

Mind Games Camp (radio transcript)



There's one thing we do here at Probe that is my favorite part of ministry. Our Student Mind Games Camp is a week-long, total immersion, give-it-all-we've-got experience for high school and college students that changes minds and hearts forever.



Beautiful Camp Copass in the Dallas-Ft. Worth area is surrounded by a lake on three sides and it feels very secluded—even though it's not far from the Dallas-Ft. Worth airport, so students can easily fly in. We teach Christian students how to think biblically on a wide range of subjects: understanding how others think as they understand their worldviews, how they can know that Christianity is true, creation and evolution, human nature, the differences between guys and girls, the problem of evil and the value of suffering, campus Christianity, and even how to watch a movie

with their brain turned on. They learn about Islam, a compassionate but biblical view of homosexuality, different views of science and Earth-history, and genetic engineering.

Returning campers get to experience what is always a highlight for our students, a special alumni track with new lectures in an intimate, personal setting. The alumni always tell the first-timers what an amazing difference it makes to come back a second or even third time, because they get so much more out of the conference than they ever thought possible.

The Probe teachers don't just give the lectures, though; we continue conversations at meals where we eat and visit with the students instead of each other. We break up into discussion groups to help the students process what they're learning in the sessions. There is free time every afternoon and evening to hike, swim, play basketball or card games, read or nap. Or of course, just hang out with new friends.



The students are delighted to meet other thinking Christians from all over the country, students eager to think and grow in their faith as they learn to love God with their minds together. They enjoy getting to know us as the instructors, too.

We're not only available the whole week; we look for opportunities to engage in conversations that will encourage and affirm what God is doing in the minds and hearts of these precious young people.

We'll be talking about Mind Games in this article, but you can go to our website, [Probe.org/mindgames](https://probe.org/mindgames), and check out our videos, a typical week's schedule, and lots of other information. In the next sections you'll hear a little bit from several lecturers, and also from several of our Mind Games alumni.

Sneak Peek of Probe Lectures

Here are snippets from lectures of four of our Probe Mind Games instructors, speaking on the Biology of Human Uniqueness, LGBT, Islam, and Nietzsche for Beginners:

Dr. Ray Bohlin:

Fire is also necessary for creating tools, particularly metal tools. You have to be able to heat metals to a really high temperature: copper, silver, gold—all their melting temperatures are over a thousand degrees centigrade. So you have to get a really hot fire to do that, and to be able to make the tools liquid, to make them malleable. So you've got not only to be able to make a fire, you have to be intentional as to how you make a really hot fire.

Sue Bohlin:

What I really love is my title for this, which is "Grace and Truth About Homosexuality," because I think we need both. We need to be coming from a heart of compassion and sympathy and understanding for the sexual and relational brokenness that results in homosexuality, but we also need to be absolutely camped out on the truth of the Word of God.

Paul Rutherford:

The third of the five pillars of Islam is the giving of alms, what they call *zakat*. It's much similar to Christian charity, to giving to a church or giving to the poor; Muslims likewise have a heart for their community, have a heart for those who are down and out. This is the giving to "the least of these," as Christians might call it. The fourth pillar of Islam is Ramadan, and Ramadan is a fast. It is a month-long fast. This is a time when they train themselves in discipline, of practicing not eating during the day, and when they train themselves in increasing their desire for God, for Allah.

Todd Kappelman:

Adolph Hitler, when he was coming to power after 1939, he ordered just crates and crates and crates of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and would give to his captains and his commanders and everything, and we believe by this action in some of Hitler's own words that he saw himself to be the inheritor of much of Nietzsche's philosophy and especially the aspect of the overman, the great world historical figure that Nietzsche is going to advocate for solving some of the problems that he's going to look at.

Comments from Alumni, Part 1

In this article we're talking about our memorable, life-impacting, week-long summer Mind Games conference. But you don't have to take our word for it. Consider what some of our alumni have to say.

Here's three-time alumnus, Noah:

Mind Games is a fun place of fellowship, you get a lot of excitement, there's a ropes course that you go on so there's a lot of excitement there, you do a lot of team-building activities, it's a ton of fun, you get to learn a whole lot about life, about faith, about people, about relationships. You get to experience a whole new world of things that you've never experienced before in the faith. A lot of people, they just have a surface-level faith, but here at Mind Games we go a whole lot deeper into that faith, we lay it out and we explain philosophically how it works, reasonably how it works, how it works with science, how it works with other people, how it works with suffering, how it works with everything, just how the world works with faith.

Here's Esther:

My faith before Mind Games was a little crazy . . . I had

thoughts about suicide a few times, and then I started to doubt, "Is God even there?" Like, if He was there, then wouldn't I feel His presence? Then I came to Mind Games and I was like, there's no way He's not real. For someone who hasn't been here, Mind Games is a great experience. You not only gain friends and family, but you learn more about God and how to stay stronger in your faith.

Tyler had a major shift between his first and second time at Mind Games:

I'm Tyler Lord from Athens, Georgia. Last year when I came I was actually agnostic, so I didn't really know. But kinda having experiences throughout the year after Mind Games and coming back, I've become a Christian. It's lots of fun. You come and, you know, it's not really all about religion. There's a bunch of free time you get to play around. You come in, and you don't really know what to expect, When you get here and you think, oh, it's gonna be a bunch of lectures, but it's really not. You get a good bond with everybody's who's here, like the other campers. And even though there are lectures, they're really interesting. The apologetics ones are great for like if someone comes up to you and they're like, "Why are you a Christian?"

Comments From Alumni, Part 2

Here are a few more alumni comments, starting with Arty:

Mind Games is a wonderful time of fellowship, worship and just gaining a lot of knowledge into why Christianity is reasonable, how Christianity can work with science, how your faith and science can work together and not against each other. Mind Games is fun, it's very much about the relationships that you build, it's about the people who you interact with on a daily basis for the week.

This was Anya's second time through:

After this second round of Mind Games, I feel like I've grown much more as a person, not just due to time but also how much Mind Games has affected me personally. If I had to describe Mind Games to someone who's never been here before, I would say it's something that completely blows your mind away. Not in the sense that it's all weighing over your head, but just how much they describe, how much detail and information you have on how to defend your faith. First year it was amazing, and second year it got even better.

Ben also returned:

Well it's really that the first Mind Games for me was like planting the seed, this time it's nurturing the plant. It was really so I could re-establish what they had taught me last year, cause last year was such an eye-opener I wanted to see if either I could experience that or build upon it this year, which I have.

Amy set a record of coming to Mind Games!

My name is Amy Klaschus, I'm from Orlando Florida, and I've been to Mind Games five times now! What keeps me coming back to Mind Games is the people, because I love the teachers—they're very nice and they're always willing to help and answer questions. Every year there have been at least a few people among the students who are just so welcoming and so Christian in a way I can't really find back home as much. I know that in shaping my growth in faith, Mind Games has been just completely essential, because it's given me the perspective and the ability to think biblically about all the problems I face, all the problems I faced in high school and now all the problems I've been facing this past year of college.

Why Go to Mind Games?

We now know that three out of four high school seniors who had been part of a church youth group drop out of church within a year.^[1] One reason for this is that they don't own their faith; they don't know that Christianity is true, and they don't know why it's true. They tend to equate faith with a warm fuzzy feeling that doesn't stand up to the challenges of life. Many students are afraid to express their doubts so they never learn that there are good, solid answers to their questions. They are sensitive to the disconnect that happens when those who profess to be Christ-followers act no differently from unbelievers.

For over twenty years, Probe's Mind Games conferences have been preparing young people for the challenges to their faith. In that time, we have witnessed firsthand the incredible thirst for a reliable trustworthy faith. Again and again we hear that some had despaired of ever finding something like Mind Games. The conference consistently exceeds expectations, and students often tell us they wish they had brought their friends.

Alumni from these summer conferences have gone on to become leaders on their campuses, the government and the military. This week-long immersion truly changes lives, giving them a new confidence in their God, His Word, and in their role as His ambassadors. We know this because some of them come back as alumni a second or third year, and because they contact us years later and let us know how Mind Games continues to impact them.

Mornings start with an informal devotional by Probe staff and a time of prayer. They receive twenty-five hours of lecture using video clips, role play, Q and A, and other teaching techniques. They connect with each other and process what they're learning in small groups. We as staff get to know and truly love them.

The Student Mind Games Camp is for those who have finished their junior or senior years of high school, and for college freshmen and sophomores. [Note: especially motivated students younger than that are welcome, though!] Please go to our Web site, Probe.org/mindgames, and check out videos. You can look at a typical schedule, and find out all the details. And then register someone you love. It will make a difference in time and eternity.

Note

1. Steve Cable, Is This the Last Christian Generation? probe.org/is-this-the-last-christian-generation/

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Transhumanism and Artificial Intelligence

Kerby Anderson provides an overview of transhumanism and AI, considering its impact on us and our families.

Over the last few years, we have heard more pundits and futurists talk about transhumanism. What is this philosophy? How will it affect our families and us? How should a Christian think about transhumanism?

Transhumanism is an intellectual and cultural movement that seeks to transform the human condition. The leaders of this movement want to use the developing technologies to eliminate aging and enhance human potential (physical, psychological, and mental).

Nick Bostrom explains that transhumanism views human nature as

a “work-in-progress, a half-baked beginning that we can learn to remold in desirable ways.” He goes on to explain the transhumanist vision: “Transhumanists hope that by responsible use of science, technology, and other rational means we shall eventually manage to become posthumans, beings with vastly greater capacities than present human beings have.”[\[1\]](#)

Two primary ways they want to do this is through genetic engineering and artificial intelligence. They want to genetically create “the new man,” and they want to use technology to merge humans with machines.

The genetic part of this equation claims that we can use gene splicing and other genetic modification techniques so that genes can be easily transferred between species. But we should be concerned about geneticists who want to create a superhuman race. Leon Kass warned that “Engineering the engineer seems to differ in kind from engineering the engine.”[\[2\]](#)

The other part of the equation concerns technology. The leaders of transhumanism believe we are on the cusp of a technological threshold in both artificial intelligence and human-machine technology.

The “humanism” in transhumanism reminds us that this is a philosophy rooted in Enlightenment humanism. But it is different. Whereas the goal of humanism was to develop the ideal human, the goal of transhumanism is to transcend what we have traditionally considered human.

The Transhumanist Declaration provides eight key points to describe what the signers believe should be the future of humans.[\[3\]](#) It begins with this claim: “Humanity stands to be profoundly affected by science and technology in the future. We envision the possibility of broadening human potential by overcoming aging, cognitive shortcomings, involuntary suffering, and our confinement to planet Earth.”

Two Principles of Transhumanism

Now I would like to look at the two foundational principles of transhumanism.

The first principle is “metaman.” Futurists predict that our current human condition will evolve into being a cyborg (short for *cybernetic organism*). Our bodies will be joined to machines as we “evolve” through technological progress.

Transhumanists believe we will have immense knowledge and information because of the rapid advances in artificial intelligence and computing power. These advances will eventually exceed human intelligence. Meanwhile, advances in genetic engineering will allow scientists to modify the human body to keep pace with these technological advances.

This is the two-fold hope of the transhumanists: artificial intelligence and genetic engineering. One represents biological change through mixing and matching genes. The other presents the merging of human intelligence with artificial intelligence.

In fact, the hope is to create a superorganism through the transference of genes between species. This may even eradicate the differences between species. One scientist even suggested that tampering with the genetic codes of all plants and animals on this planet would cause the “definition of human beings to drift.”[\[4\]](#) Humans would merge with the rest of nature, thereby creating a planetary superorganism he calls “Metaman.”

In essence, transhumanists would like to erase any distinction between human, other forms in nature, and machines. Humans would now control the future direction of evolution and merge all forms of life and non-life together in one enormous superorganism.

The second principle is “the singularity.” Transhumanists wait

for the arrival of a technological threshold that will be achieved through artificial intelligence. Futurists predict that sometime in the middle of this century, we will achieve what transhumanists call “the singularity.”[\[5\]](#) The current distinction between humanity and nature and machine will fade and there will no longer be any barriers between the natural world and artificial world.

This utopian view assumes that humans will be able to transcend the limitations of our biological bodies and brains. There will no longer be any distinction between humans and machines. And this, say the transhumanists, will allow humanity to no longer be resigned to death as the end. All of this, they predict, will usher in a technological millennium.

History of Artificial Intelligence

The term artificial intelligence was coined in 1956 by the American computer scientist John McCarthy. He defines it as “getting a computer to do things which, when done by people, are said to involve intelligence.” Unfortunately, there is no standard definition of what constitutes AI. Part of the problem is the lack of agreement on what constitutes intelligence and how it relates to machines.

McCarthy proposes that “Intelligence is the computational part of the ability to achieve goals in the world. Varying kinds and degrees of intelligence occur in people, many animals, and some machines.”[\[6\]](#) This would include such capabilities as logic, reasoning, conceptualization, self-awareness, learning, emotional knowledge, planning, creativity, abstract thinking, and problem solving.

Researchers have for decades hoped to build machines that could do anything the human brain could do. Progress was slow for many decades but has accelerated in the last few years. A significant breakthrough occurred in 2012, when an idea called the neural network shifted the entire field. This is a

mathematical system that learns skills by finding statistical patterns in enormous amounts of data.

The next big step came around 2018 with large language models. Companies such as Google, Microsoft, and OpenAI began building neural networks trained on vast amounts of text including digital books, academic papers, and Wikipedia articles. Surprisingly, these systems learned to write unique prose and computer code and to carry on sophisticated conversations. This breakthrough has been called “generative AI.”

These AI algorithms are based on intricate webs of neural networks and allow for what is considered “deep learning.” These advanced AI systems collect huge amounts of data and can correct mistakes and even anticipate future problems.

The benefits are significant. Factory automation, self-driving cars, efficient use of resources, correlating massive amounts of data, and fewer errors in medical diagnoses are just a few of the many ways in which AI will improve our lives in the 21st century.

Unfortunately, AI poses dangers to us.

Dangers of Artificial Intelligence

Although artificial intelligence offers some significant benefits, it also poses many dangers. The authors of the open letter on AI warn that human beings are not ready for a powerful AI under present conditions or even in the foreseeable future. What happens after AI becomes smarter than humans? That is a question that bothered Eliezer Yudkowsky. In his opinion piece for *Time* magazine, he argued that “We Need to Shut It All Down.”[\[7\]](#)

He warned that “Many researchers steeped in these issues, including myself, expect that the most likely result of building a superhumanly smart AI, under anything remotely like the current circumstances, is that literally everyone on Earth

will die.” He doesn’t think this is merely a possibility but believes it is a virtual certainty.

He uses this illustration to drive home his point: “To visualize a hostile superhuman AI, don’t imagine a lifeless book-smart thinker dwelling inside the internet and sending ill-intentioned emails. Visualize an entire alien civilization, thinking at millions of times human speeds, initially confined to computers—in a world of creatures that are, from its perspective, very stupid and very slow.”

Bill Gates understands both the benefits and dangers of AI. He explains that the “development of AI is as fundamental as the creation of the microprocessor, the personal computer, the Internet, and the mobile phone.” While these changes in how we work, learn, and communicate are good, there is also “the possibility that AIs will run out of control.”[\[8\]](#)

He asks, “Could a machine decide that humans are a threat, conclude that its interests are different from ours, or simply stop caring about us?” He recognizes that “superintelligent AIs are in our future” and that they “will be able to do everything that a human brain can, but without any practical limits on the size of its memory or the speed at which it operates.” However, these “strong AIs” will “probably be able to establish their own goals.” Those would likely conflict with our best interests.

Notice the number of dystopian movies where the machines have taken over. That would include movies like *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, *I, Robot*, the *Matrix* series, and the *Terminator* series. That is why many people fear how AI will be used in the future.

Biblical Perspective

How should Christians respond to transhumanism? We should begin by looking at the philosophical foundation of this

movement. It begins with a belief that there is no God and we are responsible for our own destiny. It also is based upon an evolutionary foundation that assumes that we are the product of millions of years of chance process.

The leaders of transhumanism see genetic engineering as a tool to be used to speed up the process of evolution. We can use genetics to enhance and improve the human race. If we believe that humans are merely the product of the undirected force of evolution, then certainly intelligent scientists can “improve on nature.”

The evolutionary argument goes like this. Humans die due to some technological glitch (e.g., heart stops beating). Therefore, “Every technical problem has a technical solution. We don’t need to wait for the Second Coming in which to overcome death. A couple of geeks in a lab can do it. If traditionally death was the specialty of priests and theologians, now the engineers are taking over.”[\[9\]](#)

The leaders of transhumanism believe we should use technology to improve the human race so that we are perfect and immortal. In many ways, this technological imperative harkens back to the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11). Instead, we should use technology wisely as we exercise dominion over the world (Genesis 1:28).

Here are a few biblical principles. First, we begin with the reality that each human being is created in God’s image (Genesis 1:26-27, Psalm 139:13-16, Isaiah 43:6-7, Jeremiah 1:5, Ephesians 4:24). We have been given dominion and stewardship over the creation (Genesis 1:28, Colossians 1:16) and should reject any form of technology that would usurp or subvert that stewardship responsibility.

Second, humans are created as moral agents. Computer technology can aid us in making moral decisions because of its powerful ability to process data. But we can never cede our

moral responsibility to those same computers. God will hold us responsible for the moral or immoral decisions we make (Roman 2:6-8, Galatians 5:19-21, 2 Peter 1:5-8). We should never give computers that authority.

We should reject the vision of transhumanism that looks forward to the day in which man and machine become one in the singularity. We must reject the idea that this is the next step in human evolution. We should reject the worship of technology and reject the idea that AI will make us more human. And we should reject the false utopian vision of a world when machines are given co-equal value to humans created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27).

Notes

1. Nick Bostrom, "Transhumanist Values," *Ethical Issues for the Twenty-First Century* (2005): 3-14.
2. Kass, Leon. "The New Biology: What Price Relieving Man's Estate?" *Science*, 19 November 1971, 779.
3. Transhumanism Declaration, www.humanityplus.org/the-transhumanist-declaration.
4. Gregory Stock, *Metaman: The Merging of Humans and Machines Into a Global Superorganism*, NY: Simon and Schuster, 165.
5. Ray Kurtzweil, *The Singularity Is Near*, NY: Penguin, 2005.
6. John McCarthy, "What is AI/Basic Questions," jmc.stanford.edu/artificial-intelligence/what-is-ai/index.html
7. Eliezer Yudkowsky, "Pausing AI Developments Isn't Enough. We Need to Shut it All Down," *Time*, March 29, 2023.
8. Bill Gates, "The Age of AI has Begun," March 21, 2023, www.gatesnotes.com/The-Age-of-AI-Has-Begun.
9. Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*, London: Penguin, 2016, 23.

For Further Reading

Kerby Anderson, *Christian Ethics in Plain Language*, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005, chapter 20.

Kerby Anderson, *Technology and Social Trends* Cambridge, OH:

Christian Publishers, 2016, chapter 3.

Jacob Shatzer, *Transhumanism and the Image of God* Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2019.

Lawrence Terlizze, *Into the Void: The Coming Transhuman Transformation*, Cambridge, OH: Christian Publishers, 2016.

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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

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

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Why We Shouldn't Date Non-Christians

Kyle Skaggs examines theological and sociological reasons why it's a bad idea for Christ-followers to date unbelievers.

Should you date a non-Christian? The world tells us, "Why not? You can't help who you are attracted to. As long as you don't force your beliefs on the person you're dating, there won't be a problem." But what do we say? To provide a biblical answer to this question, let's assume that you, the hypothetical Christian single, are dating with the purpose of marriage.

According to the Christian worldview, believers are to seek out a marriage that honors God. We are to leave our parents and join as one flesh with our spouse (Genesis 2:24), being faithful by reserving sex and romantic attention for that one person and only that one person (Exodus 20:14, Proverbs 6:20-35, Matthew 5:27). This way, a marriage that honors God

places His will above your own desires. In order to best do this, your marriage needs to be religiously homogamous. In other words, you need to marry another Christian.

The scripture concerning marrying a non-Christian is straightforward. 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 warns against doing it because being unequally yoked will cause us to stumble in our walk with Christ. While there is no verse that explicitly mentions dating non-Christians, what applies to marriage clearly applies to dating as well. Dating is courtship, an intentional step on the road to marriage. How you go about dating will affect how you go about marriage. There are three areas of concern when it comes to dating non-Christians. The first is your personal walk with Christ. The second is loving and honoring your spouse. Third is raising your children as Christians.

Therefore, I find it's good to explore why we are told not to be unequally yoked beyond "because the Bible says so," as well as the practical concerns of courting non-believers. There are some who would argue that it is fine to date non-Christians. Some of the arguments they give are decent. Others are not so good. I will be paraphrasing some arguments I've personally heard. For context, we must first explore why we are told not to marry unbelievers.

When the people of Israel were preparing to enter the promised land, God commanded them multiple times not to marry or intermingle with the people they were being sent to drive out, because God was having Israel drive them out. They were marked for judgment because of their wickedness. The Lord makes the consequences of intermingling with the Canaanites clear:

"...lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their

gods.” (Exodus 34:15-16 ESV)

Again in Deuteronomy, the Israelites were commanded to drive out the nations who inhabited the Promised Land, “...that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and so you sin against the Lord your God” (20:16-18 ESV).

“So the people of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And their daughters they took to themselves for wives, and their own daughters they gave to their sons, and they served their gods. And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. They forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth.” (Judges 3:5-7 ESV)

Yoking with unbelievers creates a stumbling block for you in your relationship with God, and as you can see from Israel’s history, marriage to unbelievers leads to sin because it is the believer who compromises their faith. Take Solomon as an example. He was a man of wisdom and integrity who built the temple in Jerusalem. Like his father David, he disobeyed the Lord’s command to Israel’s kings not to take many wives (Deuteronomy 17:17). Unlike his father, many of Solomon’s wives were foreigners who evidently did not stop worshiping the gods of their homelands, since Solomon was convinced to build altars for those gods. Why did he marry all these pagan women? I can’t say. He probably thought he could handle them.

This set Israel on a cycle of idolatry, oppression, and repentance much like the one in Judges.

To this, some might say, “But we aren’t living in the Old Testament,” or “that applied to the Hebrews in their particular context of taking the Promised Land.”. Even later scripture contains the exact same message.

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what

fellowship has light with darkness? . . . What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."(2 Corinthians 6:14-18 ESV)

The believer and the unbeliever live in two different realities. One is light, with God revealing sin and calling the believer to be more like Christ, while the other is darkness, with an apathetic attitude towards God's values. The ungodly do not know or care for God's laws. As the believer pulls towards God, the unbeliever pulls away. They do this because God intrudes more on the relationship as He changes the believer. Over time, the relationship will most likely become strained and bitter. The believer is forced to choose between pleasing God and pleasing the person they are dating. This conflict is amplified after marriage.

This is supported by scientific studies as well. Studies have found that couples belonging to differing religions have more frequent conflicts than those of the same faith.[{1}](#) In South Korea, a study found that Christian couples with similar attitudes towards religion and church attendance reported happier marriages.[{2}](#) The same trend was found in an American study.[{3}](#) Being unequally yoked has negative effects on your relationship with your spouse.

Being unequally yoked affects more than your relationship with God. It affects your children as well. After you are married, your children will be taught conflicting ways to live, which will more often than not lead them away from Christ. "When couples belong to different faiths or have different levels of religiosity, their children cannot easily acquire a shared set of beliefs."[{4}](#)

It also has a negative effect on your relationship with your children.^{5} In a study by George Fox University based on a survey by Knowledge Works, religious discord in heterogamous marriages (marriages between spouses with religious differences) in turn affected the children. Fathers who were more religious than their wives felt less close to their children because of their differing attitudes towards faith. In a study by Petts and Knoester,^{6} school-age children with unequally yoked parents are twice as likely to use alcohol and three times as likely to use marijuana than children with same-faith parents.” According to Petts’ study, children younger than school age in low income urban homes have been found to experience a negative correlation between their parents’ uneven religiosity and positive behaviors. In Bartkowski’s 2008 study,^{7} the frequency of parental arguments over religion is negatively associated with child development at kindergarten age. From these studies, it can be inferred that choosing to marry a fellow Christian will benefit your future children far more than yoking yourself to a non-believer.

Some Objections (Good and Bad)

Two objections I have heard after presenting the scriptural and scientific evidence are “I still don’t think it’s a big deal, because God has told people to be unequally yoked,” and “What if I use dating as an opportunity to witness to them?”

A possible third option is the “I don’t care” response, which is not an objection, because there is no argument being made. It is beyond frustrating, because it makes the conversation meaningless. If you find yourself saying something along those lines at this point in the article, then you’ve already made up your mind.

As a Christian, your first responsibility to nonbelievers is to live a Christlike life, showing the love of Jesus with the intent to introduce them to the Good News of the gospel of

Christ. This especially extends to your dating. Christians are told to date and ultimately marry other believers because they are taught that marriage is holy before God.

One objection I've heard against what I've been saying goes: "But didn't Hosea marry a whore on God's command? What if God told me to date this person?" This was an attempt to argue that God's singular exception justifies courting a non-Christian.

Yes, God did tell Hosea to marry a prostitute. No, it is not the same thing, because the woman Hosea married was a sinner, not a non-believer. First, this argument is too divorced from the context of scripture to be valid. Second, Hosea was a unique individual, one whom God raised up as a prophet. Third, the purpose of this marriage was to show Israel how they were unfaithful to God when the woman inevitably slept with other men! It was certainly not a good marriage. So unless you're a prophet whom God is telling to use your horrible dating life as an object lesson, you can't say that it's good for you to date a non-Christian.

Missionary Dating: A Lukewarm Fantasy

Speaking of exceptions, there is one scenario people have been using to excuse being unevenly yoked for decades if not centuries: missionary dating. There's this prevailing idea among young Christians that you can date someone for the purpose of sharing the gospel with them.

This is the fiction of missionary dating. It is what Christians tell themselves to justify an unwise decision. First, it attempts to wed (pun intended) two activities that do not complement each other. Courtship involves getting to know someone in order to decide whether you will marry them, while evangelism involves getting to know someone as part of a discipleship process. Dating with the intent to bring someone to Christ tries to reconcile the equal

power dynamic of courtship with the mentor-student power dynamic of discipleship. This is not a good plan.

Second, missionary dating leaves you as your date's only window into Christianity. Evangelism can require more than one person ministering to the unbeliever. It is a team effort even when we don't see it. Dating, on the other hand, is more exclusive.

Third, no one can serve two masters. You will love one and hate the other. You will favor either ministry or dating to the exclusion of the other. The temptation to stop ministering in favor of dating is stronger. The consequence of this is that you make compromises as all close relationships do, and present an imperfect picture of God's kingdom. If in your date's eyes, you live just like everyone else, they will not see what it means to give oneself up to Christ.

When you date someone, always be examining yourself. Pray that the Holy Spirit will reveal the contents of your heart to you. The Lord does not tell us to sin against Him. Anything contrary to what God commands us to do in Scripture is from the devil. To that end, missionary dating can only be effective for those who are able to use wisdom and discernment. It is inadvisable for those who are not spiritually mature. I'm sure Christians have been saved because of missionary dating, but they are few and far between.

Sending the Wrong Message

Finally, choosing to date a non-Christian instead of ministering to them is foolish because of the message you send. When you date someone like this, you are telling them that you either don't care about God or you don't care they are going to hell. It is more important to you that they pour themselves into a relationship with you than it is for them to come to know Christ. On the other hand,

prioritizing evangelism and discipleship shows them you want them to share in the kingdom of God.

In conclusion, dating a non-Christian is counterproductive to your walk with Christ. Scripture warns us against marrying non-believers, so why risk falling in love with one? We see time and time again just how easily it can indirectly damage your relationship with God. They do not know your God, nor do they honor Him. The excuses for dating non-believers are logically unsound at worst, and at best cannot stand the test of God's word. Dating a non-Christian will also cause unneeded drama, and should you choose to tie the knot, that conflict will become worse. This will make the lives of your future children needlessly complicated, their development will be hindered because of you and your spouse's fighting, and they will not be shown what a stable and godly family looks like, nor will you be able to effectively raise them to love and fear God. Missionary dating is counterproductive for both dating and evangelism. The people I know who were successful in it admitted that they went through a lot of unnecessary hardship. It is better to remain as friends at least until they come to know Christ. This shows that you care more for the state of their relationship with God than your own wants, and enables you to minister to them through your relationship.

Notes

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(11 pages)

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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

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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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The Answer Is the

Resurrection

Steve Cable shows us that the resurrection is the key apologetic for those seeking to evangelize. As we share our faith, understanding the evidence for the resurrection helps prepare us to answer questions raised by a seeker after the truth.

Making a Defense for Your Living Hope

A key verse for our ministry at Probe is 1 Peter 3:15 where Peter writes, “Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.”[\[1\]](#)

I want to encourage you to make this verse a motivator for your own walk as an ambassador for Christ. You might say, “I am not equipped to make a defense. Surely, this verse is talking to pastors and people like the researchers at Probe.” A deeper look at Peter’s letter shows us that this is not the case. Peter makes it clear that these instructions are for all Christians.[\[2\]](#) In addition, Peter wrote this verse in the imperative tense, meaning that it is a command, not a suggestion.



Okay. I want to be ready to give an account for the hope that is in me, but I need be clear on what that hope is. Fortunately, Peter answers that for us in chapter 1 where he writes, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.”[\[3\]](#)

So, our hope is a living hope for an eternal inheritance reserved for us in heaven. If I am to make a defense for this hope of eternal life, I need to be able to explain why I believe that the source of this hope has both the capability and the motivation to follow through on this offer.

How do we get this living hope? Our hope comes “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”! Jesus’ resurrection is the basis for our hope. If Jesus is not resurrected from the dead, we are of all men most to be pitied.[{4}](#) So, any defense of the hope that is within us begins with explaining why someone should believe in the resurrection. The empty tomb is the cornerstone to answering most other objections raised up against the gospel.

In the remainder of this article, we will look at evidence for the resurrection and how a defense of the resurrection is the foundation for answering many of the objections raised against Christianity.

Evidence for Jesus’ Resurrection

Giving an account for our belief in Jesus’ resurrection is the key to defending the hope within us. Several books have been written on this topic, and you can find a [list](#) of them in the transcript of this radio program on our Web site. The evidence for the resurrection as an historical event is so strong that even Dr. Antony Flew, until recently a noted proponent of atheism, had to admit, “The evidence for the resurrection is better than for claimed miracles in any other religion. It’s outstandingly different in quality and quantity, I think, from the evidence offered for the occurrence of most other supposedly miraculous events.”[{5}](#)

One help to remembering the overwhelming evidence is to think of the ten A’s attesting to Jesus’ resurrection:

1. *Accurate predictions.* Both the Old and New Testaments

contain predictions of Jesus' death and resurrection. Numerous times in the Gospels, Jesus told his disciples and the Jewish authorities that He would rise to life after three days in the earth. In John 2, at the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus told this to the Jewish leaders. It made such an impression on the disciples, that verse 22 tells us, "So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken."

2. *Attesting miracles.* Jesus' resurrection was not a sudden miraculous cap to an otherwise unremarkable life. Jesus had consistently demonstrated His authority over the material universe from turning water into wine, to walking on the water, to healing the sick, to raising Lazarus from the dead. His resurrection is consistent with the power He demonstrated during His earthly ministry.

3. *Agonizing death.* Jesus had numerous opportunities to avoid a fatal confrontation with the Jewish leaders and Roman authorities. No one is going to go through a Roman scourging and crucifixion as a hoax. Jesus submitted to the cross because it was necessary to pay for our sins and He knew that He had the authority to conquer death.

4. *Angry authorities.* After word of Jesus' resurrection began to spread, the Jewish authorities wanted to put a stop to people believing in Him. Producing the body of Jesus would have been the best way to do this. Even with support from the Roman authorities, they were never able to produce a body.

5. *Absent body.* The chief priests set a guard around Jesus' tomb to make sure the body was not stolen by his disciples. Those guards knew their lives could be at stake if they failed in their duty, but on the third day Jesus was gone. Once they regained their senses, the guards "reported to the chief priests all that had happened."[6](#) Why did they take this risk? Because they knew that there was no body to recover. No

one has ever found any credible evidence that the body of Jesus was anywhere to be found on this earth.

6. *Amazed disciples*. After Jesus' arrest, most of His disciples fled. It is clear from their reaction that they despised the cross and were not anticipating the resurrection. Two of his disciples did not recognize the risen Jesus even as He was teaching them the Scriptures related to Himself.[\[7\]](#) Their skepticism and shock showed that they clearly were not part of some preplanned hoax.

7. *Agreeing eyewitnesses*. After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to over five hundred people. They testified to His resurrection. We do not have a record of anyone disputing their testimony, saying "I was there with them and it was a hoax."

8. *Apostolic martyrs*. People don't die for something they know to be a hoax. Yet, many of these eyewitnesses accepted death rather than deny the resurrection of Jesus.

9. *Agnostic historians*. Contemporary, non-Christian historians reported that Jesus was reputed to have risen from the dead and that his followers were willing to die rather than recant their belief in Jesus.

10. *Attesting Spirit*. Over the centuries, the Holy Spirit continues to convict unbelievers and assure believers that Jesus is the risen Son of God.

We don't have to believe in the resurrection in *spite* of the facts. Instead, we believe in the resurrection in *light* of the facts. If you can defend your belief in the resurrection, then you are already positioned to respond to other questions people may have about your faith. In fact, you can respond to objections by asking, "Do you believe in the resurrection of Jesus?" If the answer is no, then you may want to focus on the evidence for the resurrection as a foundation for addressing their other concerns.

Tearing Down Objections Through the Resurrection

The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is the key to making a defense for our living hope. Let's consider some common objections to Christianity, and see how the resurrection can be the starting point for a reasoned response.

1. Is there a God still active in this universe?

Jesus' resurrection shows there is a power that transcends the physical universe. A transcendent God is the only power that can override decay and death. As the apostle Peter wrote, "[God] raised [Jesus] from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God."[{8}](#)

Jesus' resurrection declares God's active involvement in this world. He planned it from the beginning and He performed it at the appointed time.[{9}](#)

2. What difference does God make to my life?

Jesus' resurrection shows that He lives into eternity and that we have the prospect of life beyond this world.[{10}](#) Knowing we have a soul that continues beyond this world impacts our perspective on life. As Paul points out, "If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."[{11}](#)

But if the dead are raised, then we need to live with eternity in mind. It becomes a top priority to know the one who controls eternity, God.

3. Is the Bible really God's revelation? Every religion has their holy books.

Jesus' resurrection confirms that Jesus is the source of truth. He knows which holy book is actually a revelation from God. Jesus affirmed the inspiration of the Old Testament. He promised that the Holy Spirit would lead the apostles as they

shared His teaching through the New Testament. The Gospel of John states, "So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken." [\[12\]](#)

If Jesus' resurrection caused His disciples to believe the Bible, it is certainly sufficient to cause me to believe.

4. I am too insignificant for God to love.

Jesus' resurrection shows the depth of God's love for you. Without the crucifixion there would be no resurrection. His crucifixion cries out "God loves you!" Romans tells us that "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." [\[13\]](#)

Being singled out for God's love makes you very significant in His universe.

5. How can anyone know the truth about life and death?

Jesus' resurrection gives Him firsthand knowledge. He has been beyond death and returned. His knowledge transcends this physical universe. Jesus gives us an eyewitness for eternal life. He told Pilate, "My Kingdom is not of this world. . . . For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth." [\[14\]](#)

Jesus testifies to the truth regarding eternal life. We can trust His testimony because of the resurrection.

6. Why should I believe that Jesus is God's divine Son?

Jesus' resurrection conquered the grave. No mortal can claim victory over decay and death.

He said that "I and the Father are one." His victory over death confirms His claim, crying out through the ages "He is God!" As Paul proclaims in Romans, "[Jesus] was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead." [\[15\]](#)

7. Aren't there many ways to God? Can Jesus be the only way?

Jesus' resurrection puts Jesus in a class by Himself. His crucifixion and victory over death clearly show that He is the only way to God. If there were multiple ways, Jesus would not have gone to the cross. He allowed himself to be subjected to death because it was necessary for our redemption. In addition, Jesus clearly stated that no one comes to the Father except through Him.[{16}](#)

8. How can I possibly be forgiven for my sins?

Jesus' resurrection validates His claim to have victory over sin and death. The ultimate result of sin is death, and Jesus conquered death.[{17}](#) In Romans chapter 10 we learn "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."[{18}](#)

Belief in Jesus' resurrection is a central part of saving faith.

9. Why should I believe God is involved in His creation? I don't see God making much difference in this world.

Jesus' resurrection demonstrates God's active involvement in this world. He predicted it, He planned it, He performed it. Peter writes, "[you are redeemed] with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you."[{19}](#)

10. How can a loving God allow all of the evil in this world?

Jesus' resurrection demonstrates a loving God redeeming a world degraded by evil. If there were no evil, Jesus would not have had to conquer death through the cross. If God was not loving, He would not have sent Jesus into the world to redeem us.[{20}](#) Looking at His death and resurrection, we know without

a doubt that there is evil in this world, yet we are still loved by a God with power over death. Evil and love coexist because God valued us enough to create us in His image with a genuine capability to choose to turn our backs on Him. Making us unable to choose evil would have made us unable to love removing the greatest attribute of His image.

Once someone accepts the resurrection, many other barriers to accepting Christ are torn down. Whatever the question, the answer is the resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord.

May what John said of the disciples be true of us as well: "So when He was raised from the dead, . . . they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken." [\[21\]](#)

Notes

1. Scripture references are taken from the NASB95.
2. 1 Peter 1:1-2, 3:8.
3. 1 Peter 1:3-4.
4. 1 Corinthians 15:17-19
5. Gary Habermas, "My Pilgrimage from Atheism to Theism: An Exclusive Interview with Former British Atheist Professor Antony Flew." Available from the Web site of Biola University at www.biola.edu/antonyflew/.
6. Matt 28:11.
7. Luke 24:13-32
8. 1 Peter 1:21.
9. 1 Peter 1:18-21.
10. 1 Cor. 15:54-57.
11. 1 Cor. 15:32.
12. John 2:22.
13. Rom 5:8-11.
14. John 18:37-38.
15. Rom 1:4-5.
16. John 14:7.
17. James 1:15; 1 Cor. 15:54-57.
18. Rom 10:9-10.

19. 1 Peter 1:18-20.

20. John 3:16.

21. John 2:22.

Resources on Evidence for Jesus' Resurrection

Copan, Paul, and Ronald Tacelli, eds. *Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Figment? A Debate Between William Lane Craig & Gerd Ludemann*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000.

Habermas, Gary, and Michael Licona. *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 2004.

McDowell, Josh. *More Than a Carpenter*, Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale/Living Books, 1977.

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Strobel, Lee. *The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.

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Biblical Worldview: Parents and Pastors Are Not Passing

It On

Steve Cable reviews the dismal results of surveying the worldview of American Christians.

Problem: How Parents are Missing the Mark

Following up on our series of articles featuring the results from Probe's recent 2020 survey of American Religious Beliefs^{1}, we want to add to that understanding drawing on data collected and analyzed by George Barna of the Christian Research Center at Arizona Christian University. Since 2020, the Christian Research Center has taken multiple surveys to assess the worldviews and the values of American adults. In 2023, Barna released a book entitled *American Worldview Inventory 2022-23: The Annual Report of the State of Worldview in the United States*.^{2}

Looking at the spiritual status and worldviews of America's parents of children living at home, our data and Barna's book both show the vast majority of Americans do not possess a biblical worldview to pass on to their children. Equally disturbing at a parenting level, most of them "do not even have the worldview development of their children on their radar."^{3} To make this situation worse for the future of American Christianity, most Evangelical parents fall into the same category as other parents— a fractured, inconsistent worldview with no intentional plan to impart their worldview or any other worldview to their children.

Some people might want to argue that worldviews are personal, and children need to develop a personal worldview without parental intervention. That way they can own and nurture this view as young adults, finding something that works for them. Such an argument might have some substance, if we were talking about forming your views on how one might select sports teams to root for or even choose a career to pursue. But when we

talk about worldviews, we are talking about the fundamentals of life including things such as “Where did life originate?”, “What does it mean to be a person?”, “Why is there evil and suffering in the world?”, “How can we escape the destructive forces of sin in our life?”, “Can we be restored to a relationship with our creator?” and others.

There are radically different answers to these questions being promoted in our society today. If you are an Evangelical Christian, you know that true biblical answers to these questions are under constant attack.

You should expect your children to choose to flee from these attacks by adopting another, nonbiblical worldview unless they have been given good reasons to believe the biblical answers are true.

If you believe that a biblical worldview is the only foundation upon which to build a life that will echo through eternity, you need to be actively teaching, testing and encouraging your children with the truth. To do this you will need to repair your worldview along biblical guidelines and develop a plan for building these worldview truths into your children.

But first, we will look at the lies that have crept into many worldviews including those held by Christian parents.

The Victory of Syncretism

George Barna’s research as well as our own clearly show a breakdown of biblically based thinking not only among the general population but also among those who identify as Evangelicals. Barna’s recent research found that two-thirds of parents of preteens claim to be Christian, but only 4% of them possess a biblical worldview. So, what kind of worldview do they hold?

Barna surveyed adults in America using worldview questions to

divide our population into seven different worldviews ranging from Biblical Theism to Moralistic Therapeutic Deism to Postmodernism to Eastern Mysticism.

Surprisingly, the most popular worldview was Biblical Theism but held by only 2% of the parents of preteens. All the other worldviews offered were at 1% or less.

Wait, you may be asking! That sum adds up to less than 8% of the population and you would be right. What happened is that 94% of these parents were classified as being Syncretists. "Syncretism is a blending of multiple worldviews in which no single life philosophy is dominant, producing a worldview that is diverse and **often self-contradictory**." [\[4\]](#) Since the rise of postmodernism (and probably before), more and more Americans have no problem holding a set of views which are at best inconsistent. Barna found most of these syncretistic parents gathered their worldview ideas from different parts of three of the candidate worldviews: Eastern Mysticism, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, and Biblical Theism. When considered as a whole, each of these worldviews is distinctly different and in fact counter to the other two.

We see that Americans tend to embrace beliefs in the different areas of worldview that seem attractive in that area, are espoused by many of their friends, and that they see espoused on their media outlets of choice. As one scholar describes it, "Central to syncretism is the belief that all religions offer truth, or that different religions present different paths to God. Syncretism operates on the assumption that combining certain teachings produces a better way of knowing and/or reaching God."

Barna found that less than one third of adults turn to the Bible as their primary source of moral guidance. Of course, even fewer turn to the sacred texts of other religions. American adults, without placing their faith in historical worldviews, feel a freedom to create their own way to view the world. In fact, 58% of adults believe that moral

truth is up the individual to decide. Since all truth is relative, inconsistencies and contradictions are not worth considering. Certainly a careful examination of the so-called truth that all truth is relative would show the falsehood in that statement.

The dominant worldview thinking of Americans assumes that the details of the faith you ascribe to don't matter as long as you place your faith in something AND you don't presume to question anyone else's object of faith. As you can see, this way of thinking creates a tough wall for any evangelistic message to overcome. People are not programmed to think, "Isn't it nice that this Christian is concerned for my eternal situation and wants to tell me the way I can improve it." Instead, they think, "How can this person be so rude and confrontational as to present their views as the only viable truth? This person needs to be shunned."

At the end of this essay, we will consider some strategies for tearing down this wall.

Values and Beliefs of Young Parents

As noted above, two major barriers exist, preventing the development of biblical leaning worldviews for our pre-teens. First, most parents do not take any concrete actions to pass on or promote a particular worldview. Instead, they leave it to the culture around their children to instill a worldview framework. If these parents have a somewhat Christian perspective themselves, they ignore the teaching of Deuteronomy where God tells us, *"These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up."*^{5} And in the New Testament epistle Ephesians, Paul writes, *"Bring your children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."*^{6}

Secondly, the vast majority of parents, including many Evangelical parents, do not possess a biblical worldview to pass on. In some areas, they depart from the clear biblical teaching and subscribe to the lies of the world. As Barna points out, *"The parents of children under the age of 13 are a stellar example of this Christian nominalism that is widely accepted as spiritually normal and healthy."* [\[7\]](#) Let's examine some the areas where parents are failing to uphold a biblical worldview.

As Christians, we know that God created human life as sacred. Even as fallen humans, God considered our lives so important that Jesus came to die, taking on the price of our sin. And yet according to Barna's recent book, over three fourths of American parents do not suppose that human life is sacred.

This gap in a biblical worldview leads to a nation where many worship a woman's ability to choose an abortion over the sacred obligation to protect life. In fact, over 85% of parents do not consider human life as sacred and/or support having an abortion if raising the child would be **too inconvenient** for the parents. To put it bluntly, the right to live a life without inconveniences is more important than another person's right to live at all.

Another example is that less than one in four self-identified Christian parents oppose the notion that having faith matters more than which faith. They are essentially saying if you have faith in Buddha, Mohammed, or your household idol, that is just as good as having faith in Christ. These parents (and remember, these are people who identify themselves as Christians) believe that God would sacrifice His Son, turning His back on Jesus as He took the sins of the world upon Himself, when there were already other ways people could be restored to God that would require no love or sacrifice on the part of God. This inconsistent, self-contradictory thinking is a hallmark of the syncretistic views that dominate our society.

Barna also found that only one in ten parents have a consistently biblical perspective on God, creation, and history. Without this understanding, their children cannot be expected to grasp these key precepts on their own.

With this combination of *laissez-faire* parenting and a lack of a consistent biblical worldview, the natural conclusion is that the upcoming generation of young adults will be even further removed from clear biblical thinking than the current generation. Unfortunately, this result is almost certain without a concerted effort by concerned Christians to communicate the truth.

Pastors (for the most part) Not Helping Combat the Decline

As we consider the decline in American young adults who profess and live according to a biblical worldview, we might ask what influences are in play to counter this decline. One of the questions Barna addresses is “How well are America’s pastors working to stem this discouraging tide on unbelief?” To get a handle on this question, he surveyed 1,000 pastors across America including Senior Pastors, Youth Pastors and Teaching Pastors.[\[8\]](#)

If these pastors are going to help turn people back to a biblical worldview, they need to possess one themselves. What the survey found was only four out of ten Senior Pastors professed a biblical worldview. This result is disheartening, but perhaps even more startling only 12% of the Youth Pastors claimed a biblical worldview. One third of the pastors surveyed did not even read their Bible at least once a week. So, the vast majority of our children who are attending church regularly have no chance of receiving a clearly articulated biblical worldview from the spiritual leaders their parents are relying on for sound spiritual teaching.

Well, you may be thinking, these results are for all pastors, but I attend an evangelical church so I can be confident in the teaching my children will receive. It is true that while only one out of three Mainline Protestant pastors profess a biblical worldview, we can expect Evangelical pastors to be significantly better. But even Evangelical pastors still only have about one out of two (50%) with a biblical worldview. This result implies that half of the Evangelical churches in America are not teaching a biblical worldview.

Southern Baptists and non-denominational Evangelicals do score significantly higher. Among Southern Baptists, over three out of four pastors professed a consistent biblical worldview. This significantly higher number may result from Southern Baptist churches requiring candidates for pastoral positions to affirm their belief in the Baptist Faith and Message document. Similarly, almost two out of three non-denominational pastors supported such a worldview.

In Barna's analysis, an Integrated Disciple was defined as someone who *"professed a biblical worldview and successfully integrated their biblical beliefs into their daily behavior."*[\[9\]](#) One would think the pastors of mid-sized and large churches would be the most educated and very likely to be Integrated Disciples. However, what the survey revealed was that only 15% of pastors at churches with over 250 in average attendance were identified as Integrated Disciples. It is hard to find a disciple who is not following a spiritual leader, but in these churches such a leader will be hard to find.

Some people would like to believe that it doesn't matter which church you go to as long as you are going to church. Probe's and Barna's results show this hopeful view to be unfounded. Among Roman Catholics, less than 6% of the priests profess a biblical worldview. This lack of biblical leadership is clearly evident among those people who regularly attend Catholic mass where less than one out of one hundred profess a clear biblical worldview.

Today it is of utmost importance that Christian parents examine the teaching coming from the pastors and other leaders at their church. If the teaching does not reflect a biblical worldview, you should run, not walk, to the nearest exit and search for another church.

How to Combat the Decline in Biblical Worldview Believers

In this article, we have been highlighting the decline in the portion of our population who profess a biblical review, drawing on the research results presented in the book, *American Worldview Inventory 2022-23*. Although it helps to know the facts about the beliefs of most Americans, just reviewing and lamenting the data does not really accomplish anything. We want to consider and act on the steps we can take as individuals and churches to plant and tend to a new generation of Integrated Disciples in our country.

Barna calls on us to intentionally teach the key doctrines of an evangelical, biblical worldview in our seminaries, our churches, and our homes. As recent history has clearly demonstrated, just assuming that younger generations will catch our biblical worldview is doomed to failure. We need to systematically, intentionally, and repeatedly extol and explain the key truths that make us those who “*proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.*”[\[10\]](#) Barna suggests the following key truths to focus on:

1. An orthodox, biblical understanding of God which understands that God is the all-powerful, all-knowing, perfect, and just creator of the universe who rule that universe today. Among parents of children under 13, just 40% hold that view.
2. All human beings are sinful by nature; every choice we make has moral contours and consequences. A vast majority of

Americans, about three out of four, do not believe that humans are born with a sin nature and are certain to sin “and can only be saved from its consequences by Jesus Christ.”

3. Jesus Christ’s sacrificial death is the only way to be reconciled with our holy God. We receive this free gift through our repentance and our confession that Jesus Christ is our Lord. Only three out of ten adults believe this is the only way to heaven, while only 2 of 100 believe they will go to hell after they die.

4. The entire Bible is true, reliable and relevant. When we understand how we received the Bible and how it applies to every aspect of our life and earth and in heaven, it changes how we perceive and interact with the world.

5. Absolute moral truth exists—and those truths are defined by God. Absolute truth can only be known by the source of truth, our Creator. Unfortunately, the majority of adults believe that determining moral truth is up to each individual.

6. The ultimate purpose of human life is to know, love, and serve God. If we know the true God, we will “*love Him because He first loved us*”[{11}](#) and we will want to serve Him through “*the good works He has prepared for us.*”[{12}](#) Most young Americans say they lack meaning and purpose. They will never be able to find truly meaningful purpose apart from Christ.

7. Success on earth is best understood as consistent obedience to God. If we understand that we are eternal beings who in Christ are the recipients of an eternal inheritance, we can see that our true success cannot be found in the temporal pleasures of this world. Only 20% of adults embrace this definition of success.

In my experience, I have watch numerous young people grow up

in a church and then leave to either thrive in a dynamic Christ-honoring life or fall away into a syncretic worldview, serving their own interests. The world system is constantly feeding them with lies and attacking the truths they have been taught. So, how can we do a better job of helping build strong Christians with a solid biblical worldview?

First, we must teach them the seven truths listed above. Not once, but many times and in many situations. Their parents must talk about these truths and their churches must teach these truths.

Second, we must ask them regularly to explain what they believe. Just because they have sat under teaching does not mean they have learned any lessons. To believe we should test high school students to determine what they have learned and then ignore testing students of the Bible is at best foolhardy.

Third, we must tell these students as they enter into more of the secular world that we are still there for them. Tell them, "If someone or something causes you to question what you have learned, don't just throw out what you have learned and follow something else. Come tell me about it and why it seems like it may be true. I have been in similar halls to the ones you are walking through now. I am convinced that the only source of real truth is found in Jesus Christ and the Word of God. Let's look at it together." Let us *"bear one another's burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ."*^{13}

Notes

1. Steve Cable, *Understanding a Post-Christian America in 2020*, probe.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Post-Christian-America.pdf
2. George Barna, *American Worldview Inventory 2022-23: The Annual Report of the State of Worldview in the United States*,

Arizona Christian University Press, 2023.

3. Ibid., page 7.

4. Ibid., page 12.

5. Deuteronomy 6:6-7

6. Ephesians 6:4

7. Barna, page 27.

8. Ibid., page 41.

9. Ibid., page 51.

10. 1 Peter 2:9

11. 1 John 4:19

12. Ephesians 2:10

13. Galatians 6:2

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

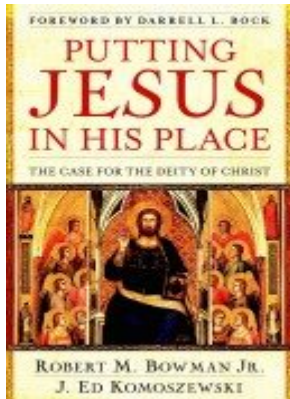
Don Closson explains the five lines of evidence that Jesus is God from the book Putting Jesus in His Place.

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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Loneliness and the Lockdown

Kerby Anderson looks at the isolation and longing for human contact that has become endemic even before the pandemic.

America was already facing a crisis of loneliness, and then the coronavirus pandemic hit. People sheltering at home had even less human contact. That made the crisis of loneliness even worse. The best thing people could do to protect themselves from the virus was to isolate themselves. But that

is not the best thing they could do for their physical or mental health.

A study by Julianne Holt-Lunstad found that loneliness can be as bad for your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Another study by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine found that social isolation in older adults increased their risk of heart disease, stroke, dementia, high cholesterol, diabetes, and poor health in general.[{1}](#)



More than a quarter century ago (1994), I wrote a book (*Signs of Warning, Signs of Hope*) making a number of predictions for the future. Chapter eight set forth the case for a coming crisis of loneliness.[{2}](#) Years earlier Philip Slater wrote about *The Pursuit of Loneliness*. The US Census Bureau documented the increasing number of adults living alone. Dan Kiley talked about living together loneliness in one of his books. Roberta Hestenes coined the term “crowded loneliness.” The trend was there for anyone to see if they began reading some of the sociological literature.

In the last few years, many authors have written about the crisis of loneliness. Robert Putnam wrote about it in his famous book, *Bowling Alone*.[{3}](#) He argues that people need to be connected in order for our society to function effectively. Putnam concludes, “Social capital makes us smarter, healthier, safer, richer, and better able to govern a just and stable democracy.” Senator Ben Sasse, in his book, *Them: Why We Hate Each Other—and How to Heal*, laments that our traditional tribes and social connectedness are in collapse.[{4}](#)

Living Alone

The reasons are simple: demographics and social isolation. More people are living alone than in previous generations, and those living with another person will still feel the nagging

pangs of loneliness.

In previous centuries where extended families dominated the social landscape, a sizable proportion of adults living alone was unthinkable. And even in this century, adults living alone have usually been found near the beginning (singles) and end (widows) of adult life. But these periods of living alone are now longer due to lifestyle choices on the front end and advances in modern medicine on the back end.

People have been postponing marriage and thus extending the number of years of being single. Moreover, their parents are (and presumably they will be) living longer, thereby increasing the number of years one adult will be living alone. Yet the increase in the number of adults living alone originates from more than just changes at the beginning and end of adult life. Increasing numbers are living most of their adult lives alone.

In the 1950s, about one in every ten households had only one person in them. These were primarily widows. But today, due to the three D's of social statistics (death, divorce, and deferred marriage), more than a third of all households is a single person household.

In the past, gender differences have been significant in determining the number of adults living alone. For example, young single households are more likely to be men, since women marry younger. On the other hand, old single households are more likely to be women, because women live longer than men. While these trends still hold true, the gender distinctions are blurring as both sexes are likely to reject traditional attitudes toward marriage.

Marriage Patterns

The post-war baby boom created a generation that did not make the trip to the altar in the same percentage as their parents.

In 1946, the parents of the baby boom set an all-time record of 2,291,000 marriages. This record was not broken during the late 1960s and early 1970s, when millions of boomers entered the marriage-prone years. Finally, in 1979, the record that had lasted 33 years was finally broken when the children of the baby boom made 2,317,000 marriages.

The post-war generations are not only marrying less; they are also marrying later. The median age for first marriage for women in 1960 was 20 and for men it was 22. Today the median age for women is 27 and for men it is 29.

Another reason for a crisis in loneliness is marital stability. Not only are these generations marrying less and marrying later; they also stay married less than their parents. When the divorce rate shot up in the sixties and seventies, the increase did not come from empty nesters finally filing for divorce after sending their children into the world. Instead, it came from young couples divorcing before they even had children. That trend has continued into the 21st century.

The crisis of loneliness will affect more than just the increasing number of people living alone. While the increase in adults living alone is staggering and unprecedented, these numbers are fractional compared with the number in relationships that leave them feeling very much alone.

Commitment is a foreign concept to many of the millions of cohabiting couples. These fluid and highly mobile situations form more often out of convenience and demonstrate little of the commitment necessary to make a relationship work. These relationships are transitory and form and dissolve with alarming frequency. Anyone looking for intimacy and commitment will not find them in these relationships.

Commitment is also a problem in marriages. Spawned in the streams of sexual freedom and multiple lifestyle options, the

current generations appear less committed to making marriage work than previous generations. Marriages, which are supposed to be the source of stability and intimacy, often produce uncertainty and isolation.

Living-Together Loneliness

Psychologist Dan Kiley coined the term “living-together loneliness,” or LTL, to describe this phenomenon. He has estimated that 10 to 20 million people (primarily women) suffer from “living together loneliness.”[\[5\]](#)

LTL is an affliction of the individual, not the relationship, though that may be troubled too. Instead, Dan Kiley believes LTL has more to do with two issues: the changing roles of men and women and the crisis of expectations. In the last few decades, especially following the rise of the modern feminist movement, expectations that men have of women and that women have of men have been significantly altered. When these expectations do not match reality, disappointment (and eventually loneliness) sets in. Dan Kiley first noted this phenomenon among his female patients. He began to realize that loneliness comes in two varieties. The first is the loneliness felt by single, shy people who have no friends. The second is more elusive because it involves the person in a relationship who nevertheless feels isolated and very much alone.

To determine if a woman is a victim of LTL, Kiley employed a variation of an “uncoupled loneliness” scale devised by researchers at the University of California at Los Angeles. For example, an LTL woman would agree with the following propositions: (1) I can’t turn to him when I feel bad, (2) I feel left out of his life, (3) I feel isolated from him, even when he’s in the same room, (4) I am unhappy being shut off from him, (5) No one really knows me well.

Women may soon find that loneliness has become a part of their

lives whether they are living alone or “in a relationship,” because loneliness is more a state of mind than it is a social situation. People who find themselves trapped in a relationship may be lonelier than a person living alone. The fundamental issue is whether they reach out and develop strong relationship bonds.

Crowded Loneliness

Loneliness, it turns out, is not just a problem of the individual. Loneliness is endemic to our modern, urban society. In rural communities, although the farmhouses are far apart, community is usually very strong. Yet in our urban and suburban communities today, people are physically very close to each other but emotionally very distant from each other. Close proximity does not translate into close community.

Dr. Roberta Hestenes at Eastern College has referred to this as “crowded loneliness.” She observed that “we are seeing the breakdown of natural community network groups in neighborhoods like relatives.” We don’t know how to reach out and touch people, and this produces the phenomenon of crowded loneliness.

Another reason for social isolation is the American desire for privacy. Though many desire to have greater community and even long for a greater intimacy with others, they will choose privacy even if it means a nagging loneliness. Ralph Keyes, in his book *We the Lonely People*, says that above all else Americans value mobility, privacy, and convenience. These three values make developing a sense of community almost impossible. In his book *A Nation of Strangers*, Vance Packard argued that the mobility of American society contributed to social isolation and loneliness. He described five forms of uprooting that were creating greater distances between people.

First is the uprooting of people who move again and again. An old Carole King song asked the question, "Doesn't anybody stay in one place anymore?" At the time when Packard wrote the book, he estimated that the average American would move about 14 times in his lifetime. By contrast, he estimated that the average Japanese would move five times.

The second is the uprooting that occurs when communities undergo upheaval. The accelerated population growth along with urban renewal and flight to the suburbs have been disruptive to previously stable communities.

Third, there is the uprooting from housing changes within communities. The proliferation of multiple-dwelling units in urban areas crowd people together who frequently live side by side in anonymity.

Fourth is the increasing isolation due to work schedules. When continuous-operation plants and offices dominate an area's economy, neighbors remain strangers.

Fifth, there is the accelerating fragmentation of the family. The steady rise in the number of broken families and the segmentation of the older population from the younger heightens social isolation. In a very real sense, a crisis in relationships precipitates a crisis in loneliness.

Taken together, these various aspects of loneliness paint a chilling picture of loneliness in the 21st century. But they also present a strategic opportunity for the church. Loneliness will be on the increase in this century due to technology and social isolation. Christians have an opportunity to minister to people cut off from normal, healthy relationships.

The Bible addresses this crisis of loneliness. David called out to the Lord because he was "lonely and afflicted" (Psalm 25:16). Jeremiah lamented that he "sat alone because your hand

was on me and you had filled me with indignation” (Jeremiah 15:17). And Jesus experienced loneliness on the cross, when He cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34).

The local church should provide opportunities for outreach and fellowship in their communities. Individual Christians must reach out to lonely people and become their friends. We must help a lost, lonely world realize that their best friend of all is Jesus Christ.

Notes

1. Joanne Silberner, “In a time of distancing due to coronavirus, the health threat of loneliness,” *STAT*, March 28, 2020.
2. Kerby Anderson, *Signs of Warning, Signs of Hope* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), chapter eight.
3. Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (NY: Touchstone, 2001).
4. Ben Sasse, *Them: Why We Hate Each Other—and How to Heal* (NY: St. Martin’s Press, 2018).
5. Dan Kiley, *Living Together, Feeling Alone: Healing Your Hidden Loneliness* (NY: Prentice-Hall, 1989).

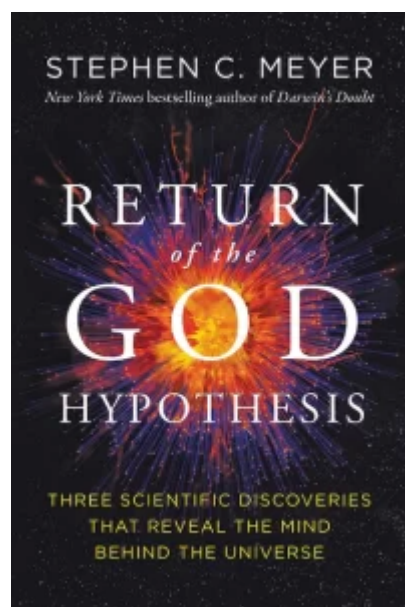
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‘Return of the God Hypothesis’ for Regular People

Dr. Ray Bohlin provides an overview of Stephen Meyer’s book

Return of the God Hypothesis, looking at how recent scientific discoveries provide evidence for an intelligent creator.

Was There a God Hypothesis Prior to Scientific Materialism of Today?



In this article I give an overview of Stephen Meyer's *Return of The God Hypothesis: Three Scientific Discoveries that Reveal the Mind Behind the Universe* [\[1\]](#). The three discoveries are first, the discovery in the 20th century of the Big Bang Model for the origin of the universe, second, the continuing discovery of the extreme fine-tuning of a universe that is friendly toward life, and third, the grand amount of genetic and cellular information needed for the origin of the first life and the Cambrian Explosion, where nearly all animal phyla suddenly appear with no ancestors.

But we need to cover a little history first. Meyer's title is "Return of the God Hypothesis." This implies that there was previously an accepted "God Hypothesis" in science. Then it was lost, and the time and evidence are right for that God Hypothesis to return. Early, Meyer quotes Richard Dawkins, "The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference." [\[2\]](#) So according to Dawkins, science has shown God to be superfluous.



This has been the position of most scientists since the late 19th century, when two authors detailed a long-standing warfare between science and religion. Most of the scientific community followed along to the present day.

But Meyer goes on to document that most if not all historians of science today agree that the Christian worldview greatly influenced, some say was even necessary for, the rise of modern science. Three key Christian concepts were, first, God's ability to choose what kind of universe He wanted to create. That meant that we can't just reason what nature *should* be like, we had to *discover* it. Second, nature is intelligible. Humans, being created in the image of God, could discover how nature operates (Romans 1:18-20). And last, human fallibility. Humans are sinful; therefore, one man's conclusions about the operation of nature must be subject to review of other scientists to ensure they are accurate. Christianity is the only worldview capable of developing modern science.[\[3\]](#)

So, what happened? Well, the Enlightenment happened where philosophers began to think only human reason is necessary or even proper to use in discovering the nature of humanity and nature around us. In the next section, I begin to investigate the three scientific discoveries that warrant a return of the God hypothesis.

Scientific Discovery #1: The Big Bang

The subtitle of Stephen Meyer's book, *Return of the God Hypothesis is "Three Scientific Discoveries That Reveal the Mind Behind the Universe."* Now we will look at the first of these discoveries, the Big Bang.

First, I know that some of our readers don't accept the concept of the Big Bang since they are convinced that our universe is much younger than 13.7 billion years. I understand your position, [please read my article "Christian Views of Science and Earth History at probe.org/christian-views-of-science-and-earth-history/] but let's look at this then as an argument you can use with an atheist to show that his own dating of the universe and the Big Bang requires a Mind.

In the early 20th century, scientists like Edwin Hubble began to observe that the universe was not static as previously accepted, but was actually expanding. It took several lines of evidence, more powerful instruments, and many astronomers and mathematicians to come to this conclusion. The novel result was thinking about running the clock backwards. If the universe is expanding now, if you go back in time the universe gets smaller and smaller. Eventually you get to a point where they say the universe was contained in a “particle” that was infinitely dense and occupied no space.

We know now the universe had a beginning. Astronomers and cosmologists had assumed the universe was static and existed for eternity. This conclusion was disturbing to some astronomers. Some rejected the Big Bang for philosophical reasons not scientific. Mathematician Sir Arthur Eddington said,

“Philosophically, the notion of a beginning is repugnant to me. . . . I should like to find a genuine loophole.”[{4}](#) “We [must] allow evolution an infinite time to get started.”[{5}](#)

Edmund Whitaker wrote what many were thinking: “It is simpler to postulate creation ex nihilo—divine will constituting nature out of nothingness.”[{6}](#)

And finally, Robert Jastrow wrote, “For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.”[{7}](#) So, God creating matter and energy out of nothing explains the Big Bang, where any naturalistic idea simply cannot explain the evidence.

Scientific Discovery #2: The Fine-tuning of the Universe for Life

Let us now turn our attention to the second of the discoveries in Stephen Meyer's book, the fine-tuning of the universe for life.

This has also been referred to as the "Goldilocks Universe," meaning a lot of things turned out to be just right for the universe to be friendly to life. For instance, you may be aware that there are four fundamental forces in the universe: gravity, electromagnetism, and the strong and weak nuclear forces. Each of these forces is expressed as an equation that contains a unique constant, and each one could have had a range of values at the Big Bang.

Meyer reveals that the gravitational constant alone is fine-tuned to $1/10^{35}$ —that's one chance in 100 billion trillion trillion. The other three constants are also fine-tuned, but even further, the constants are also fine-tuned in relation to each other. This adds another number of at least 1 part in 10^{50} .

Meyer had the opportunity to hear Sir John Polkinghorne at Cambridge during his doctoral work in the history and philosophy of science. Polkinghorne used an illustration of a universe generating machine with numerous dials and adjustable sliders, each representing one of the many cosmological fine-tuning parameters. Any slight change in the dials and adjusters of these parameters would render a universe hostile to life in any form. Polkinghorne would later say in an interview that a theistic designer provided a much better explanation than any materialistic hypothesis.[\[8\]](#)

Later, Meyer shows that including entities such as entropy and black holes, the odds of generating a life friendly universe are in this context 1 part in 10 to the power of 1 followed by

122 zeroes.{9} It would take several lines to write this number. This is an insanely impossible number to be arrived at by chance.

Nobel-Prize-winning physicist Charles Townes said, "Intelligent design as one sees it from a scientific point of view, seems to be quite real. This is a very special universe: it's remarkable that it came out just this way." {10} This intelligence is perfectly consistent with the God of the Bible.

Scientific Discovery #3: Genetic Information for the First Cell

In this section I'm discussing the third scientific discovery; the need for complex specified genetic information for the first cell and new groups of organisms throughout time.

In Darwin's time, the first microscopes were being used and cells could be seen. Of course, scientists understood little of what they were seeing. Most of the cell appeared to be filled with something called protoplasm, a jelly-like substance that was thought to be easily derived from combining just a few substances. I've often said that if Darwin knew of the amazing complexity and the need for information storage, processing and regulation, evolution would have never been offered as a chance process.

Now we understand that the need for information to compose the first living, growing, and reproducing cell, is enormous. The first cell needed DNA to store information, specific proteins and RNA to produce additional proteins for the cell to function, and a controlled means to copy DNA accurately.

For instance, life uses 20 different amino acids to link together to form proteins, the workhorses of the cell. The number of combinations of two amino acids is 400. A four amino

acid stretch has 160,000 different combinations. A small protein of “just” 150 amino acids has 10^{195} possible combinations. But how many of these could be a protein with some function? Just one in every 10^{77} sequences.

But also, new groups of organisms appear suddenly throughout the fossil record. Nearly all large groups of animals, or phyla, appear in the Cambrian explosion. Animal and plant phyla rapidly diversified in at least 13 more explosions within phyla and classes into new classes, orders and families with no precursors, from flowering plants and winged insects to mammals and birds. All these explosions would require massive amounts of new genetic and developmental information.

The evidence supports the need for an intelligent designing mind to create all the needed information. Minds create information all the time. Natural processes simply can't do it.

Do These Three Evidences Point to Theism?

The three discoveries discussed in Stephen Meyer's book, *Return of the God Hypothesis: Three Scientific Discoveries that Reveal the Mind Behind the Universe* are the Big Bang, the extreme fine-tuning of the laws of physics to provide a life-friendly universe, and the necessary complex and specified information for the origin of life and the progression of complex life-forms through the fossil record.

But where does that leave us? Do these discoveries warrant a return of the God Hypothesis? Meyer examines four different worldviews to ask, would the universe we have, be expected by any of these worldviews? He uses a scientific approach called “the inference to the best explanation.”

So, given a universe that is not only friendly toward life but contains living organisms, which worldview would best explain

this universe? He begins with scientific materialism. Materialism has no explanation for the beginning of the universe. There was no matter or energy before the beginning, so matter and energy cannot account for the beginning of the universe. Moreover, for the origin of complex specified information needed for life, naturalism has no answer. In fact, only theism posits an entity, God, that has the causal power to produce genetic information.

Let's move to pantheism. Pantheism does not propose a personal God but an impersonal god. This "god" is one and the same with nature. Then pantheism suffers the same fate as naturalism in that the beginning can't be explained by what doesn't exist yet, matter and energy.

But what about theism and deism? To explain the notion of a beginning, an entity outside the universe is required. Both theism and deism propose a transcendent, intelligent agent, God. Both can explain the beginning and the fine-tuning. But what about the appearance of complex specified genetic information on the earth? Deism and many forms of theistic evolution require a front-loaded beginning: all the information for life was present at the beginning and natural laws took over from there—God did not intervene. But how was this information retained over billions of years until life arose on earth? And natural laws simply can't produce complex specified information. Deism and theistic evolution won't work. Only theism remains.

On pg. 298, Meyer states, "As one surveys several classes of evidence from the natural sciences—cosmology, astronomy, physics, biochemistry, molecular biology, and paleontology—the God Hypothesis emerges as an explanation with unique scope and power. Theism explains an ensemble of metaphysically significant events in the history of the universe and life more simply, more adequately, and more comprehensively than major competing metaphysical systems."

Notes

1. Stephen Meyer, *Return of the God Hypothesis* (New York: HarperCollins, 2021).
2. Richard Dawkins, *River Out of Eden* 133, quoted in Meyer, *Return of the God Hypothesis*, 14.
3. *The Soul of Science: Christian Faith and Natural Philosophy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994) by Nancy Pearcey and Charles Thaxton.
4. Arthur Eddington, "The End of the World: From the Standpoint of Mathematical Physics" *Nature*, vol. 127 (1931) p. 450.
5. Arthur S. Eddington, "On the Instability of Einstein's Spherical World," *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society* 90 (May 1930): 672. Quoted in Hugh Ross, *A Matter of Days: Resolving a Creation Controversy* (Kindle Locations 484-485). RTB Press. Kindle Edition.
6. Cited in Robert Jastrow, 1978. *God and the Astronomers*. New York, W.W. Norton, p. 111-12.
7. Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers*. p. 113-114, 116.
8. *Return of the God Hypothesis*, p. 143-144.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
10. Bonnie Azab Powell, "'Explore as Much as We Can': Nobel Prize Winner Charles Townes on Evolution, Intelligent Design, and the Meaning of Life," *UC Berkeley NewsCenter*, June 17, 2005, www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2005/06/17_townes.shtml. Cited in Meyer, *Return of the God Hypothesis*, p. 146.