewed through a prism! (You can google this to see pictures. The best ones are copyrighted so I can't show them to you here.) ***The heavens declare the colorful glory of God!***

For the few minutes of totality, the naked eye can see the sun's lovely corona (Latin for crown) streaming out from the sun. We can't see the corona except during an eclipse because looking straight at the sun for even a few seconds causes eye damage, and because the sun's ball of fire overwhelms the (visually) fragile corona. This is another way that an eclipse allows us to see how ***the heavens declare the glory of God.***



Astronomer Guillermo Gonzalez noticed details about eclipses that got him excited:

- During a total solar eclipse, the moon is just large enough to block the large photosphere (the big ball of fiery gas), but not so large that it obscures the colorful chromosphere.
- The moon and the sun are two of the roundest measured bodies in the solar system. (Some moons are potato-shaped!) So when the round disk of the moon passes in front of the equally round disk of the sun, the shapes

match perfectly.

- He studied all 65 of the moons in our solar system and discovered that ours are the best planet and best moon for studying the sun during an eclipse. Because the moon fits so perfectly over the sun, its blinding light is shielded, providing astronomers with a view of the sun's atmosphere. We can discern finer details in its chromosphere and corona than from any other planet.
- Being able to study the flash spectrum during a total eclipse enables astro-scientists to determine the chemical makeup of other, distant stars without leaving Earth.

These facts of ***the heavens declare the glory of God!***

Michael Bakich wrote of the 2017 eclipse in *Astronomy Magazine* blog,

This eclipse will be the most-viewed ever. I base this proclamation on four factors: 1) the attention it will get from the media; 2) the superb coverage of the highway system in our country; 3) the typical weather on that date; and 4) the vast number of people who will have access to it from nearby large cities.[{2}](#)

I think this is true of the 2024 eclipse as well. Whether you are fortunate enough to be in the path of the total eclipse like me, or will only get to see 75% of the sun's surface covered by the moon (with eclipse glasses, of course!), this extremely important sky event will be proclaiming to everyone that ***the heavens declare the glory of God***. May it make a lasting impression on us all that teaches us more about God's glory!

1. Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay W. Richards, *The Privileged Planet* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2004)

[2.](#)

<http://cs.astronomy.com/asy/b/astronomy/archive/2014/08/05/25->

facts-you-should-know-about-the-august-21-2017-total-solar-eclipse.aspx

This post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/the-eclipse-declares-the-glory-of-god-v-2024/
on Feb. 20, 2024.

Apologetics and Spiritual Skirmishing

Kyle Skaggs urges Christians to use the spiritual armor of Ephesians 6 in engaging in apologetics.

As I was working towards my degree at Dallas Baptist University I did volunteer work with an online ministry. There, I encountered people from all walks of life; all of them having questions about Christ and Christianity. For a while, I was doing well. I found joy in encouraging and counseling other believers. I also learned to tell the difference between non-believers who were willing to listen and those who were only there to argue.

Around a week from graduation I logged to the ministry's website feeling confident. I'd spent hours reviewing various arguments and counterarguments, I was certain I would use what I had learned over four years to lead the conversation to the Gospel. This was not what happened. Instead, the people I talked to became either confused or frustrated before leaving. Figuring I was just having one of those bad days, I thought nothing of it. The same thing happened the next day. Now I was conflicted. I wondered why I was ineffective, because

everything I said was supported by Scripture, so I logged off and puzzled over what I was doing wrong. While I was lost in my thoughts, a very clear voice in my head said, “You cannot lecture people into the Kingdom of God.” I had forgotten 1 Peter 3:15; “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...” That rebuke from the Holy Spirit sent me on a journey of reflection on the spiritual skirmishes that we so easily lose sight of in our daily routine.

Spiritual Warfare

“Enemy-occupied territory—that is what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage.” [\[1\]](#) Our adversaries are the rulers, authorities, and the powers of this dark world. (Ephesians 6:12) Every ideology, philosophy, and worldview not of the Gospel is controlled by the spiritual forces of darkness.

The devil knows his time is short (Revelation 12:12), so he is intent on dragging as many souls down with him as he can. To his annoyance, if you have already been saved by grace through faith, and are now saved, you are called to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19). He is resourceful, and if he can't stop you from having a relationship with God, then he will use every trick to make you as ineffective as possible in your walk with Christ, and in evangelism.

The Devil and his forces are relentless. Whenever we attempt to evangelize, every gap in our defenses can and will be exploited. How are we Christians to contend with these forces of darkness? Paul tells us to put on the full armor of God so that we can take our stand against the Devil's schemes. Let's take a look at the parts of the spiritual armor God provides.



The Belt of Truth

First, we must remain grounded in the truth. Ephesians 6:14 refers to the Belt of Truth, which holds our equipment within easy reach. When we face an enemy whose only weapons are lies and deceptions, we have the advantage. We have nothing to hide! All we need to do is tell the truth!

To wear the belt is to be ready. There has been increasing pressure to ignore fundamental Christian teachings for the sake of convenience. Do not do this. Know your scripture and gird yourself in the truth of the Gospel.

The Helmet of Salvation and the Breastplate of Righteousness

Second, we must wear the helmet of salvation (Ephesians 6:17) and the breastplate of righteousness (6:14) to turn aside any attacks that slip through our defenses. In those days, just as it is now, the helmet and breastplate are essential equipment to protect the head and the heart, and just one of the things separating the true soldier from the levy and the ad hoc militia.

In the same way, the certainty of our salvation and the

righteousness of Christ are key pieces of our armor. As I have said before, Satan is ruthless. He will use every sin you have committed to shift your focus away from those who need Christ, and onto yourself. Being assured of our salvation and our righteousness before God is our greatest defense against these attacks.

The Gospel of Peace

What made the Romans such a formidable force? Discipline and adaptability. Being able to march long distances and maneuver across a variety of terrain. Timing and distance determine the victor of any confrontation. To do this, they needed shoes that were durable and able to grip the ground firmly.



With the readiness that comes from the Gospel of Peace (Ephesians 6:15), we can rapidly move to where the Lord needs us. “[God’s Soldier’s] movements are dictated by the needs of the Gospel witness.”[\[2\]](#)

The Shield of Faith



We are also told to take up the Shield of Faith (Ephesians 6:16) to extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one. The favored shield in the time Ephesians was written was the Roman *scutum*, a large shield that protected most

of the soldier's body, enabling the Romans to protect both themselves and each other in tight formations without sacrificing their defense when fighting in looser formations. Most deaths in ancient battles occurred after, during, and after a rout. Therefore projectiles were used to disrupt and to instill fear before the two sides met in melee. Standing firm against hails of projectiles was key to surviving the battle.

It is the same with all believers. Our faith is our primary defensive and offensive tool. People who have faith in Christ are willing to risk being made to look foolish. They are confident in the hope they have in Christ, and are therefore enabled to do great things. People who act out of faith inspire others to do the same. Our faith also protects us from the feelings, falsehoods, and ideas the Devil likes to use to discourage us. If we are discouraged from our walk, then we have already lost.

The Sword of the Spirit

Finally, Ephesians 6:17 refers to the Sword of the Spirit, or the word of God. In conjunction with the *scutum* was the *gladius*, a short sword primarily used for thrusting and short cuts. It was the legionary's primary weapon. After throwing their *pila* (specialized javelins) to disrupt the enemy formation, the Romans drew their swords and closed the distance to engage in hand-to-hand fighting. Their armor and discipline enabled them to weather the brutal melee far better than their opponents. Ideally, this caused the enemy to rout.



There is a good reason the word of God is described as a sword

in other passages. It is absolute truth. Revelations 9:15 and Hebrews 4:12 describe God's word as a double-edged sword. In Hebrews, Paul says "it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Like a sword, learning to use God's word effectively requires constant training. Christians should therefore study and seek to live according to the word so they can stand firm when confronted by the Enemy.

By being willing to close in, to deliver the word of God straight into the heart of the matter, shrewdly providing an answer for our faith with gentleness and respect, we can establish common ground with those who do not know Christ, thus opening the way for them to hear the gospel. We do this knowing full well that friends and even family may hate us for confronting the world. Because we are willing to push through, we are able to form relationships with people and show what it means to walk with Christ! As with Roman equipment in Jesus' day, the armor of God is tailor made to allow us to safely close the distance with the enemy, and with the word of God, drive them from the field.

All we have to do is put it on.

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Faith Trends in America: How Is Christianity Faring as We Enter the Third Decade of the 21st Century

In looking at the state of American Christianity, Steve Cable examines how handling data inaccurately can produce wildly varying conclusions.

Recent reports on the current state of Christianity in America could create emotional whiplash, making one feel elated one moment and depressed the next. People are quick to comment on survey results and their own experiences. Within the last year, we have run the gamut from Glenn Stanton's book, *The Myth of the Dying Church: How Christianity is Actually Thriving in America and the World*,[{1}](#) to a Pew Research article, *In U.S. Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace*.[{2}](#)



These titles appear to represent two very different viewpoints. Which is it? Are we thriving or declining at a rapid pace?

Finding the answer requires one to thoughtfully articulate your question in at least two ways:

1. What do you mean by Christianity? Are you referring to all potential Christians both Protestant and Catholic or are you focused on a subset, such as Evangelicals? And,
2. Is anything beyond affiliation with a church necessary to be considered an active Christian? Examples might include a biblical understanding of how one gets to heaven and belief in the Bible.

You also need to thoroughly understand the available survey data that might throw light on your question. You need to understand what questions are asked and how they are worded. Then you analyze the responses to the set of relevant questions to gain insight on your topic of interest. Remember, no survey asks the exact questions you would ideally use. That sounds like more work than most of you want to attempt. Unfortunately, most of the pundits writing today do not attempt to do that work either. Generally, they take fragmented data and attempt to draw intelligent inferences.

In this article, I have done this work for you, drawing primarily on data from the Pew Research Group and the General Social Survey. We will look at which groups are growing as a percent of our population and which groups are not. Both Pew and the GSS have taken surveys over an extended period of time, helping us identify trends in religious affiliation and beliefs.

As you will see, the picture is certainly not rosy, but perhaps better than you expect. Although the growth of non-Christian segments is continuing at a fairly rapid pace, Evangelical Christianity is only declining slightly as a percentage of the population. However, I will point out how some data has been misunderstood to paint either a rosier picture or a gloomier picture than the actual current state of affairs.

Evangelicals: Thriving or Declining

All surveys we have reviewed covering this century show the same general result: the percent of people claiming an affiliation with a Protestant or Catholic church has been declining.

GSS surveys^{3} found across all ages the percentage who identify as Protestant or Catholic has dropped from 84% of the

population in 1988 down to 69% in 2018. Looking only at Protestants (both Evangelical and Mainline), the drop was from 58% down to 46%. Considering those who are Millennials now, that is ages 18 to 34, we find a decline from 53% down to 36% over this thirty-year period. And the data does not show any leveling off in the rate of decline.

But we may ask, "Are Evangelicals participating in this general decline or are they thriving as some authors claim?"

The bottom-line answer is that Evangelicals are declining as a percent of the overall population but at a much slower rate. Across all ages, the percentage who identify as Evangelical has dropped from 30% to 28% over this twenty-year period. For those aged 18 to 34 the drop was from 29% to 25%. In October 2019, Pew released a report showing that from 2009 to 2018, the percentage of Evangelicals of all ages dropped from 28% to 25%, a significantly faster rate of decline.

Even with a slow rate of decline, if Evangelicals make up around 25% of the population, they can have a significant impact on American culture and life and perhaps begin to grow again.

However, does Evangelical affiliation equate to an active Evangelical practice? We need to know how many who affiliate with an Evangelical church *are active Christians* as opposed to just being affiliated if we want to truly assess the strength of the American Evangelical movement.

Using the GSS surveys, we can look for people who:

1. Know God really exists
2. Pray multiple times per day
3. Attend church at least twice a month
4. Believe the Bible is the inspired word of God, and
5. Call themselves a strong Christian

I think an active, evangelical Christian would have these

basic beliefs and practices.

The percentage of the population who meet these criteria has dropped from about 9% down to just over 7% of the population over the last twenty years. This result is a large enough group to have some impact but not enough to crow about the growing Evangelical presence. We can say that Evangelical Christianity is certainly not thriving but clinging to a position of some relevance.

What's Happening with the Nones

Nones are people who state their religious affiliation is either atheist, agnostic or nothing at all.[\[4\]](#) The dramatic growth of the Nones has been an ongoing headline story.

Surveys[\[5\]](#) indicate the Nones were 8% of the population in 1988. By 2018 they had grown to over 23% of the population. For ages 18 through 29, they tripled from 13% to 35% of the population. No one denies this growth, but some question the importance of this trend.

For example, Glenn Stanton states, “(The Nones) are simply reporting their actual faith practices in more candid ways, largely due to new ways in which polling questions have been asked in the last ten years or so.”[\[6\]](#) Oddly enough, he primarily relies on data from GSS for long term trends and they have asked exactly the same question regarding Nones since 1972.[\[7\]](#)

Some suggest Nones are primarily Christians who will return to the fold as they move into marriage and child rearing. Is there any indication that this is happening?

Well, in 2007, among those aged 18 to 32, 24% of them are classified as Nones. In 2014, for this same group now seven years older, 32% of them are Nones. As this group began rearing children, *a significantly larger percentage of them were Nones than when they were younger.* Also, instead of

attending church, only 4% of these Nones attend church more than once a month.

Instead of emerging adult Nones turning into church-attending Christians as they age, more of them are becoming Nones. It appears that the cultural pressures against Christianity are outweighing the tendency of prior generations returning to seek religious training for their children.

The Barna Group has found that there are genuine differences between Millennials and older generations that will not be removed as they age. As Dave Kinnaman, President of the Barna Group, states in his book, *UnChristian*,[{8}](#) “I would caution you not to underestimate the widening gap between young people and their predecessors. Those who think that in due time Mosaics . . . will ‘grow up’ and look like everyone else should prepare to have unfulfilled expectations.” Dave’s comment is based on their analysis of multiple surveys covering thousands of individuals and a large number of in-depth interviews with young adults.

Are the Nons THE Major Growth Story?

Is the growth of nondenominational Christians a more important trend than the Nones? Glenn Stanton states, “Growth of nondenominational churches has been many times larger than the nones. . . it is not the rise of the nones that is the major story . . . It’s the “nons” and not the nones that are mushrooming.”[{9}](#)

This condition would be an amazing finding if true. However, it is not true for three major reasons which we will discuss today:

1. The percentage growth of the “nons” is *not many times larger*. From 2007 to 2014, “nons” grew their percentage of the population by 44%. But, Nones grew by almost the same rate at 42%. Looking at absolute growth, the “nons” grew by

four million people versus the Nones' 19 million—almost five times the number of “nons.” The growth of the “nons” is relegated to a minor factor when compared to the Nones.

2. The “nons” are a subset of the Evangelicals. And Stanton states, “*Evangelicals* have benefited more from these ecclesiastical exoduses than anyone else. They even . . . *outpaced the nones.*”[\[10\]](#) In fact, most of the “nons” growth came as a result of switching between evangelical denominations. Thus, any growth by the “nons” is offset by declines in other evangelical groups, resulting in an overall *decline of about 1%*. Evangelicals have not even come close to outpacing the Nones.

In fact, for the first time, we have the total number of nones exceeding the number of Evangelicals in America.

3. Stanton says, “It’s the evangelical churches identifying as nondenominational that have been growing faster than any others including the nones and the atheists.”[\[11\]](#) Taking a look at percentage growth, *the atheists and agnostics have shown the most explosive growth by far*, growing their numbers from 9 million in 2007 to 17.4 million in 2014—a growth of 92%—while the “nons” grew from 8 million to 12 million over the same time period, a growth of 56%. So perhaps Stanton meant to say, “It’s the non-believers and not the Nones that are mushrooming.”

In summary, the growth of the “nons” may be of interest to those who study the relative make-up of Evangelicals in America. But to those interested in how Evangelicals are doing as a whole it is not relevant. The fact that the “nons” are increasing just reflects some churning of affiliations within the Evangelical realm. On the whole, Evangelicals are decreasing at a slow, but steady pace.

Confusing Expansion with Same-Store Growth

A commercial enterprise may report sales growth. But the savvy investor wants to know why. Opening new stores may increase sales. But if it masks lower sales per existing store, it is a red flag. They are actually losing market share.

Similarly, with parachurch ministries, their number of locations gives little indication as to the health of Christianity. However, their growth rate per location can signal increased interest in Christianity.

Unfortunately, this distinction is often overlooked. For example, one pundit points to impressive growth by two respected student ministries in adding new locations as evidence to support an optimistic projection of Evangelical growth. However, they are not reporting an increased impact on a per site basis.

Looking at their annual reports,[{12}{13}](#) we see that one of them reports per location attendance *declining* at a rate of almost 1% per year over the last decade.[{14}](#) The other is declining even faster, reporting a growth rate of *negative* 3% per year.[{15}](#)

These declines could be caused by several different factors such as lower attendance at new locations, competition with other student groups, lower interest in their Christian message, etc. But we can be sure that these two ministries do not indicate an overall growth trend for Evangelicals.

Surveys and statistics can be very helpful in understanding the status of a ministry. However, we can be seriously misled by listening to those who do not know how to interpret the data contained in these sources.

Wrapping up our look at faith trends, in this article we saw:

1. American Evangelicals are declining slightly in the overall population with actively engaged Evangelicals holding about 7% of the population.
2. The Nones continue to grow and now exceed Evangelicals. Their growth clearly reflects the unimportance of religious affiliation among a large percentage of Americans.
3. The growth of Non-denominationals (although interesting) made no impact on the overall size of American Evangelicals and is less than the growth of atheists and agnostics.
4. Looking at growth per location of parachurch ministries is more important than growth in number of locations in assessing the growth of Christianity.

We live in a challenging time but Evangelical churches are strong enough to make a huge difference in America if we will follow the Holy Spirit's lead and present the eternal truth of the gospel in ways that communicate to today's "nothing in particular" culture.

Notes

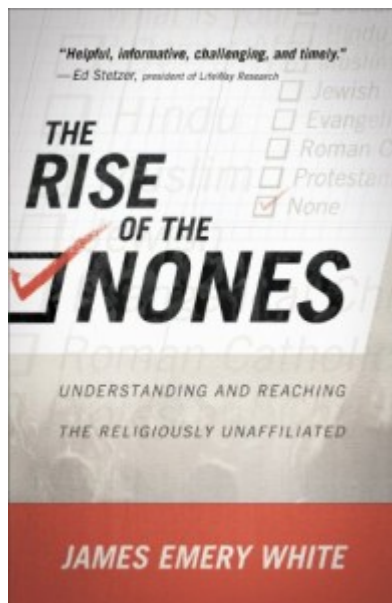
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14. The years looked at were 2009 and 2017.
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The Rise of the Nones – Reaching the Lost in Today's America

Steve Cable addresses James White's book The Rise of the Nones in view of Probe's research about the church.



Probe Ministries is committed to updating you on the status of Christianity in America. In this article, we consider James White's book, *The Rise of the Nones, Understanding and Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated*.[\[1\]](#) His book addresses a critical topic since the fastest-growing religious group of our time is those who check "none" or "none of the above" on religious survey questions.

Let's begin by reviewing some observations about Christianity in America.



From the 1930's[\[2\]](#) into the early 1990's the percentage of *nones* in America[\[3\]](#) was less than 8%. But by 2012, the number had grown to 20% of all adults and appears to be increasing. Even more alarming, among those between the ages of 18 and 30 the percentage grew by a factor of three, from 11% in 1990 to nearly 32% in 2012.

Another study reported Protestantism is no longer the majority in the U.S., dropping from 66% in the 1960's down to 48% in 2012.

The *nones* tend to consider themselves to be liberal or moderate politically, in favor of abortion and same-sex marriage being legal, and seldom if ever attend religious services. For the most part, they are not atheists and are not necessarily hostile toward religious institutions. However, among those who believe in "nothing in particular," 88% are not even looking for a specific faith or religion.

One report concludes, "The challenge to Christianity . . .

does not come from other religions, but from a rejection of all forms of organized religions. They're not thinking about religion and rejecting it; they are not thinking about it at all." [\[4\]](#) In fact, the 2011 Baylor survey found that 44% of Americans said they spend no time seeking "eternal wisdom," and a Lifeway survey found that nearly half of Americans said they never wonder whether they will go to heaven.

As White notes, these changes in attitude come in the wake of a second major attack on traditional Christian beliefs. The first set of attacks consisted of:

1. Copernicus attacking the existence of God
2. Darwin attacking God's involvement in creation, and
3. Freud attacking our very concept of a creator God.

The second storm of attacks focuses on perceptions of how Christians think in three important areas.

1. An over entanglement with politics linked to anti-gay, sexual conservatism, and abrasiveness
2. Hateful aggression that has the church talking in ways that have stolen God's reputation, and
3. An obsession with greed seen in televangelist transgressions and mega-pastor materialism, causing distrust of the church.

These perceptions, whether true or not, create an environment where there is no benefit in the public mind to self-identifying with a Christian religious denomination.

Living in a Post-Christian America

A 2013 Barna study [\[5\]](#) shows America rapidly moving into a post-Christian status. Their survey-based study came to this

conclusion: over 48% of young adults are post-Christian, and “The influence of post-Christian trends is likely to increase and is a significant factor among today’s youngest Americans.”[{6}](#)

White suggests this trend is the result of “three deep and fast-moving cultural currents: secularization, privatization, and pluralization.”[{7}](#)

Secularization

Secularization teaches the secular world is reality and our thoughts about the spiritual world are fantasy. White states: “We seem quite content to accept the idea of faith being privately engaging but culturally irrelevant.”[{8}](#) In a society which is not affirming of public religious faith, it is much more difficult to hold a vibrant, personal faith.

Privatization

Privatization creates a chasm between the public and private spheres of life, trivializing Christian faith to the realm of opinion. Nancy Pearcey saw this, saying, “The most pervasive thought pattern of our times is the two-realm view of truth.”[{9}](#) In it, the first and public realm is secular truth that states, “Humans are machines.” The second and private realm of spirituality states, “Moral and humane ideals have no basis in truth, as defined by scientific naturalism. But we affirm them anyway.”[{10}](#)

Pluralization

Pluralization tells us all religions are equal in their lack of ultimate truth and their ability to deliver eternity. Rather speaking the truth of Christ, our post-modern ethic tells us we can each have our own truth. As reported in our book, *Cultural Captives*[{11}](#), about 70% of evangelical, emerging adults are pluralists. Pluralism results in making your own suit out of patches of different fabrics and patterns

and expecting everyone else to act as if it were seamless.

White sums up today's situation this way: "They forgot that their God was . . . radically other than man . . . They committed religion functionally to making the world better in human terms and intellectually to modes of knowing God fitted only for understanding this world."[{12}](#)

This combination of secularization, privatization and pluralization has led to a mishmash of "bad religion" overtaking much of mainstream Christianity. The underlying basis of the belief systems of *nones* is that there is a lot of truth to go around. In this post-modern world, it is considered futile to search for absolute truth. Instead, we create our own truth from the facts at hand and as necessary despite the facts. Of course, this creates the false (yet seemingly desirable) attribute that neither we, nor anyone else, have to recognize we are sinners anymore. With no wrong, we feel no need for the ultimate source of truth, namely God.

If You Build It, They Won't Come

We've been considering the beliefs and thinking of the *nones*. Can we reach them with the gospel, causing them to genuinely consider the case for Christ?

We are not going to reach them by doing more of the same. Statistics indicate that we are not doing a good job of reaching the *nones*.

As James White notes, "The very people who say they want unchurched people to . . . find Jesus resist the most basic . . . issues related to building a relationship with someone apart from Christ, . . . and inviting them to an open, winsome, and compelling front door so they can come and see."[{13}](#)

Paul had to change his approach when addressing Greeks in

Athens. In the same way, we need to understand how to speak to the culture we want to penetrate.

In the 1960's, a non-believer was likely to have a working knowledge of Christianity. They needed to personally respond to the offer of salvation, not just intellectually agree to its validity. This situation made revivals and door-to-door visitation excellent tools to reach lost people.

Today, we face a different dynamic among the *nones*. "The goal is not simply knowing how to articulate the means of coming to Christ; it is learning how to facilitate and enable the person to progress from [little knowledge of Christ], to where he or she is able to even consider accepting Christ."[{14}](#)

The rise of the *nones* calls for a new strategy for effectiveness. Today, cause should be the leading edge of our connection with many of the *nones*, in terms of both arresting their attention and enlisting their participation.

Up through the 1980s, many unchurched would respond for salvation and then be incorporated into the church and there become drawn to Christian causes. From 1990 through the 2000s, unchurched people most often needed to experience fellowship in the body before they were ready to respond to the gospel. Today, we have *nones* who are first attracted to the causes addressed by Christians. Becoming involved in those causes, they are attracted to the community of believers and gradually they become ready to respond to the gospel.

We need to be aware of how these can be used to offer the good news in a way that can penetrate through the cultural fog. White puts it this way, "Even if it takes a while to get to talking about Christ, (our church members) get there. And they do it with integrity and . . . credibility. . . Later I've seen those *nones* enfolded into our community and before long . . . the waters of baptism."[{15}](#)

Relating to *nones* may be outside your comfort zone, but God

has called us to step out to share His love.

Combining Grace and Truth in a Christian Mind

Every day we are on mission to the unchurched around us. James White suggests ways we can communicate in a way that the *nones* can understand.

We need to take to heart the three primary tasks of any missionary to an unfamiliar culture. First, learn how to communicate with the people we are trying to reach. Second, become sensitized to the new culture to operate effectively within it. Third, “translate the gospel into its own cultural context so that it can be heard, understood, and appropriated.”[{16}](#)

The growth of the *nones* comes largely from Mainline Protestants and Catholics, right in the squishy middle where there is little emphasis on the truth of God’s word. How can we confront them with truth in a loving way?

The gospel of John tells us, “Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”[{17}](#) Jesus brought the free gift of grace grounded in eternal truth. As we translate the gospel in today’s cultural context for the *nones*, this combination needs to shine through our message. What does it look like to balance grace and truth?

- If we are communicating no grace and no truth, we are following the example of Hinduism.
- If we are high on grace – but lacking in truth, we give license to virtually any lifestyle and perspective, affirming today’s new definition of tolerance.
- On the other hand, “truth without grace: this is the worst of legalism . . . – what many *nones*

believe to be the hallmark of the Christian faith.” The real representative of dogma without grace is Islam.” In a survey among 750 Muslims who had converted to Christianity, they said that as Muslims, they could never be certain of their forgiveness and salvation as Christians can.

- Grace is the distinctive message of Christianity but never remove it from the truth of the high cost Christ paid. Jesus challenged the religious thought of the day with the truth of God’s standard. Recognizing we cannot achieve that standard, we are run to the grace of God by faith.

To communicate the truth, we need to respond to the new questions *nones* are asking of any faith. As White points out, “I do not encounter very many people who ask questions that classical apologetics trained us to answer . . . Instead, the new questions have to do with significance and meaning.” Questions such as, “So, what?” and “Is this God of yours really that good?”

We need to be prepared to “give a defense for the hope that is within us” in ways that the *nones* around us can resonate with, such as described in our article *The Apologetics of Peter* on our website.

Opening the Front Door to *Nones*

The *nones* desperately need the truth of Jesus, yet it is a challenge to effectively reach them. “Reaching out to a group of people who have given up on the church, . . . we must renew our own commitment to the very thing they have rejected – the church.”[\[18\]](#) The fact that some in today’s culture have problems with today’s church does not mean that God intends to abandon it.

The church needs to grasp its mandate “to engage in the process of ‘counter-secularization’ . . . There are often disparaging quips made about organized religion, but there was

nothing disorganized about the biblical model.”{19} We all have a role to play in making our church a force for the gospel in our community.

It must be clear to those outside that we approach our task with civility and unity. Our individual actions are not sufficient to bring down the domain of darkness. Jesus told us that if those who encounter the church can sense the unity holding us together they will be drawn to its message.

How will the *nones* come into contact with the unity of Christ? It will most likely be through interaction with a church acting as the church. As White points out, “If the church has a “front door,” and it clearly does, why shouldn’t it be . . . strategically developed for optimal impact for . . . all *nones* who may venture inside?”{20} Surveys indicate that 82 percent of unchurched people would come to church this weekend if they were invited by a friend.

One way we have a chance to interact with *nones* is when they expose their children to a church experience. Children’s ministry is not something to occupy our children while we have church, but is instead a key part of our outreach to the lost *nones* in our community. “What you do with their children could be a deal breaker.”

In today’s culture, we cannot overemphasize the deep need for visual communication. Almost everyone is attuned to visually receiving information and meaning. By incorporating visual arts in our church mainstream, “it has a way of sneaking past the defenses of the heart. And *nones* need a lot snuck past them.”{21}

We need to keep evangelism at the forefront. “This is no time to wave the flag of social ministry and justice issues so single-mindedly in the name of cultural acceptance and the hip factor that it becomes our collective substitute for the clear articulation of the gospel.”{22}

White clearly states our goal, "Our only hope and the heart of the Great Commission, is to stem the tide by turning the nones into wons."[\[23\]](#)

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Smuggling Theology Into “Out of the Silent Planet”

Dr. Michael Gleghorn provides an overview of how C.S. Lewis wove theology into his ‘Out of the Silent Planet,’ the first book of his space trilogy,

Out of the Silent Planet, C.S. Lewis’ first foray into the science-fiction genre, was originally published in 1938.[\[1\]](#) Lewis, who appreciated the science-fiction stories of authors like H. G. Wells, was nonetheless troubled by elements in these stories that were morally and intellectually objectionable. According to Alister McGrath, Lewis realized “that the forms of science fiction . . . used to promote various forms of atheism and materialism could . . . be used to *critique* these viewpoints and advocate an alternative.”[\[2\]](#) This is what Lewis *did* in *Out of the Silent Planet*—and what he *continued* to do in two follow-up books: *Perelandra* and *That Hideous Strength*. Together, these books are commonly known as “the Space Trilogy.”

Out of the Silent Planet tells the story of Dr. Elwin Ransom, who is drugged, kidnapped, and taken aboard a spaceship traveling to Mars. Weston and Devine, the two men who kidnap Ransom, have been to Mars before and believe that the planet’s inhabitants want them to bring back another human being (wrongly assuming that the person *may* be wanted as a



sacrificial offering). Weston is a physicist, interested in finding potential planets for humanity to colonize once our own planet becomes uninhabitable. Devine is an investor, hoping to make some money from the enterprise.

On their way to Mars (known as Malacandra to its own inhabitants), Ransom learns that his life may be in danger once they reach the planet. Hence, shortly after their arrival, Ransom escapes his kidnappers and ends up meeting a creature called a Hross, one of the planet's native inhabitants. He soon discovers that, much like himself, these are intelligent and moral beings. Indeed, in some ways they, along with the other intelligent species on the planet, are superior to human beings, for they have not been infected with the same moral illness that plagues our own species. Eventually, Ransom even meets the designated ruler of the planet, a spiritual intelligence referred to as an Oyarsa. He then learns why earth is known as "the silent planet."[\[3\]](#)

After publishing the book, Lewis confided to one interested correspondent that most of the early reviews had completely missed of Christian theology that he had woven into his narrative. He humorously noted that, apparently, "any amount of theology can now be smuggled into" such a book without anyone's even noticing.[\[4\]](#) So how much theology did Lewis "smuggle into" *Out of the Silent Planet*? That's what we'll discuss in the remainder of this article.

The Heavens Declare the Glory

As Weston, Devine, and Ransom travel through space on their way to Mars, Ransom is surprised by just how *good* he is feeling: courageous, joyful, alert, and full of life. He reflects upon the fact that he had been educated to regard space as "the black, cold vacuity" separating the worlds. He comes to realize, however, that this was all wrong. The term "space," he muses, was utterly inadequate "for this . . .

ocean of radiance in which they swam.” He thus *rejects* the term, observing that “Older thinkers had been wiser when they named it simply the heavens—the heavens which declared the glory.”[\[5\]](#)

Ransom is here reflecting upon the words of King David in Psalm 19:1, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.” As one commentator remarks, “David was moved by observing that the heavens, under the dominating influence of the sun, declare the splendor of God’s handiwork.”[\[6\]](#) The reference to the sun here is apt, for it is largely through the influence of the solar rays that Ransom feels “his body and mind daily rubbed and scoured and filled with new vitality.”[\[7\]](#)

Of course, we must remember that Lewis is here writing science *fiction*—and not science fact. While “the substitution of heaven for space” was Lewis’s “favorite idea in the book,” he also acknowledged “that the rays in interplanetary space, so far from being beneficial,” would actually be harmful to us.[\[8\]](#) But Lewis was attempting to reintroduce a conception of wonder and beauty into the world. He wanted to move his readers’ understanding of “space” from something merely cold, dark, and dead, to a conception of the “heavens” as something radiant and alive with the goodness and bounty of their Creator. And this, in the fictional (and even mythological) world of the story, he has arguably achieved.

Indeed, it’s one of the reasons that many dislike referring to these books as “the *space* trilogy.” Such language misses the fact that Lewis was attempting to shift our attention from the darkness and deadness of “space” to the glory and splendor of the “heavens.” It’s just one of the ways in which Lewis was attempting to reclaim for God a genre of literature that was so often dominated by atheistic and materialistic forms of thinking.[\[9\]](#)

War in Heaven

Before we go any further, we must address the meaning of Lewis's title, "*Out of the Silent Planet*." The novel concerns a voyage from Earth to Mars, and details the adventures of the main character, Dr. Elwin Ransom, after his arrival. In the novel, Earth is known as "the *silent* planet." But why?

The answer has partly to do with "smuggled theology" and partly with the mythological world of the story created by Lewis. In this mythological world, we are introduced to the idea that each planet in our solar system is ruled by a very great, though still created, spiritual being. These beings were created by God and are something like a cross between a Christian archangel and a Roman god or goddess. Hence, the spirit that governs Mars is something like a cross between the archangel Michael and the Roman god Mars (devoid, of course, of all the negative characteristics traditionally ascribed to Mars in Greco-Roman mythology). In fact, this being is a loyal servant of God and was created (at least in part) for the purpose of ruling the planet assigned to it. In the novel, such a ruling spiritual power is referred to an *Oyarsa*.

Eventually, Ransom meets this ruling power and learns why Earth is known as "the silent planet." He is told that the *Oyarsa* of *our* world was once very great, even greater than that of Mars.^[1] Unfortunately, however, he became "bent" (or evil). This happened in the distant past, before there was any life on Earth. Because this "Bent One" desired to destroy "other worlds besides his own," there was "great war" in the heavens. Eventually, he was "bound . . . in the air of his own world." "There," Ransom learns, "doubtless he lies to this hour."^[11] The other planets have no communication with Earth. It is "silent."

Do you see what Lewis is doing? In the fictional world of the novel, he is telling us a story very similar to that of the fall of the devil. In the Bible, the Apostle Paul refers to

Satan as the “prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:1-2) and the “god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4). Lewis is doing something similar in his description of the “Bent One” who rules the Earth as a rebel against God. But Lewis goes much further than this.

War on Earth

Above, we left Ransom, the hero of C. S. Lewis’s novel, *Out of the Silent Planet*, deep in conversation with the divinely appointed spiritual ruler of Mars. After telling Ransom that Earth, alone among the planets in our solar system, is “silent,” being ruled by a “bent” (or evil) power, the Martian ruler then says something quite intriguing.

He tells Ransom that they do not think that “Maleldil” (more on this in a moment) would completely surrender Earth to the “Bent One.” Indeed, he says, “there are stories among us” that Maleldil has done some “strange” and wonderful things, even personally appearing on Earth and “wrestling with the Bent One” for the right to rule. “But of this,” he says, “we know less than you; it is a thing we desire to look into.”[\[12\]](#)

So who is Maleldil, and what exactly has he done? In the world of the novel, Maleldil is the name for God in the Old Solar language, which Ransom has gradually learned during his time on Mars.[\[13\]](#) Hence, the Martian ruler is essentially telling Ransom that they do not believe that God would completely surrender Earth to the devil. Indeed, they have even heard stories that God (or Maleldil) has visited “the silent planet” and done battle with the evil one. He admits that there is much they do not know about all this but says that he (and other loyal servants of God) long to look into these things.

Those familiar with the Bible will doubtless see what Lewis is doing here, for he concludes this passage with what is basically a biblical quotation. The Apostle Peter wrote of

“the prophets who prophesied about the grace” that was to be ours in Christ. So great was the content of this revelation, notes Peter, that even “angels long to look” into such things (1 Peter 1:10-12). Thus, as Christiana Hale rightly notes, the “strange counsel” that Maleldil has taken, and the wonderful things he has done, “the things that all the angels desire to look into, is the Gospel of Jesus Christ: the Incarnation, birth, death, and resurrection of the Son of God.”[\[14\]](#)

Once again, therefore, we see Lewis “smuggling theology” into his interplanetary space adventure. In this case, though not stating it explicitly, he clearly alludes to the whole gospel message about Jesus. Next, we’ll consider one final example of “smuggled theology” in C. S. Lewis’s *Out of the Silent Planet*.

Divine Providence and the Martial Spirit

Although God, who is known as Maleldil in the novel, is mentioned repeatedly, He is always mentioned in the third person. We hear about things that Maleldil *has done, is doing,* or may one day *do*, but we do not hear directly from God (or Maleldil) himself. Nevertheless, it is clear that He is ultimately in charge, and He is providentially at work in and through His creatures.[\[15\]](#)

For example, the spiritual power that Maleldil created to govern Mars, tells Ransom (the hero of the novel) that it was only by Maleldil that he had been able to save his own planet from the destructive rage of the “Bent One” (or devil). Indeed, it was only by Maleldil that the heavenly host were able to stop the “Bent One’s” ambitious cruelty and confine him to the Earth.[\[16\]](#) Moreover, we learn that Maleldil has done marvelous things and even personally visited Earth to do battle with the devil.[\[17\]](#)

Lewis thus portrays God (or Maleldil) not only as a king, but also as a warrior. He is characterized (in an appropriate way)

by what might be called the “warrior” or “martial spirit.” Moreover, the spiritual power that Maleldil created to govern Mars is also (like the god of Roman mythology) imbued with the martial spirit. He, too, is a warrior, loyally engaged in fighting in the service of God. In light of this, once we learn that Ransom has been called to Mars by its planetary ruler, we can rightly surmise that it was, in fact, *God’s will* for Ransom to make this journey. We might even guess that one of the purposes of this journey was to develop the “martial spirit” in Ransom himself.

As Christiana Hale observes, “Lewis does not randomly pick Mars as the location, as if any alien planet would do. No, he chooses Mars for a reason, and an enormous part of that reason is to mold Ransom into a Martial character.”[\[18\]](#) In other words, God (or Maleldil) wants to develop certain martial virtues in Ransom, things like courage, strength, determination, perseverance, and grit. Indeed, this is providentially necessary, for He is preparing Ransom for something far greater in the future. Hence, through the providence of God and the influence of Mars, we witness Ransom’s growth in the martial spirit, thus preparing him for [his next great adventure](#) on a different alien world, that of Perelandra.

Notes

1. C. S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1965).
2. Alister McGrath, *C. S. Lewis: A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2013), 234-35.
3. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 120-21.
4. C. S. Lewis to Sister Penelope CSMV, August 9, 1939, in *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, ed. Walter Hooper, vol. 2, Books, Broadcasts and War 1931-1949 (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2004), 262.
5. All quotations in this paragraph are taken from Lewis, *Out*

of the Silent Planet, 32.

6. Allen P. Ross, "Psalms," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament Edition*. ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Victor Books, 1985), 807.

7. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 31-32.

8. C. S. Lewis to Mrs. Stuart Moore (Evelyn Underhill), October 29, 1938, in *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, ed. Walter Hooper, vol. 2, Books, Broadcasts and War 1931-1949 (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2004), 233-34.

9. See Alister McGrath, *C. S. Lewis: A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2013), 234-35.

10. See Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 120-21.

11. All quotations in the paragraph are taken from Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 121.

12. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 121.

13. Christiana Hale, *Deeper Heaven: A Reader's Guide to C. S. Lewis's Ransom Trilogy* (Moscow, ID: Roman Roads Press, 2020), 155.

14. Hale, *Deeper Heaven*, 88.

15. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 67-8.

16. *Ibid.*, 121.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Hale, *Deeper Heaven*, 70.

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Money Management in a Crisis

The COVID pandemic caused a worldwide financial crisis, making stewarding God's money more important than ever. Kerby Anderson provides a biblical view of money, giving, debt, and savings.

A number of years ago, I wrote a book with the appropriate title, *Making the Most of Your Money in Tough Times*.[\[1\]](#) Although there have been tough times in the past, we certainly need some biblical wisdom about our money and how to manage it in our current circumstances. Here are some key principles that I discuss in that book and in a more recent book on the subject of *Christians and Economics*.[\[2\]](#)

Biblical View on Money

Let's start by correcting a common cliché that money is the root of all evil. Actually, the biblical passage says: "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness" (1 Timothy 6:10).



Money is not evil, but the love of money can be a concern. Money can be used to promote good or evil. Money can provide for your family, feed the poor, and promote the gospel. It can also be used to buy drugs, engage in prostitution, and destroy individuals and society.

The real question is: What is your attitude towards money? What do you plan to do with the financial resources God has placed into your hands? Jesus warned us that we should not love money because we cannot serve God and Mammon (Matthew 6:24). In order to have a proper biblical perspective on money, we need to understand what the Bible teaches about wealth and poverty.

While we are talking about money, let's focus some attention on wealth. Within the Christian community, we are often bombarded with unbiblical views of wealth. At one extreme are those who preach a prosperity gospel of "health and wealth" for all believers. At the other extreme are radical Christians who condemn all wealth and imply that a rich Christian is a contradiction in terms.

What is a biblical view of wealth? First, wealth itself is not condemned. The Bible teaches that God gave material wealth to Abraham (Genesis 13), Isaac (Genesis 26), Jacob (Genesis 30), and Joseph (Genesis 39). Other characters in the Old Testament were also wealthy, such as Job (Job 42) and Solomon (1 Kings 3). In fact, we see in Job 42 that God once again blessed Job with material possessions after his trials. In Deuteronomy, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, wealth is seen as evidence of God's blessing (Deuteronomy 8; 28; Proverbs 22:2; Ecclesiastes. 5:19).

Even though wealth might be an evidence of God's blessing, believers are not to trust in it. Passages in the Old Testament and the New Testament teach that the believer should not trust in wealth but in God (Proverbs 11:4; 11:28; Jeremiah 9:23; 1 Timothy 6:17; James 1:11; 5:2).

Second, when wealthy people in the Bible were condemned, they were condemned for the means by which their riches were obtained, not for the riches themselves. The Old Testament prophet Amos railed against the injustice of obtaining wealth through oppression or fraud (4:11; 5:11). Micah spoke out against the unjust scales and light weights with which Israel defrauded the poor (6:1). Neither Amos nor Micah condemned wealth per se; they only denounced the unjust means by which it is sometimes achieved.

Third, Christians should be concerned about the effect wealth can have on our lives. We read in many passages that wealth often tempts us to forget about God. Proverbs 30:8-9 says: "Give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with the food that is my portion, That I not be full and deny You and say, 'Who is the Lord?'" Hosea 13:6 says of those who were satisfied that "their heart became proud" and ultimately forget about the Lord.

Biblical View on Giving

In order to develop a biblical point of view on money, we should first focus on the subject of giving. The concept of the tithe is introduced in the Old Testament. The word tithe means "a tenth part." Once you understand that someone who, say, makes \$3000 a month and gives only \$100 a month is not tithing. A number of studies have found that only 2-3 percent of households tithe their income to their church.

There is no explicit command in the New Testament to tithe. The primary reason is that the tithe was for the Levites and the priests. The substitutionary death of Christ for our sins did away with the need for a temple and priests.

In the New Testament, we do see numerous verses calling for believers to give. For example, we are to give to those who minister (1 Corinthians 16:1; Galatians 2:10). We are to give to those who trust God to supply their needs (Philippians 4:19). We are to give as God has prospered them (1 Corinthians 16:2) and are to give cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7). And the Bible teaches that we will ultimately give account of our stewardship (Romans 14:12).

The first century believers set a high standard for giving. They sold their goods and gave money to any believer in need (Acts 2:45). They sold their property and gave the entire amount to the work of the apostles (Acts 4:36-5:2). And they also gave generously to the ministry of Paul (2 Corinthians 8:1-5) on a continual basis (Philippians 4:16-18).

Even though the tithe was no longer required, it appears that the early believers used the tithe as a base line for their giving. After all, a large majority of the first century believers were Jewish, and so they gave not only the tithe but above and beyond the requisite ten percent.

Paul makes it clear that Christians are not to give

“grudgingly or under compulsion” but as each believer has “purposed in his heart” (2 Corinthians 9:7). Although the tithe was no longer the mandatory requirement, it seems to have provided a basis for voluntary giving by believers.

There is also a correlation between sowing and reaping. 2 Corinthians 9:6 says: “Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” Elsewhere in Scripture, we read that the size of a harvest corresponds to what we scatter. Proverbs 11:24-25 says: “There is one who scatters, and yet increases all the more, And there is one who withholds what is justly due, and yet it results only in want. The generous man will be prosperous, And he who waters will himself be watered.” Notice that a spiritual harvest may be different from the kind of seed that is sown. For example, a material seed (giving to ministry) may reap a spiritual harvest (1 Corinthians 9:9).

Finally, we are to give according to what we have purposed in our hearts. 2 Corinthians 9:7 says: “Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

Biblical View on Debt – Part 1

The Bible has a number of warnings concerning debt. Proverbs 22:7 says: “The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is a servant to the lender.” When you borrow money and put yourself in debt, you put yourself in a situation where the lender has significant influence over you.

Many other verses in the Proverbs also warn about the potential danger of taking on debt, especially another person’s debt (Proverbs 17:18; 22:26-27; 27:13). While this does not mean that we can never be in debt, it does warn us about its dangers.

If you are debt free you are free to follow the Lord’s leading

in your life. If you are in debt, you are constrained and become a servant to the lender. People who are in financial bondage are not emotionally or spiritually free. Their financial obligations wear heavy upon their mind and spirit.

The Bible also teaches that it is wrong to borrow and not repay. Psalm 37:21 says: "The wicked borrows and does not pay back, but the righteous is gracious and gives."

Some have taught that Christians should never go into debt. The basis for that teaching is usually the passage in Romans 13:8 because it says: "Owe nothing to anyone."

Although some have argued that this verse prohibits debt, the passage needs to be seen in context. This passage is not a specific teaching about debt but rather a summary of our duty as Christians to governmental authority. Paul is teaching that we should not owe anything to anyone (honor, taxes, etc.). But he is not teaching that we should never incur debt. While it is better that we are debt-free, this passage is not commanding us to never go into debt.

The Bible is filled with biblical passages that provide guidelines to lending and borrowing. If debt was always wrong, then these passages would not exist. After all, why have passages providing guidelines for debt if debt is not permitted? Certainly there would be a clear prohibition against debt. We should point out that the clear implication of Romans 13:8 is that we should pay our debts and it would be wise if we would pay our debts off as quickly as possible.

Biblical View on Debt – Part 2

One of the consequences of debt is that we can often deny reality. In order to realistically deal with the debt in our lives we need to get rid of some of the silly ideas running around in our heads.

For example, you are NOT going to win the lottery. Your debt problem is NOT going to go away if you just ignore it. And a computer glitch in your lender's computer is NOT going to accidentally wipe out your financial records so that you don't have to repay your debt.

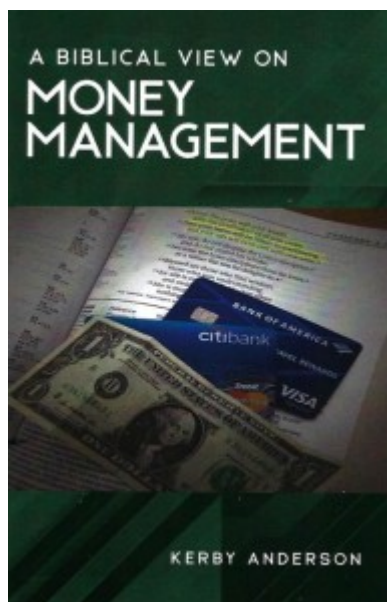
Another consequence of debt is a loss of integrity. When we cannot pay, we start saying "the check's in the mail" when it isn't. We not only kid ourselves but we try to mislead others about the extent of our problem with debt.

Sometimes debt even leads to dishonesty. Psalm 37:21 says: "The wicked borrows and does not pay back." We should repay our debts.

A third consequence of debt is addiction. Debt is addictive. Once in debt we begin to get comfortable with cars, consumer goods, furniture, etc. all funded through debt. Once we reach that comfort level, we go into further debt.

A final consequence of debt is stress. Stress experts have calculated the impact of various stress factors on our lives. Some of the greatest are death of a spouse and divorce. But it is amazing how many other stress factors are financially related (change in financial state, mortgage over \$100,000). When we owe more than we can pay, we worry and feel a heavy load of stress that wouldn't exist if we lived debt free.

Biblical View on Savings



It is always important for us to get out of debt. I have written another booklet on the subject of debt. If you are in debt or want to learn more about government debt and personal debt, I encourage you to obtain that booklet. Email me your name and address at kerby@probe.org and I will send it to you.

We should not merely work to get out of debt and eventually break even. Savings and investing should be part of your budget and part of your life plan. Saving and investing are ultimately a means to an end. You may be saving for your kids' college or saving for your retirement.

America used to be a nation of savers. In fact, thrift was a foundational element of American society. The architect Louis Sullivan even carved the word THRIFT over the door of his bank. Thrift was seen as a private moral virtue that made public prosperity possible. Americans supported institutions that encouraged savings.

The Bible encourages us to save. In Proverbs it encourages those who do not save to consider how a lowly creature like the ant prepares for the future. "Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest" (Proverbs 6:6-8).

The writer of Proverbs also talks about how wise people save in contrast to foolish people who do not. "In the house of the wise are stores of choice food and oil, but a foolish man devours all he has" (Proverbs 21:20).

We should always have a budget. Author and speaker, John

Maxwell, has a great definition of a budget: "A budget is people telling their money what to do instead of wondering where it went." A budget is a plan for saving and spending.

The book of Proverbs admonishes us to plan. Proverbs 16:3 says, "Commit your works to the LORD And your plans will be established." But as we develop these plans for the future, we also need to be sensitive to the Lord's leading. "The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps" (Proverbs 16:9).

The Bible promises that good things will happen when we plan. "Good planning and hard work lead to prosperity" (Proverbs 21:5, NLT). By contrast, the Bible also teaches that your plans will fail if these plans are not within the will of God. Isaiah 30:1 says, "'Destruction is certain for my rebellious children,' says the Lord. 'You make plans that are contrary to my will. You weave a web of plans that are not from my Spirit, thus piling up your sins.'"

If you do not have anything in savings, you need to begin by putting aside a cash reserve for emergencies. Proverbs 22:5 says, "The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it." Everyone needs a cash reserve for major emergencies (fire, tornado, earthquake) and even for small emergencies and inconveniences (broken appliance, car repair, flat tire).

Most financial advisors suggest that you have six months' worth of income set aside for an emergency or unexpected expense. You may not have that set aside right now, but today is a good time to start setting aside some money. Make your first goal to set aside one month's worth of income.

This has been a brief overview of money management. I encourage you to read books[\[3\]](#) and visit websites that will give you even more direction on how to use your money. The Bible provides insight in giving, savings, and debt. Apply

these principles and allow God to bless you.

Notes

1. Kerby Anderson, *Making the Most of Your Money in Tough Times* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House), 2009.

2. Kerby Anderson, *Christians and Economics* (Cambridge, OH: Christian Publishing House), 2016).

3. Randy Alcorn, *Money, Possession and Eternity* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House), 2003.

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