

Questions Intellectuals Ask About Christianity

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1. Is it possible to be a scientist and a Christian?

Scientists who were Christians:

Deceased:

Francis Bacon
Johannes Kepler
Blaise Pascal
Isaac Newton
Michael Faraday
James Clerk Maxwell
William Henry Perkin
George Stokes
Lord Kelvin
J. J. Thomson
Charles Coulson

Living:

Norman March
Robert Griffiths
Richard Bube
Donald Page
Allan Sandage
David Cole
Francis Collins

John Polkinghorne
S. William Pelletier
Andrew Bocarsly
James Tour

2. What about Adolph Hitler? Wasn't he a Christian?

The heaviest blow that ever struck humanity was the coming of Christianity. Bolshevism is Christianity's illegitimate child. Both are inventions of the Jew. —*Adolph Hitler*

3. Who made God?

God never needed to be made because He was always there. God exists in a different way from human beings. We exist in a derived, finite, and fragile way, but the Creator exists as eternal, self-sustaining, and necessary, in the sense that there is no possibility of Him ceasing to exist. In philosophy, many errors result from supposing that the conditions and limits of our own finite existence apply to God.

4. Can god make a rock so big that he can't lift it?

God is omnipotent. But omnipotence does not mean that God can do literally everything.

As the shorter catechism says "God can do all His holy will."

God cannot sin...God cannot lie...God cannot change His nature.

God cannot deny the demands of His holy character.

God cannot make a square circle, for the notion of a square circle is self-contradictory.

God cannot cease to be God. But all that God wills and promises He can and will do.

5. Doesn't the inherent subjectivity of morality prove that God does not exist?

A. People commonly say that "morality is subjective" or that it is "relative." But when they speak in a moral vein—which is to say, when they pass judgment on human behavior—they do so as moral realists. Most atheists are just as convinced as Christians that Adolf Hitler was an evil person.

B. People resist moral realism because they think it leads to "intolerance." In doing so they make two fundamental mistakes. First, they fail to realize that tolerance itself is a value and that they are simply making this one value rule over all others. This is itself a form of moral realism. Second, they fail to understand that tolerance and moral realism can coincide.

C. People disagree about how to implement values, but in the abstract they don't disagree about the truth of any value.

1. No one ever says that "justice" or "fairness" or "kindness" or "bravery" or "charity" are not sound values—in the abstract.

2. Moral disagreements are always about the implementation of values, about trying to integrate them into our behavior. This involves taking into account issues of knowledge as well as issues of right and wrong.

D. There are no "new values," or "different values." People sometimes think there are new values, simply because the language with which we express values changes. For instance, a popular value term now is "diversity." But while you don't find this word in the traditional language of morality, such as that used in the language in the New Testament, you will find the concept (e.g. I Corinthians 12:14–31). There Paul talks about the different roles played by different (i.e., diverse) parts of the body of Christ.

E. People are attracted to moral subjectivism or relativism because it exonerates them of guilt. But the very fact that they so strongly desire to perceive themselves righteous betrays a commitment to moral realism.

6. Is the New Testament Picture of Jesus Reliable?

The grounds for accepting the New Testament as trustworthy compare very favorably with the grounds on which classical (Greek, Roman) scholars accept the authenticity and credibility of 'reliable' ancient documents.

—F. F. Bruce (1912–), *Distinguished English academic classics scholar, University of Manchester*

Example: Julius Caesar's *Gallic Wars*—nine or 10 existing manuscripts. The oldest dates from 850 A.D.

However, there are 4,000 extant Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, in whole or in part. The best complete documents go back to 350 A. D. Parts of John's Gospel are dated at 130 A. D.

To express skepticism concerning the resultant text of the New Testament books...is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity, for no documents of the ancient period are as well-attested bibliographically as is the New Testament. —*John Warwick Montgomery*

7. How could any intelligent 20th century person believe that Jesus rose physically from the dead?

A) If Jesus remained dead, how can you explain the testimony of the disciples? Forty days later, you hear their voices with shouts of excitement, "We've seen a dead man walking!"

B) If Jesus remained dead, how can you explain the faithfulness of the disciples to the testimony of the resurrection even in the face of their own deaths? Of the 11 disciples, only one died of old age—John—and he was exiled to Patmos, an island work camp. They died as martyrs with the truth of the resurrection on their lips.

C) If Jesus remained dead, why did 500 people say they saw Him alive (see I Corinthians 15:6)?

D) If Jesus remained dead, how can you explain the credibility of the witnesses? In the first century, the people questioned the first-hand witnesses...and their story was not proven wrong.

E) If Jesus remained dead, how can you explain the inability of the first century skeptics to deal with the resurrection with an alternative explanation? All the power of Rome and of the religious establishment in Jerusalem was geared to stop the Christian faith. All they had to do was to dig up the grave and to present the corpse. They didn't.

F) If Jesus remained dead, how can you explain the reality of the Christian church and its phenomenal growth in the first three centuries of the Christian era? Christ's Church covered the Western world by the fourth

century. A religious movement built on a lie could not have accomplished that.

G) If Jesus did not rise from the dead, his closest friends were an extraordinary compulsive group of liars. This charge does not fit well with the ethical caliber of the writings of Jesus' disciples. Virtually all religions now concede that the writings of the apostles represent a very high level of morality.

8. Who is Jesus?

[People say] "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the devil of Hell. You must take your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon, or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

—*From Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis (1898–1963), *Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English Literature, Cambridge University, England*

9. Why do bad things happen to good people

Scrawled on the side of a vacant building in Berkeley, CA:

Most people want to serve God...usually in an advisory capacity.

If human life is in fact ordered by a beneficent being whose knowledge of our real needs and of the way in which they can be satisfied infinitely exceeds our own, we must expect *a priori* that his operations will often appear to us far from beneficent and far from wise, and that it will be our highest prudence to give him our confidence in spite of this.

—*C.S. Lewis: Lecture to the Oxford Socratic Club, 1955*

A god whom we could understand exhaustively, and whose revelation of himself confronted us with no mysteries whatsoever, would be a god in man's image, and therefore an imaginary god.

—*J. I. Packer, theologian*

Human arrogance tends to believe that if we had been in charge of creation we would have done it better. With a little more care about the details, we would have kept the beauty of sunsets, but eliminated germs like staphylococci. The more we understand the processes of the world, however, the less likely does it seem that this would be possible.

As finite human beings we should not claim to know God's will exhaustively. But it is clear that God did not intend to create an enormous machine whose sole purpose is the elimination of human suffering. Suffering is very much a part of God's plan for our brief sojourn upon this planet.

Why do bad things happen to good people? An often-heard variant: "God would have a lot more friends if He treated the ones He already has better."

Response: If God rescued from every problem those who are true to Jesus, Christians would not need faith. Their religion would be a great insurance policy, and there would be lines of selfish people ready to sign up.

10. Doesn't the uneven geographical distribution of Christianity around the globe prove that it must not be a universal truth?

No more that the uneven distribution of the understanding of calculus around the world proves that calculus is untrue.

11. What about other religions?

If you had gone to Buddha and asked him, "Are you the son of Bramah?" he would have said, "My son, you are still in the veil of illusion." If you had gone to Socrates and asked, "Are you Zeus?" he would have laughed at you. If you had gone to Mohammed and asked, "Are you Allah?" he would first have rent his clothes and then cut your head off. If you had asked Confucius, "Are you Heaven?" I think he would have probably replied, "Remarks that are not in accordance with nature are in bad taste." The idea of a great moral teacher saying what Christ said is out of the question. In my opinion, the only person who can say that sort of thing is either God or a complete lunatic suffering from that form of delusion which undermines the whole mind of man...He (Jesus) was never regarded as a mere moral teacher. He did not produce that effect on any of the people who actually met Him. He produced mainly three effects: hatred-terror-adoration.

—*A Mind Awake: An anthology of C. S. Lewis*

12. Will not God accept those of other religions who are sincere?

All other religions are diametrically opposed to Christianity on the most crucial question: "Who is Jesus Christ?" They deny that Jesus is God, that He rose again after dying on the cross, and that because of His death, we can have forgiveness of sin.

No one questions the sincerity and intensity of the faith of, for example, a Buddhist monk. But sincerity or intensity of faith does not create truth. Faith is no more valid than the object in which it is placed.

The question must be, "What is true?" Read the original accounts and see what Jesus claimed about Himself. *Not every* religion can be true. Most are mutually contradictory. Either one is true and the others are false, or they are all false. Either Christ is who he said He is or He is not. If He is not, then He was lying, He was sincerely deluded, or the stories were all made up about Him.

If Jesus is who He said He is, then Christianity is true and He is the only way to God.

13. Hasn't the overall influence of Christianity been negative?

A balanced response to this old question has been given by Kenneth Scott Latourette, Sterling Professor, Yale University:

Christianity has been the means of reducing more languages to writing than have all other factors combined. It has created more schools, more theories of education, and more systems than has any other one force. More than any other power in history it has impelled men to fight suffering, whether that suffering has come from disease, war or natural disasters. It has built thousands of hospitals, inspired the emergence of the nursing and medical professions, and furthered movement for public health and the relief and prevention of famine. Although explorations and

conquests which were in part its outgrowth led to the enslavement of Africans for the plantations of the Americas, men and women whose consciences were awakened by Christianity and whose wills it nerved brought about the abolition of slavery (in England and America). Men and women similarly moved and sustained wrote into the laws of Spain and Portugal provisions to alleviate the ruthless exploitation of the Indians of the New World.

Wars have often been waged in the name of Christianity. They have attained their most colossal dimensions through weapons and large-scale organization initiated in (nominal) Christendom. Yet from no other source have there come as many and as strong movements to eliminate or regulate war and to ease the suffering brought by war. From its first centuries, the Christian faith has caused many of its adherents to be uneasy about war. It has led minorities to refuse to have any part in it. It has impelled others to seek to limit war by defining what, in their judgment, from the Christian standpoint is a "just war." In the turbulent Middle Ages of Europe it gave rise to the Truce of God and the Peace of God. In a later era it was the main impulse in the formulation of international law. But for it, the League of Nations and the United Nations would not have been. By its name and symbol, the most extensive organization ever created for the relief of the suffering caused by war, the Red Cross, bears witness to its Christian origin. The list might go on indefinitely. It includes many another humanitarian projects and movements, ideals in government, the reform of prisons and the emergence of criminology, great art and architecture, and outstanding literature.

14. How can a loving God send people to Hell?

The premise is correct. God loves us. But His love is strong, rather than weak and permissive.

The question should actually be, "How can a holy God let sinful people into heaven?" You can't simply camp out on God's love and forget His holiness.

No one is worthy enough to enter heaven. But because of His love, God wants us to be with Him. So, Jesus' death on the cross, where He paid the penalty for all that we have done wrong, was God's way of satisfying His holiness and demonstrating His love.

Look at that sacrifice: God has done everything possible to keep people out of hell. What have you done about that provision? Are *you* choosing hell rather than heaven?

15. What about people who have never heard even the name of Jesus?

Many people have thought about this question, and few claim to understand God exhaustively. If I did, I would be God! But we do know that the Bible says God will judge the world with justice. It also says God has made His presence known to all people through nature and through our conscience, so we all find ourselves without excuse (Romans 1:19,20).

The world can be divided into two groups: those who have heard already, and those who have not heard yet. I have confidence that God will take care of that latter group. But because everyone here has heard, you will need to make a decision about what you will do with Jesus Christ.

16. Why are there so many hypocrites in the church?

Yes, there are people in the church who do not live the life they profess. God hates such pretense as much as you do. But businesses, social clubs and other religions all have their hypocrites as well.

Look at Christ and who He claimed to be rather than solely at those who follow, or profess to follow, Him. Christianity stands or falls on the life of Christ, not on the performance of His followers. Anything in life that is genuine will inspire counterfeits.

Jesus Christ's claims are true, and He was not a hypocrite. Will you follow Him? Don't miss out on knowing Jesus because of someone else's failure.

17. Won't a good moral life get a person to heaven?

Living a good life cannot get a man or woman into heaven, because God's standard for "good enough" is perfection. If He allowed anything imperfect into heaven, heaven would be marred. So who can get to heaven on his own merit? No one, because no one is perfect.

So how can any one get there? We can't live a sinless life, nor can we make up for our wrongs. But Jesus did both. God offers a relationship with Him on this earth and eternity with Him in heaven. All one needs to do is trust in Jesus' death on the cross as the penalty for our sins, paid in full.

18. Many non-Christians are offended by the "exclusiveness" of Christianity. Can anything be said in response?

A) Christianity is "universal" in the sense that Jesus invites all people everywhere to receive the gift of eternal life made possible by the death on the cross.

B) Since many basic tenets of different religions are contradictory, someone has to be wrong.

C) Exclusivity seem unavoidable. Who wants to board a commercial airplane on which the pilot is not exclusively committed to a safe landing? "Doesn't the pluralist believe exclusively that several religions provide acceptable paths to God?" The exclusion of exclusivity is also exclusive.

D) Christianity's uniqueness arises not from the narrow-mindedness of individual Christians, but from the extraordinary claims of Jesus Christ, attested by those who were eyewitnesses of His life, death, and resurrection.

Conclusion:

While there are many other questions that intelligent people ask about God, these are some of the principal ones that could become intellectual roadblocks to those who are truly seeking to know the truth about God. As you can see from the answers I have put forth, I do not believe that any of these are sufficient to keep a reasonable person from pursuing a personal relationship with God.

In fact, the answers I found to these questions were an important factor in an incredible discovery that I made during my fourth year on the faculty at University of California, Berkeley. I discovered that God offered forgiveness to me for all of my disobedience and rebellion against Him. I found that Jesus Christ had paid the penalty for all of my self-centered actions when He suffered and died on the cross and was raised from the dead. When I trusted Jesus to be my Savior that year, I discovered that through Jesus I had been forgiven of my sins. I also found that I had been given a clean relationship with God, a purpose for living, and the

assurance of spending eternity with God when I die. Can you imagine anything more wonderful than that?

This discovery made such an incredible difference in my life, I want to encourage you to find this personal relationship with God as well. If you will acknowledge that you have sinned against God, and if you trust Jesus to save you from the just punishment of a holy God, you will find that He will make you into a new person, from the inside out. I encourage you to make this discovery today.

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