

# **“Did Jesus Preach Immortality?”**

**Dear Probe, I have studied the Gospels. My question is: Did Jesus Christ preach Immortality? If so for certain ones or for all?**

Thanks for your letter. Jesus taught that salvation (including eternal life) was freely available to all men through faith in Him alone (see John 3:16; 14:6). Technically, Jesus did not preach the Greek doctrine of the immortality of the soul. Rather, he taught that all men would be raised bodily from the dead, some to glory and everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting death in the lake of fire (See John 5:28-29; Revelation 20:11-15). Of course, there is an intermediate state between death and resurrection in which the physically dead experience personal, conscious existence (presumably in a disembodied state), but this is not man's final state of existence. The final state is the resurrection of the body.

I personally believe that Christ died for all men and that all men are offered eternal life through faith in Him (See 1 Tim. 2:4-6; 2 Pet. 3:9). Unfortunately, not all men will avail themselves of this gift. Therefore, some will be condemned to eternal separation from God in the lake of fire (the second death).

I hope this is helpful.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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# Christianity and Religious Pluralism – Are There Multiple Ways to Heaven?

*Rick Wade takes a hard look at the inconsistencies of religious pluralism. He concludes that if Christ is a way to heaven there cannot be other ways to heaven. Whether Christianity is true or not, pluralism does not make rational sense as it considers all religious traditions to be essentially the same.*

## Aren't All Religions Basically the Same?

In a humorous short article in which he highlighted some of the silly beliefs people hold today, Steve Turner wrote, “We believe that all religions are basically the same, at least the one we read was. They all believe in love and goodness. They only differ on matters of creation sin heaven hell God and salvation.”[\[1\]](#)

It is the common belief today that all religions are basically the same. They may look different—they may differ with respect to holy books or forms of worship or specific ideas about God—but at the root they're pretty much the same. That idea has become so deeply rooted that it is considered common knowledge. To express doubt about it draws an incredulous stare. Obviously, anyone who thinks one religion is the true one is close-minded and benighted! More than that, the person is clearly a bigot who probably even hates people of other religions (or people with no religion at all). Now, this way of thinking is very seldom formed by serious consideration of the issues, I believe (although there are knowledgeable

scholars who hold to it), but that doesn't matter. It is part of our cultural currency and is held with the same conviction as the belief that planets in the solar system revolve around the Sun and not Earth.

On the surface at least, it's clear enough that the various religions of the world are different. Theists believe in one personal God; Hindus believe in many gods; atheists deny any God exists. Just on that issue alone, the differences are obvious. Add to that the many beliefs about the dilemma of the human race and how it is to be solved. Why don't people understand the significance of these differences? On the scholarly level, the fundamental objection is this. It is believed that, if there is a God, he (or she or it) is too different from us for us to know him (or her or it). Because of our limitations, he couldn't possibly reveal himself to us. Religious writings, then, are merely human attempts at explaining religious experience without actually being objectively true.

Philosopher John Hick wrote that this is really a problem of language. Statements about God don't have the same truth value as ones about, say, the weather, because "there is no . . . agreement about how to determine the truth value of statements about God."[\[2\]](#) We use religious language because it is meaningful to us, but there is really no way to confirm the truth of such talk. Because we can't really know what the truth is about God, we do our best to guess at it. For this reason, we are not to suggest that our beliefs are true and others false.

On the more popular level, the loss of confidence in being able to know religious and moral truths which comes from academia and filters through the media, is teamed up with an inclusivist attitude that doesn't want anyone left out—that is, if there are any truths to be known.

I want to take a look at the issue of religious pluralism, the

belief that there are many valid ways to God. We'll start with some definitions and a reminder of what historical Christianity teaches about God and us and how we can be reconciled to Him.

## Starting Points

There are three basic positions on the question of the relation of Christianity to other religions. The historic view is called *exclusivism*. That word can be a real turn-off to people because we live in an inclusivistic era. What it means in this context is that the claim of Christianity that Jesus is the only way means that all other ways to God are excluded. If Jesus is the only way to the one true God, then no other claims can be true.

Another view on the matter is *inclusivism*. This is the belief that, while salvation is made possible only by the cross of Christ, it can be obtained without hearing the gospel. Even people who are externally part of other religions traditions can be saved. This is a temptation for Christians who are convinced that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, but don't like the idea that there are people who haven't heard the gospel who thus cannot be saved.

By religious *pluralism*, we mean the belief that all religions (at least the major, enduring ones) are valid as ways to relate to God. There is nothing unique about Christ; He was one of many influential religious teachers and leaders. This is the position I'll be considering in this article.

Before looking at pluralism, it would be good to review the historic Christian understanding of salvation to bring the contrast into bold relief.

## One God

The Bible is clear that there is one God. Through Isaiah the

prophet God said, "I am the Lord, and there is no other; besides Me there is no God" (Is. 45:5a; see also 43:10; 44:6).

Beyond this, it's important to note that, philosophically speaking, it is impossible that there could be two (or more) "Gods" like the God of the Bible. Scripture is clear that God is everywhere present at once, so there can't be a truly competing presence (Ps. 139:7-12). God is capable of doing whatever He wills. There can be no ultimate interference by another deity. "The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths," says the Psalmist (135:6). Or more succinctly, "Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him" (Ps. 115:3; see also Dan. 4:35). How could there be two Gods like this? They would have to be absolutely identical, since neither one could be interfered with. And if so, they would be the same God!

## **One Savior**

The Bible is also clear that there is only one Savior. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (Jn. 14:6). To the rulers and elders and scribes in Jerusalem, Peter declared, "There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

## **Theological necessity**

In addition, it was theologically necessary for salvation to come through Christ alone. In Hebrews chapter 9 we read that the death of the sacrifice was necessary. According to Hebrews chapter 7, the Savior had to be divine (see also 2 Cor. 5:21). And Hebrews 2:17 says the Savior had to be human. Jesus is the only one who fulfills those requirements.

## **One more consideration**

To this we can add the fact that the apostles never even

hinted that people could be saved any other way than through Christ. It is this belief that has fueled evangelistic endeavors all over the world.

## Religious Pluralism Can't Accomplish Its Goal

Even on the surface of it, the notion of religious pluralism is contradictory. If we can't know that particular religions are true, how can we know that *any* are valid ways to God? The pluralist has to know that we can't know (which is an interesting idea in itself!), while also having confidence that somehow we'll be able to reach our goal through our particular beliefs and practices.

But that brings serious questions to the surface. Do all religions even *have* the same goal? That's an important issue. In fact, it's the first of three problems with religious pluralism I'd like to consider.

Can religious pluralism accomplish its goal? What do I mean by that? Two ideas are at work here. First, it is believed that we can't really know what is true about God; our religions are only approximations of truth. Second, if that is so, aren't we being high-handed if we tell a people that their religion isn't true? How can any religion claim to have *the* truth? To be intellectually honest, we need to consider all religions (at least the major, enduring ones) as equally valid. There is a personal element here, too. The pluralist wants to take the *people* of all religions seriously. Telling anyone his or her religion is false doesn't seem to signal that kind of respect. So the goal of which I speak is taking people seriously with respect to their religious beliefs.

I can explain this best by introducing a British scholar named John Hick and tell a little of his story.[{3}](#) Hick was once a self-declared evangelical who says he underwent a genuine

conversion experience as a college student. He immediately began to associate with members of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship in England. Over time, however, his philosophical training and reading of certain New Testament scholars made him begin to have doubts about doctrinal matters. He also saw that, on the one hand, there were adherents of other religions who were good people, while, on the other, there were some Christians who were not very nice people but were sure of their seat in heaven. How could it be, he thought, that God would send these good Sikhs and Muslims and Buddhists to hell while saving those not-so-good Christians just because they believed in Jesus? Hick went on to develop his own understanding of religious pluralism and became probably the best-known pluralist in the scholarly world.

I relate all this to you to point out that, at least as far as the eye of man can see, Hick's motivation was a good one: he wanted to believe that all people, no matter what religious stripe, can be saved. Harold Netland, who studied under Hick and wrote a book on his pluralism, speaks very highly of Hick's personal character.[\[4\]](#) And isn't there something appealing about his view (again, from our standpoint)? Wouldn't we like everyone to be saved? And having heard about (or experienced directly) the violence fueled by religious fanaticism, it's easy to see why many people recoil against the idea that only one religion has the truth. We want everyone included! We want everyone to feel like his or her religious beliefs are respected and even affirmed!

The problem is that we are supposed to view our beliefs as *approximations* of truth, as somehow meaningful to us but not really true. All people are to be welcomed into the universal family of faith—but they are to leave at the door the belief that what they believe is true. It's as though the pluralist is saying, "It is really noble of you to be so committed to your faith. Of course, we know that little of what you believe can be taken as truth, but that's okay. It gives meaning to

your life.” Or in other words, “We want you to feel validated in your religion, even though your religious doctrines aren’t literally true.”

To be quite honest, I don’t feel affirmed by that. My religious belief is completely undermined by this idea. If Jesus isn’t the only way to God, Christianity is a complete lie, and I am believing in vain.

My belief is that salvation—the reconciliation of persons to the one, true trinitarian God—has been made possible by Jesus, *and* that I *know* this to be the case. In his first epistle, John wrote: “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 Jn. 5:13). If I can’t know this to be true, the promises of Scripture are only wishes. In that case, my hope for eternity is no more secure than crossing my fingers and saying I hope it won’t rain this weekend. We are all, in short, forced to abandon our notions of the validity of our religious beliefs and accept the skepticism of the pluralist. And I don’t feel affirmed by that.

For my money, to be told I might be very sincere but sincerely wrong if I take my beliefs as true in any literal sense is like being condescendingly patted on the head. To be honest, I take such a notion as arrogance.

So my first objection to religious pluralism is that it does not accomplish its goal of making me feel affirmed with respect to my religious beliefs beyond whatever emotional fulfillment I might get from pretending the beliefs are true.

## **Religious Pluralism Doesn’t Make Sense**

My second objection to religious pluralism is that it doesn’t make sense in light of what the various religions claim. Let me explain.



Christianity is a confessional religion. In other words, there are particular beliefs we confess to be true, and it is partly through confessing them that we are saved. Is that surprising? Aren't we saved by faith, by putting our trust in Christ? Yes, but there are specific things we are supposed to believe. It isn't just believing *in*; it's also believing *that*. For example, Jesus said to the scribes and Pharisees, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe *that I am he* you will die in your sins" (Jn. 8:23-24). And then there's Paul's clear statement that "if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom. 10:9). So what we believe is very important despite what some are saying now about how Christianity is a relationship and how doctrine isn't all that important.

Back to my point. Christians who know what the Bible teaches and the basics of other religions find themselves staring open-mouthed at people who say that all religions are basically the same. How could anyone who knows anything about the major religions of the world even think such a thing? I suspect that most people who say this do *not* know the teachings of the various religions. They have some vague notions about religion in general, so they reduce these great bodies of belief to a few essentials. Don't all religions believe in a higher power or powers? Isn't their function just to give meaning to our lives? Don't they all typically include such things as prayer, rituals of one kind or another in public and private worship, standards for moral living, holy books, and the like?

Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias has said something like this: Most people think all religions are essentially the same and only superficially different, but just the opposite is true. People believe there are some core beliefs and practices such as those I just named which are common to all religions,

and that religions are different only on the surface. Muslims have the Koran; Christians have the Bible; Jews have the Torah; Hindus have the Bhagavad Gita. Muslims pray five times a day; Christians pray at church on Sundays and most anytime they want during the week. Buddhists have their shrines; Jews their synagogues; Hindus their temples; Muslims their mosques; and Christians their churches. So at the core, the same; on the surface, different.

But just the opposite is true! It is on the *surface* that there is similarity; that is why we can immediately look at certain bodies of beliefs and practices and label them "religion." They aren't identical, but they are similar enough to be under the same category, "religion." On the surface we see prayers, rituals, holy books, etc. It's when we dig down to the *essential* beliefs that we find contradictory differences!

For example, Islam is theistic but is unitarian while Christianity is trinitarian. Hindus believe we are not true individual selves but are parts of the All, while orthodox Jews believe we are individuals created in the image of God. Muslims believe salvation comes through obedience to Allah, while Buddhists believe "salvation" consists of spinning out of the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth into nirvana.

No, religions are *not* essentially the same and only superficially different. At their very core they are drastically different. So while pluralists might take the religious person seriously, they don't take his or her *beliefs* seriously. How can all these different beliefs be true in any meaningful sense? How can the end of human existence be *both* nirvana *and* heaven or hell? Pluralists have to reduce all these beliefs to some vague possibility of an afterlife of some kind; they have to empty them of any significant content.

So what we believe to be true, pluralists know isn't. Isn't it interesting that the pluralist is insightful enough to know what millions of religious adherents don't! That's a strange

position to take given that the heart of pluralism is the belief that we can't know what is ultimately true about God!

It is for this reason that my second objection to religious pluralism is that it doesn't make sense in light of what the various religions claim. It claims that our different beliefs are essentially the same, which is false on the surface of it. And it claims that the differences result from the fact that we can't know what is true, while the pluralist acts like he or she *can* know what is true.

## **Pluralism Is Incompatible with Christianity**

Religious pluralism may well be *the* most common attitude about religion in America. You might be wondering, Aren't there a lot of Christians in America? According to the polls, one would think so. But I dare say that if you polled people in your church, especially young people, you would find more than a few who are religious pluralists. They believe that, while Christianity is true for them, it isn't necessarily true for other people. Is pluralism a legitimate option for Christians? In short, no.

This, then, is my third objection to religious pluralism, namely, that religious pluralism is incompatible with Christianity because it demands that Christians deny the central truths of Scripture. If religious pluralism is true, Jesus' claims to deity and biblical teaching about His atoning death and resurrection cannot be true.

The Bible is clear that salvation comes through accepting by faith the finished work of Jesus who is the only way to salvation. Paul told the Ephesians that at one time they "were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world" (2:12). Without Christ they were

without God. He told the Romans that righteousness came through Jesus and the atoning sacrifice He made (5:6-10, 17). Jesus said plainly that “no one comes to the Father but by me” (Jn. 14:6). Because pluralism denies these specifics about salvation, it is clearly at odds with Christianity.

There is a more general truth that separates Christianity and pluralism, namely, that Christianity is grounded in specific historical events, not abstract religious ideas. Pluralists, as it were, line up all the major, enduring religions in front of them and look for similarities such as those we have already noted: prayers, rituals, holy books, and so on. They *abstract* these characteristics and say, “Look. They’re all really the same because they do and have the same kinds of things.” But that won’t do for Christianity. It is not just some set of abstract “religious” beliefs and practices. It is grounded in specific historical events.

This is a crucial point. The historicity of Christianity is critical to its truth or falsity. God’s project of salvation is inextricably connected with particular historical events such as the fall, the flood, the obedience of Abraham, the Exodus, the giving of the Law, the fall of Israel and Judah, the return to Israel—all events leading to Jesus, a historical person who accomplished our salvation through a historical event. It is through these events that God declared and carried out His plans, and nowhere do we read that He would do so with other people through other events and teachings. The truth of Christianity stands or falls with the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ and their meaning revealed by God. If the resurrection is historically false, “we are to be pitied more than all men,” Paul wrote (1 Cor. 15:19). If this was God’s way, and Jesus declared Himself to be the *only* way, then no other way is available.

One thing the church must *not* do is let any of its members think that their way is only one way. This isn’t to condone elitism or condescension or discrimination against others,

even though that's what a lot of people believe today. That believing in the exclusivity of Christ does *not* necessarily result in an attitude of elitism is seen in Jesus Himself. His belief that He was and is the only way to the Father is clear, but few people will criticize Him for having the attitudes just mentioned. It is a strange thing, isn't it? Christians who say Jesus is the only way are condemned as self-righteous bigots, while the One who boldly declared not His religion but *Himself* as the only way is considered a good man!

To sum up, then. Pluralism falls under its own weight, for it cannot affirm all religious beliefs as it seems to desire, and its belief that religions are all pretty much the same, even though their core teachings are contradictory, doesn't make sense. It also is certainly incompatible with Christianity which declares that the truth of its teachings stand or fall with specific historical events. And frankly, its claim to know that no religion really has the truth because such truth can't be known, comes off as a rather hollow declaration in light of the knowledge pluralists think they possess.

## Notes

1. Steve Turner, *Nice and Nasty* (Marshall and Scott, 1980).
2. John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, rev. ed. (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1977), 3.
3. See John Hick, "A Pluralist View," in Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips, *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralist World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), chap. 1.
4. Harold A. Netland, *Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth* (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1991), ix.

# The Most Important Decision of Your Life

*Probe's founder, Jimmy Williams, shares how to know God and go to heaven when you die.*



*This article is also available in [Spanish](#).*

I have come to share a message that changed my life. I was not a bad boy—but not a good boy either. I went to church with my parents and was baptized when I was 12.

If you had asked me if I were a Christian, I would have said yes. But for twenty-one years God was just a formal idea to me rather than a personal friend. I professed Christianity, but I lived my life as a practical atheist.

At the University, I studied music. I loved to sing, especially the tenor arias from the great operas. As I neared my final year, I was having success with my career goals, but my heart was empty. I felt that something was missing from my life. I did not know at the time that, as the empty stomach calls for food, I was suffering from spiritual hunger.

Pascal, the great French physicist eloquently expressed this hunger when he said, “There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of each man which cannot be satisfied by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ.”

Augustine, the great theologian and bishop speaks of the same hunger: “Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.”

I thought I had many unsolvable problems then, but I soon discovered that solving my spiritual hunger helped many of my other problems to vanish.

I met a fellow student, an athlete, who had the radiance of a Christian on his face. A simple conversation with him changed the entire direction of my life that day in September, 1959.

He told me that just as there are physical laws in the universe, so are there spiritual laws which govern our relationship with God. They are called “laws” because they are universally true. For example, we do not break the law of gravity. . . it breaks us. Jump off a high building and we discover the truth about the law of gravity.

So what are these spiritual laws? I will share with you the four my friend related to me that day. And like the law of gravity, they are true, whether we believe them or not.

## **I. God loves us and has a purpose for our lives.**

Jesus tells us in John 10:10, “I have come that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly.” That is one of the reasons He came to make our lives rich and full of purpose.

Everything in this room has a purpose—the microphone, the piano, the stage, the chairs, the sound system, the lectern. What is man’s purpose? What is your purpose? This is an important question.

Why is it that most people are not experiencing the abundant life Jesus promised? The second law tells us:

## **II. Man is sinful and separated from God; thus, he cannot know and experience God’s love and plan for his life.**

The Bible tells us in Romans 3:23 that “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” God has given us standards to live by in such things as the Ten Commandments. And James

tells us that “if a man keeps the whole law (the Ten Commandments) but offends in **one** place, he is guilty of all.”

I am not saying that every person is as bad as he/she could be; I am saying that every person has fallen short of the mark, has failed to meet what God has required. And what God requires of us in our personal standard of behavior and righteousness is as unattainable as throwing a rock and trying to hit the North Pole.

Humans have tried to address this problem of personal, moral failure in various ways. Some, in the face of some 4000 years of documented history which records horrific, bloody, and unending incidents of man’s inhumanity to man, some have actually persisted in the belief that man is basically **good**.

Others, more realistic and honest about man’s tendency toward selfishness and evil, have attempted to explain the reason man displays such destructive behavior. Here are three explanations widely held across the world:

(1) Some suggest that man’s moral failure is **biological**; that it is simply the vestigial remains of aggression from our primitive, animal, evolutionary past.

(2) Others argue that man’s moral flaw is basically **sociological**, that man lacks the proper environment necessary for upright behavior.

(3) Still others insist that the human problem is essentially **intellectual**, and if people knew more, they would understand what was right, and they would do it. Curiously, in the United States, over 35,000 laws and statutes exist simply to try and enforce the Ten Commandments! We *do* know what is right, but we choose often not to do it!

These three theories have one thing in common: each one approaches the human moral condition from the standpoint of what man lacks.



The **biologist** tells us that more time is needed for man to work out and eliminate the remnants of his primitive aggression. Tennyson optimistically hopes for this in his poem, *In Memoriam*: "Moving ever upward, outward, let the ape and tiger die."

The **sociologist** tells us that what humans basically need is a proper or better environment, and if they had it, human behavior would improve. Modern America is a vivid and tragic example that abundance will not make people good.

Others suggest that man's lack is **information**, and therefore education is the answer. We lack sufficient time; we lack a proper environment; we lack the necessary information.

But our real dilemma is not what is *lacking*, but what is *present*! And every academic discipline has to allow for and explain what it is:

Biology calls it primitive instinct;  
Philosophy calls it irrational thinking;  
Psychology calls it emotional weakness;  
Sociology calls it cultural lag;  
History calls it class struggle;  
Humanities calls it the human flaw, or *hubris*;  
The Bible calls it sin.

Jesus speaks of this presence in Mark 7:15-23 as something which comes from within man, something which issues forth from his inner life:

*"Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside the man which going into him can defile him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man. . . .Are you too so uncomprehending? Do you not see that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him; because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated? . . .That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from **within**, out of the*

*heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts and immorality, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."*

Albert Einstein echoes this when he said, "It is not the explosive power of the atom which I fear: but rather the explosive power for evil in the heart of man which I greatly fear."

"All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."  
(Romans 3:23).

And if this sinful condition were not bad enough, we learn from the Bible that there are consequences for our sin: "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord." (Romans 6:23)

What is the meaning of death? Death always means separation. *Physical death* is a separation of the soul/spirit from the body. People who are present when someone dies can actually observe the moment when this takes place.

*Spiritual death* is also a separation, from God Himself. Man's sin keeps him separated from the one he seeks to know. Mahatma Gandhi, the great Hindu teacher, speaks of this separation when he says in his autobiography, "O wretched man that I am! It is a constant source of torture to me that I am separated from the One I know to be my very life and being, and I know it is my sin that hides Him from me!"

T.S. Eliot expresses this same despair when he says:

"We are the hollow men,  
We are the stuffed men,  
Head piece filled with straw.  
No head—No heart.

Life does not end with a bang,  
But with a whimper."

Feelings of this separation, this alienation, have prompted men through the ages to try and find a way to bridge this gap, this estrangement, from God. And historically, all of these attempts originate with man, and reflect his own efforts to reach God by trying to be good, trying to keep the Ten Commandments or the Golden Rule, or by observing some religious practice.

The problem with these approaches is that one never knows when he or she has been good enough or done enough! Karl Marx said that "Religion is the opiate of the people," meaning that it appeared to be something necessary and helpful for humans, whether true or not. And many people console themselves by attending church, trying to be basically good and decent, and drugging themselves into believing God will accept them for making such efforts. Marx believed these naïve human inclinations should be eliminated.

Actually, the teachings of Jesus agree with Marx on this point. Jesus taught that religion is the enemy of Christianity, because religion represents man's best attempts to reach up and find God. And it is interesting to note that in Jesus' day He was most critical of the self-righteous, religious people He encountered: the "good" ones.

He said, "Those who are well do not need a physician." (Matthew 9:12) When does someone go to the doctor? When well, or sick? What Jesus was implying is that the notion that one's good deeds or relatively good life were already sufficient to bridge the gap between himself and his God, then what Christ came to accomplish through His sacrificial death on the cross is totally negated and unnecessary. In other words, He was saying, If you have drugged yourself into believing that your own good works have secured your salvation, then He, the Great Physician, can do nothing for you.

This is what Paul was getting at in Ephesians 2, 8-9 when he said: "For by grace have you been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast."

The Ten Commandments were never given by God with the expectation that man would keep them flawlessly. They were given as a guide, a teaching tool. Or, in medical terminology, the commandments parallel the purpose of an X-ray machine, which can only *reveal* the condition of the broken bone within a human body. It identifies the problem but can provide no solution for knitting the bone back together.

This is what Jesus was trying to say to the Pharisees, to recognize the true spiritual condition of their lives, in that as good and righteous as they tried to be, they were still hopelessly short of the mark which God required. A gospel preacher once pointed out that it was not difficult to get people saved, but it was extremely difficult to get them *lost*! We must first honestly face our true spiritual condition.

Once we have come to grips with this fact of our own personal sin and failure before God and accept it as true of ourselves, we are ready to consider the third spiritual law:

### **III. Jesus Christ is God's only provision for man's sin; through Him we can know and experience God's love and purpose for our lives.**

The second spiritual law reveals to us the bad news about man's condition. This third law now gives us the *euaggelion*, the gospel, the good news from God:

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

We have established that "religion" is defined as man's best

efforts to reach up and find God. Christianity is unique and exactly the opposite and is defined as God's only effort to reach down and find man. Religion is spelled "**Do.**" Christianity is spelled "**Done!**"

Jesus stated the purpose of His divine mission in John 6:38-40:

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. . . And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. . . For this is the will of My Father, that every one who beholds the Son, and believes in Him, may have eternal life: and I myself will raise him up on the last day."

John the disciple, an eyewitness, recounts to us the last words Christ uttered on the cross: "When Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished!' And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit" (9:30). "Mission accomplished!" "Done!"

It is for this reason that Jesus had told his disciples, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes to the Father except by me." (John 14:6) He claimed to be the One who, by His Incarnation and death, had come from heaven to build a bridge made of Himself, which could alone completely span the spiritual chasm between sinful human beings and a holy God.

The exclusiveness of this statement by Christ offends many. It is too narrow, they say. But honestly, some things in life *are* narrow. I have always appreciated a narrow-minded pilot, for example, who insists in landing his plane on the runway!

One of most beautiful cities in America is San Francisco, California. You may know that at the opening into the vast San Francisco Bay there stands a gigantic, rust-red suspension bridge called the Golden Gate Bridge. It allows people and cars to get back and forth from the city on the South to the

picturesque little seaside village, Sausalito, and the Napa Valley on the North. People have a choice if they want to get to Sausalito: they can take the bridge, or they can swim in the cold Pacific with its treacherous currents flowing in and out of the Bay. Everyone decides to trust the Bridge.

This bridge is also narrow. And since it was built in the 1930s, no one has ever petitioned the city of San Francisco to put up another bridge alongside the Golden Gate so people can get to Sausalito. It is not necessary, not needed. Now the real question is whether Jesus' claim to be the bridge, the only bridge, which gives access to God, is true.

There is a story recounted about a certain man who operated a drawbridge over a large river which he raised and lowered, allowing the boats to pass through. One day he brought his small son with him to the drawbridge. Late in the morning a large boat approached filled with people. As he was raising the drawbridge to let the big ship pass, his little son fell directly on to the great gear wheel. Horror-stricken, the man was faced with the decision of imperiling the many lives of those on the swift, oncoming craft, or saving his son. Moments later, the crushing of the little son's body in the machinery was accompanied by the tears and the crushed heart of a father who sacrificed his beloved child for the lives of the strangers on the boat.

That is the significance of the Cross. Jesus' life for ours. He is our substitute, our bridge, and access to God. He died so we might live. He was separated from God the Father ("My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me?") so we might not have to be. . . for an eternity.

"All we like sheep have gone astray,  
Each of us has turned to his own way;  
But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on  
Him.  
He was oppressed and He was afflicted,

Yet He did not open his mouth.  
Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,  
And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,  
So He did not open His mouth. . . .  
He was cut off out of the land of the living,  
For the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was  
due. . .  
Although He had done no violence  
Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.  
But it pleased the Lord  
To crush Him, putting Him to grief;  
If His soul would render Himself as a guilt offering. . .  
By His knowledge the Righteous One,  
My Servant, will justify the many,  
As He will bear their iniquities.”  
—Isaiah 53

What this means to you and to me is that if we were the only two people who ever lived on planet earth, Christ would still have come and do what He did just for the two of us. That is how much He loves us. He had you and me specifically in mind as He carried that cross up the *Via Dolorosa* on that day in Jerusalem two thousand years ago. And on that Cross He took your place and mine and bore our Hell so that we might have the chance at Heaven.

Now it is most important to make something crystal clear. I want to pose a question. If the above things are really true, how many people did Jesus die for? We find the answer in John 3:16: “God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

We learn from this that Christ died for the world. His death is sufficient for every human being who ever lived on the planet.

But we must ask a second question: Does that fact that Christ

died for *all* mean that everyone is a Christian? Obviously not. His death is *sufficient* for everyone, but it is only *efficient* for certain ones. Which ones? The fourth and final spiritual law tells us:

## **IV. We must personally receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior into our lives in order to become a Christian.**

John 1:12 and 13 tell us that “As many as received Him, to them He gave the authority to become children of God, to those who believe on His name. . . who were born not of blood (through inheritance), nor of the will of the flesh (human will power), nor of the will of man (priestly pronouncement), but of God (the new birth).”

The Bible speaks of receiving Christ as similar to receiving a gift. We have seen this mentioned in Romans 6:23 and Ephesians 2:8,9 above. This “gift” concept marks out an approach to God that is diametrically opposed to any and all religious systems based on human effort we have already discussed.

The “spirit” of gift-giving is one of **grace**. How does one accept a gift? The appropriate response is “Thank you.” If you were to try to give money in exchange for a gift given you, the other person would be highly insulted and offended. The graciousness of the gift-giver would be spoiled by such a response. Grace is God’s unmerited, undeserved favor.

We cannot earn this gift.

We do not deserve this gift.

We can only say “Thank you.”

What God has so graciously provided for our salvation is so unlike the way humans think about such things, that no human would ever have thought up such a solution to the fallen,



human condition.

And so we humans have a choice with respect to our personal salvation. We can continue our own religious efforts with the uncertain hope of being acceptable to God when we die, or we can accept the free gift of God, His Son's death on our behalf. And when you come to think about it, if God intended for man to achieve his own salvation through self-effort, then He made a terrible mistake: He let His own Son die on the Cross, which was evidently (along this line of reasoning) not really necessary! Salvation through self-effort negates the very significance of the Cross and Christ's death on our behalf.

Now how do we receive this gift? We do it by exercising faith through the exercise of our will. It is a personal faith decision one makes on the basis of the facts stated above.

The experience goes by many names: conversion, being saved, being born again. Let's look at Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in John chapter three. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, the group Jesus was so often critical of because of their self-righteousness. But Nicodemus is drawn to Jesus and comes to see Him. He says, "Rabbi, we know that you have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these miracles that you do unless God is with Him." Jesus said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus took Him literally: "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can He?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of . . . the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

Here Jesus contrasts physical birth with spiritual birth. Physical birth is an event. It happens at a moment in time

and, we each celebrate the occasion once a year on our birthdays. Likewise, spiritual birth is an event, one that can occur at any time and any place when a person understands what Christ did and reaches out to personally receive the Gift He offers: "But as many as received Him, to those He gave the authority to become the children of God, to those who believe *on* His name (John 1:12)." Observe the verbs in this verse. It is our part to believe that what Christ did for us is true, then to receive Him into our lives as our Savior, and become a child of God. This is done by an exercise of our will, which actively decides to abandon all self effort to reach and attain a righteousness acceptable to God, but rather to reach out to Him in faith and receive the Gift which He offers us. And notices the verse states that we are to believe *ON*, not *IN*. Believing in something does not necessarily call for trust. Believing on something does. This is the true nature of faith. To "believe *on*" means to "*count on*."

The story is told of a great trapeze artist at the circus. Up on the high wire, he would ride back and forth across on a bicycle with a long pole. Then he would do it again with his attendant sitting on his shoulders. After that He asked the audience if they believed he could carry one of them across. The entire audience loudly exclaimed they believed he could. He looked at a particular man on the front row and asked if he believed, and he said "yes." Then the trapeze artist said, "Climb up the ladder, get on my shoulders, and Ill take you across." If the man responds and *entrusts himself* to the man on the bicycle, he is demonstrating the equivalent of the biblical faith called for by one who desires to become a Christian and to be born into the family of God.

It is important to understand the nature of faith in our lives. Faith is something that we employ all the time. Faith that a chair will hold us up; faith the on-coming driver will stay in his lane; faith the plane will land safely. Everyone has faith—atheist, agnostic, Christian. The real issue is not

having faith, in large or small quantities, but rather to have a *worthy object* for our faith. If you walked out on a frozen pond, which would you prefer, a little faith in a sheet of ice two-feet thick, or a lot of faith in an inch of ice? Faith is important, but the *object* of our faith is all-important.

To believe on Christ is to trust Him and Him alone to make us presentable and acceptable to God. We decide that He is the most reliable object of our faith and we are saying that when we stand before God, we are not trusting in our own merits to attain eternal life, but rather in the merits of our Substitute, the spotless Lamb of God who stands there with us, our Savior and our Redeemer.

Revelation 3:20 gives us a picture of how this spiritual birth occurs: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine (fellowship) with him, and he with Me."

Picture Jesus standing at the door of your life, your will, seeking entrance. He is a gentleman. He will never force His way into our lives. But we learn here that if we open the door of our life to Him and receive Him as our Savior, He will respond.

If I were to come to your home and knock on the door, you would have essentially three responses: (1) you could tell me to go away, (2) you could ignore me and play like you were not at home, (3) or you could invite me in.

The same is true of Jesus. He waits to be invited. He treats each person with integrity and will not come where He is not invited or wanted. It is our choice. But if we *do* open the door (that's our part), He *will* come in (that's His part). And Jesus doesn't lie. If we open, He will come.

We do this through prayer. The specific words we use are not important, but rather the attitude of the heart. Here is a short prayer which contains the major elements of receiving

Christ:

"Lord Jesus, I reach out to you at this time in my life to claim the gift you have offered me. I confess I have sinned and fallen short of what you require of me. I thank you for dying on the Cross for my sins, and I thank you for your forgiveness. I open the door of my heart and life and invite you to come into me, and make me the kind of person you want me to be. I trust you now as my personal Savior and from this day forward I *trust in you alone* to make me presentable and acceptable before God when I must give account of myself and my life. Thank you for coming into my life, and I know you are there now, because you promised that if I opened the door, you would come in. Amen."

If you prayed this prayer right now, and it expressed the desire of your heart, then where is Christ? He is now inside you. Before, He was on the outside looking in. Now, He is on the inside looking out. The word "Christian" means "Christ *in* one." That is why the body is called the temple of God. A temple is a place where God dwells.

How do you know he is there? We are back to the question of faith. Above, we spoke of exercising faith and trust that Christ's death on the Cross for us is true and that we are called upon to respond by believing *on* it. To answer this question, we must exercise faith again.

Let's say I came to your home and knocked. You opened the door, invited me in, and we went into the living room and sat down to chat. And let's say after a time, you got up, went to the door, opened it and said to me, "Come on in, Jim!" You did this several times, while I remained on the sofa in the living room! This would not only be silly; it would be clear evidence that you did not *really* believe I was already in your home!

So it is with Christ. Faith is when you stop saying "please" to God and you start saying "thank you." Unless you trust in

faith that, regardless of how you *feel*, Christ was true to His Word and actually entered when you invited Him, you can never get on with your new life in Christ, because you keep “going to the door” in uncertainty, not truly believing He did what He said He would do. And so once you have invited Him into your life, *believe that He is there*, and begin to trust that by saying, “Lord, thank you for coming into my life and making me a child of God and a member of your family.”

Perhaps this train illustration will help to understand the difference between fact, faith, and feeling. The *engine* of the train represents the facts . . .the truths about Christ’s death and its implications to us. The *coal car* represents faith. . .the energy needed to make these facts a reality to us. The *caboose* represents our feelings . . .which may vary every day and every moment depending on our circumstances, emotions, and state of mind.

The train will run with or without the caboose, and one would never think of trying to pull a train with the caboose! So it is with our life in Christ. This decision we have made concerning our salvation has nothing to do with how we *feel* at any particular time.

If someone were to ask me if I were married, I wouldn’t respond by saying, “Well, I feel married today,” or “I’m working at being married,” or “I think I’m married,” or “I hope I am.” And yet these are the very kinds of statements we often hear when we ask someone if they are Christians. In fact, these responses are a strong indication that the person does not really understand what Christ did for them, and He is probably still “standing outside” knocking at their door. This may be the case for many just simply because they lack the proper information and no one has ever clearly explained how they can become Christians.

Let’s ask another question: Is it presumptuous to assume that when I die I will go to heaven?

“And the witness is that that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know (not “hope”) that you have (present tense; not “will have”) eternal life.” (I John 5:11-13).

What we learn here is that a Christian receives eternal life not at death, but at the Second Birth. To receive Christ and “have the Son” is also to have eternal life as a **present possession**. No Christ, no eternal life. Possess Christ and also possess eternal life. We can see why this would be so. At our physical birth, our parents gave us the only kind of life they possessed—human life. When we place our faith in Christ and are born spiritually into the family of God, He gives us the only kind of life *He* possesses—eternal life.

That is why the apostle Paul could say with confidence, “To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8). And that is why Jesus could say to the believing thief on the cross, “Truly I say to you, *today* you shall be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43).

As a non-Christian, it always made me angry if someone said with confidence, that they knew they would go to heaven when they died. That is because I had assumed that what they implied is that they had done enough “good things” already to merit heaven. But that wasn’t their reasoning at all. They were simply giving testimony to the fact that they had received the gift of eternal life promised them when they recognized the futility of their own religious efforts and turned to Christ and received Him into their lives as the Bible instructed them to do.

To not have this certainty in the Christian life is to live out one’s days motivated by fear. God does not intend this for His children, and plainly states it over and over again, that

our lives are to be lived out with a motivation of love and gratitude for what God has done for us. We want to live for Christ. Our good works become, not a means of gaining our salvation, but the results of having been forgiven and a desire to please our Heavenly Father out of grateful hearts which have received mercy.

Where does one go and what does one do after he/she is born again?

Newborn babies need a lot of care. Birth is followed by a process of growth and development and time. When this natural development in a little baby fails to proceed as intended, we consider it sad, a tragedy. In the spiritual realm, the new birth goes through a similar process. New Christians need a proper environment so they can begin to grow spiritually and mature in their Christian faith. Here are several suggestions to speed your growth along:

- **Begin to read the Bible.** Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Jesus is saying here that if we want to obtain a word from God, we must go where He has revealed Himself. He has done so in the Scriptures, not Shakespeare or the morning paper. Peter says, "Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the Word, so that you may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2).

The Bible is a big book. In fact it's 66 books! Many people get bogged down by starting in Genesis. They quickly get bogged down in the "begats" and abandon Bible reading in despair. What kind of nourishment do little babies begin with? Milk. Then pabulum. Then baby food. Then finally meat.

Start with the Gospel of John. It is the baby food section. Get a Bible that you feel free to mark up so you can underline things which are meaningful to you. Read the Bible like you eat fish. When you come upon a bone, something indigestible,

don't choke on it. If you don't understand it, say "Father, I don't understand this, but I trust that as I grow, I will come to understand it. It's probably meat I can't digest yet." Mark Twain observed, "It's not the things about the Bible that I don't understand that bother me; it's the things about the Bible that I *do* understand that bother me." There is plenty that we do understand even as young Christians to feed our souls. It is through the Bible that you let God talk to you.

- **Make prayer a habit.** This is how we talk to God. Prayer can happen at any time and any place, not just on Sunday. It can be long or short, eloquent or plain, important or trivial, and with or without "thee" and "thou." It can be done with eyes open or shut, standing, kneeling, or lying down. It is talking to a Person, your Heavenly Father. He promises never to leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5), and therefore is accessible to you 24 hours a day everyday. Prayer can involve:

- (1) *confession of sin*, as it occurs, with assurance that "If we confess (agree with God concerning) our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

- (2) *praise and thanksgiving*,

- (3) *intercession* (asking for others), and

- (4) *petitions* of any kind which may burden one's heart. Paul says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God, and the peace of God which passes all understanding shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6,7).

- **Fellowship with other Christians.** Seek out the encouragement that comes from being and sharing with other Christians. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, "Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another." A hot coal removed from the fire and placed apart from the others quickly dies out, but left in proximity



to other coals it burns brighter and longer. Christianity was never intended to be a solo affair. It is best served by a community of believers who mutually strengthen, support and challenge one another to “run a good race” (Hebrews 12:1,2).

- **Baptism.** Our Lord left us only two ordinances to faithfully observe: baptism and communion. Therefore, in obedience to the Lord’s command, every new believer should soon arrange to express his/her faith commitment to Christ—in His death, burial, and resurrection—by a personal, visual rite of public baptism. (“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” [Matthew 28:19].)

- **Share Christ with others.** Jesus told the first disciples, “Follow me and I will make you to become fishers of men” (Mark 1:17). If you know of a good bargain somewhere, you tend to want to tell your friends. One sign of being a Christian, is that you have a strong desire that others might know what you have discovered yourself. . .that God loves them and wants them to know Him. But notice this is a *process*. No one is a “natural” born fisherman. It takes time and skill to catch fish. Learning how to share effectively with others is a learned experience as well. Study the life of our Lord and see how He dealt with people. Read the book of Acts and observe how Paul and others were effective in helping others clarified their own spiritual experience and joined the family of God.

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# Christian Views of Science

# and Earth History – A Balanced Perspective

*Dr. Ray Bohlin and Rich Milne consider the three primary views held by Christians regarding the age of the earth and how the universe, life and man came to be: young earth creationism, progressive creationism, and theistic evolution. After considering the case for each one, they conclude with a call to work together for the cause of Christ.*



*This article is also available in [Spanish](#).*

## Introduction of Three Views

How old is the earth? Did men live with dinosaurs? Are dinosaurs in the Bible? Where do cave men fit in the Bible? Did the flood cover the whole earth? How many animals were on Noah's Ark? What does the word *day* in Genesis chapter one mean?

These are all common and difficult [questions your children may have asked](#), or maybe they are questions you have. What may surprise you is that evangelical Christians respond with numerous answers to each question. In reality, answers to the preceding questions largely depend on the answer to the first one. How old is the earth?

The diversity of opinion regarding this question inevitably leads to controversy, controversy that is often heated and remarkably lacking in grace and understanding. For those Christians who are practicing scientists, there is much at stake. Not only is one's view of Scripture on the firing line, but one's respect and job security in the scientific community is also at risk.

But we must say up front, that as important as this question

is, it is of secondary importance to the quest of defeating Darwinism as currently presented to the culture. Educational leaders and evolutionary scientists are determined to present a fully naturalistic evolution as the only reasonable and scientific theory that can be discussed in the public education system. All Christians, whether old earth or young earth, should find common cause in dethroning philosophical naturalism as the reigning paradigm of education and science.

Returning to the age of the earth question, we would like to survey three general categories of response to this question that can be found among Christians today. For each of these three views, we will discuss their position on Genesis chapter one, since theological assumptions guide the process of discovering a scientific perspective. We will also discuss the basics of the scientific conclusions for each view. Finally, we will discuss the strengths of each view and what those holding the other two views think are the other's limitations.

The first view of science and earth history we will discuss is the recent or literal view. This position is often referred to as scientific creationism, creation science, or young earth creationism. Young earth creationists believe that the earth and the universe are only tens of thousands of years old and that Genesis gives us a straightforward account of God's creative activity.

The second position, progressive creationism or day-age creationism, holds that the earth and the universe are billions of years old. However, progressive creationists believe that God has created specifically and *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), throughout the billions of years of earth history. They do not believe that the days of Genesis refer to twenty-four hour days, but to long, indefinite periods of time.

A view traditionally known as theistic evolution comprises the third position. Theistic evolutionists essentially believe

that the earth and the universe are not only billions of years old, but that there was little, if any, intervention by God during this time. The universe and life have evolved by God-ordained processes in nature. Theistic evolutionists, or evolutionary creationists as many prefer to be called, believe that the first chapter of Genesis is not meant to be read historically, but theologically. It is meant to be a description of God as the perfect Creator and transcendent over the gods of the surrounding ancient Near Eastern cultures.

Before we consider each position in greater detail, it is important to realize two things. First, we will paint in broad strokes when describing these views. Each has many sub-categories under its umbrella. Second, we will describe them as objectively and positively as we can without revealing our own position. We will reveal our position at the conclusion of this article.

## **Recent or Literal Creation**

Having introduced each position, we would like to review the theological and scientific foundations for the first one: recent or young earth creationism.

The young earth creationist firmly maintains that Genesis chapter one is a literal, historical document that briefly outlines God's creative activity during six literal twenty-four hour days. If one assumes that the genealogies of Genesis chapters five and eleven represent a reasonable pre-Israelite history of the world, then the date of creation cannot be much beyond thirty thousand years ago.[\[1\]](#)

A critical theological conclusion in this view is a world free of pain, suffering, and death prior to the Fall in Genesis chapter three. God's prescription in Genesis 1:29 to allow only green plants and fruit for food follows along with this conclusion.

The universal flood of Noah, recorded in Genesis chapters six through nine, is also a crucial part of this view. On a young earth, the vast layers of fossil-bearing sedimentary strata found all over the earth could not have had millions of years to accumulate. Therefore, the majority of these sedimentary layers are thought to have formed during Noah's flood. Much research activity by young earth creationists is directed along this line.[{2}](#)

Young earth creationists also maintain the integrity of what is called the Genesis kind, defined in Genesis 1:11, 12, and 21. The dog kind is frequently given as an example of the Genesis kind. While this is still a matter of research, it is suggested that God created a population of dog-like animals on the sixth day. Since then, the domestic dog, wolf, coyote, African wild dog, Australian dingo, and maybe even the fox have all descended from this original population. Young earth creationists suggest that God created the individual kinds with an inherent ability to diversify within that kind. But a dog cannot cross these lines to evolve into say, a cat.

The literal view of Genesis chapter one has been predominant throughout Church history and it proposes a testable scientific model of the flood and the Genesis kind. Critics point out that there are immense difficulties explaining the entire geologic record in terms of the flood.[{3}](#) Principal among these problems is that it appears there are many more animals and plants buried in the rocks than could have been alive simultaneously on the earth just prior to the flood.

## **Progressive Creationism**

The next view to discuss is progressive creationism. The progressive creationist essentially believes that God has intervened throughout earth history to bring about His creation, but not all at once over six literal twenty-four hour days. The progressive creationist will accept the long ages of the earth and the universe while accepting that there

is some historical significance to the creation account of Genesis.

A popular view of Genesis chapter one is called the day-age theory. This view agrees that the events described in the first chapter of Genesis are real events, but each day is millions, perhaps billions of years in duration. The Hebrew word for day, *yom*, can mean an indefinite period of time such as in Genesis 2:4. This verse summarizes the first thirty-four verses of the Bible by stating, "This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the *day* that the Lord God made the earth and the heaven" (emphasis added). In this case, the word *day* refers to the previous seven days of the creation week. Consequently, the progressive creationist feels there is justification in rendering the days of Genesis chapter one as indefinite periods of time.[\[4\]](#)

Therefore, the progressive creationist has no problem with the standard astronomical and geological ages for the universe and the earth. A universe of fifteen billion years and an earth of 4.5 billion years are acceptable. In regard to evolution, however, their position is similar to the young earth creationists'. Progressive creationists accept much of what would be called microevolution, adaptation within a species and even some larger changes. But macroevolutionary changes such as a bird evolving from a fish are not seen as a viable process.[\[5\]](#)

These are the basic beliefs of most progressive creationists. What do they think is the predominant reason for holding to this perspective? Most will tell you that the evidence for an old universe and earth is so strong that they have searched for a way for Genesis chapter one to be understood in this framework. So the agreement with standard geology and astronomy is critical to them. Progressive creationists also find the biblical necessity for distinct evidence for God's creative activity so strong that the lack of macroevolutionary evidence also dovetails well with their position.

The most difficult problem for them to face is the requirement for pain, suffering, and death to be a necessary part of God's creation prior to Adam's sin. The atheistic evolutionist, Stephen J. Gould, from Harvard, commented on this problem of God's design over these many millions of years when he said, "The price of perfect design is messy relentless slaughter."[\[6\]](#) There are also major discrepancies with the order of events in earth history and the order given in Genesis. For instance if the days of Genesis are millions of years long, then when flowers were created on day three, it would be millions of years before pollinators, such as bees, were created on days five and six.

## Theistic Evolution

Having covered young earth creationism and progressive creationism, we will now turn to the view called [theistic evolution](#) and then discuss our own position with a call to mark the common enemy of the evangelical community.

Most theistic evolutionists see little, if any, historical significance to the opening chapters of Genesis. They suggest that the Genesis narrative was designed to show the Israelites that there is one God and He has created everything, including those things which the surrounding nations worshipped as gods. In essence, Genesis chapter one is religious and theological, not historical and scientific.[\[7\]](#)

Another view of the account of creation according to Genesis that has become popular with progressive creationists as well as theistic evolutionists is the structural framework hypothesis.[\[8\]](#) This literary framework begins with the earth formless and void as stated in Genesis 1:2. The first three days of creation remove the formlessness of the earth, and the last three days fill the void of the earth. On days one through three God creates light, sea and sky, and the land. On days four through six, God fills the heavens, sky, sea, and land. There was a pattern in the ancient Near East of a

perfect work being completed in six days with a seventh day of rest. The six days were divided into three groups of two days each. In Genesis chapter one we also have the six days of work with a seventh day of rest, but the six days are divided into two groups of three days. So maybe this was only meant to say that God is Creator and His work is perfect.

Essentially, theistic evolutionists accept nearly all the scientific data of evolution including not only the age of the cosmos, but also the evolutionary relatedness of all living creatures. God either guided evolution or created the evolutionary process to proceed without need of interference.

Theistic evolutionists maintain that the evidence for evolution is so strong that they have simply reconciled their faith with reality. Since reading Genesis historically does not agree with what they perceive to be the truth about earth history, then Genesis, if it is to be considered God's Word, must mean something else. They do believe that God is continually upholding the universe, so He is involved in His creation.

Theistic evolution suffers the same problem with pain, suffering, and death before the Fall that progressive creation endures.[{9}](#) In addition, the many problems cited concerning the origin of life, the origin of major groups of organisms, and the origin of man remain severe problems for the theistic evolutionist as well as the secular evolutionist.[{10}](#) Some theistic evolutionists also quarrel with a literal Adam and Eve. If humans evolved from ape-like ancestors, then who were Adam and Eve? If Adam and Eve were not literal people, then is the Fall real? And how is redemption necessary if they are imaginary?

## **Call for Caution and Discussion**

We have discussed the biblical and scientific foundations of three different Christian views of science and earth history.



In so doing, we have tried to convey a sense of their strengths and limitations. The issue of the age of the earth is very controversial among evangelicals, particularly those who have chosen some field of science as their career.

Our intention has been to present these perspectives as objectively as possible so you, the reader, can make an informed decision. We have purposefully kept our own views out of this discussion until now. We would like to take a moment and explain the reasoning behind our position.

We have studied this issue for over twenty years and have read scholars, both biblical and scientific from all sides of the question. For some ten years now, we have been confirmed fence sitters. Yes, we are sorry to disappoint those of you who were waiting for us to tell you which view makes more sense, but we are decidedly undecided. This is by no means a political decision. We are not trying to please all sides, because if that were the case, we know we would please no one. The fact is, we are still searching.

Biblically, we find the young earth approach of six consecutive 24-hour days and a catastrophic universal flood to make the most sense. However, we find the evidence from science for a great age for the universe and the earth to be nearly overwhelming. We just do not know how to resolve the conflict yet. Earlier, we emphasized that the age question, while certainly important, is not the primary question in the origins debate. The question of chance versus design is the foremost issue. The time frame over which God accomplished His creation is not central.

Such indecision is not necessarily a bad thing. Davis Young in his book *Christianity and the Age of the Earth*, gives a wise caution. Young outlines that both science and theology have their mysteries that remain unsolvable. And if each has its own mystery, how can we expect them to mesh perfectly?[\[11\]](#) The great 20th century evangelist, Francis Schaeffer said:

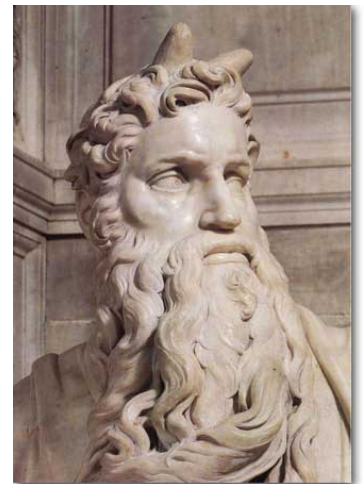
We must take ample time, and sometimes this will mean a long time, to consider whether the apparent clash between science and revelation means that the theory set forth by science is wrong or whether we must reconsider what we thought the Bible says. {12}

“What we thought the Bible says”? What does *that* mean?



In the sixteenth century, Michelangelo sculpted Moses coming down from Mount Sinai with two bumps on his head. The word which describes Moses' face as he came off the mountain, we now know means shining light, meaning Moses' face was radiant from having been in God's presence. But at that time it was thought to mean “goat horns.”

So Michelangelo sculpted Moses with two horns on his head. That is what they thought the Bible literally said. Now we know better, and we changed our interpretation of this Scripture based on more accurate information. We believe we need even more accurate information from both the Bible and science to answer the age of the earth question.



The question concerning the age of the earth comes down to a matter of interpretation, both of science and the Bible. Ultimately, we believe there is a resolution to this dilemma. All truth is God's truth. Some suggest that perhaps God has created a universe with apparent age. That is certainly possible, but certain implications of this make us very uncomfortable. It is certainly true that any form of creation out of nothing implies some form of apparent age. God created Adam as an adult who appeared to have been alive for several decades though only a few seconds into his existence.

Scientists have observed supernova from galaxies that are hundreds of thousands of light years away. We know that many of these galaxies must be this distant because if they were all within a few thousand light years, then the nighttime sky would be brilliant indeed. These distant galaxies are usually explained in terms of God creating the light in transit so we can see them today. These observed star explosions mean that they never happened in an apparent age universe. Therefore, we are viewing an event that never occurred. This is like having videotape of Adam's birth. Would supernovas that never happened make God deceptive?

Therefore, we believe we must approach this question with humility and tolerance for those with different convictions. The truth will eventually be known. In the meantime, let us search for it together without snipping at each other's heels.

## Notes

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3. Daniel E. Wonderly, *Neglect of Geologic Data: Sedimentary Strata Compared with Young-Earth Creationist Writings* (Hatfield, PA: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute,

1987), 130. Howard J. Van Till, Robert Snow, John Stek, and Davis A. Young, *Portraits of Creation: Biblical and Scientific Perspectives on the World's Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1990), 26-125.

4. Hugh Ross, *Creation and Time* (Colorado Springs, CO: NAVPRESS, 1994), 45-72.

5. Ibid., 73-80.

6. Stephen Jay Gould, "Darwin and Paley Meet the Invisible Hand," *Natural History* (November 1990):8. Mark Van Bebber and Paul S. Taylor, *Creation and Time: A Report on the Progressive Creationist Book by Hugh Ross* (Mesa, AZ: Eden Communications, 1994), 128.

7. Van Till, et al., *Portraits of Creation*, 232-242.

8. Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part 1: From Adam to Noah*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem Magnum Press, 1978), 12-17. Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis*, trans. David G. Preston (Leciester Press and Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 49-59.

9. Ken Ham, *Evolution: The Lie* (El Cajon, CA: Creation-Life Pub., 1987).

10. Phillip E. Johnson, *Darwin on Trial*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 15-112, 166-170.

11. Davis A. Young, *Christianity and the Age of the Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 158.

12. Francis Schaeffer, *No Final Conflict* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 24.