

HOW THE BIBLE ANSWERS LIFE'S SEVEN BIGGEST QUESTIONS

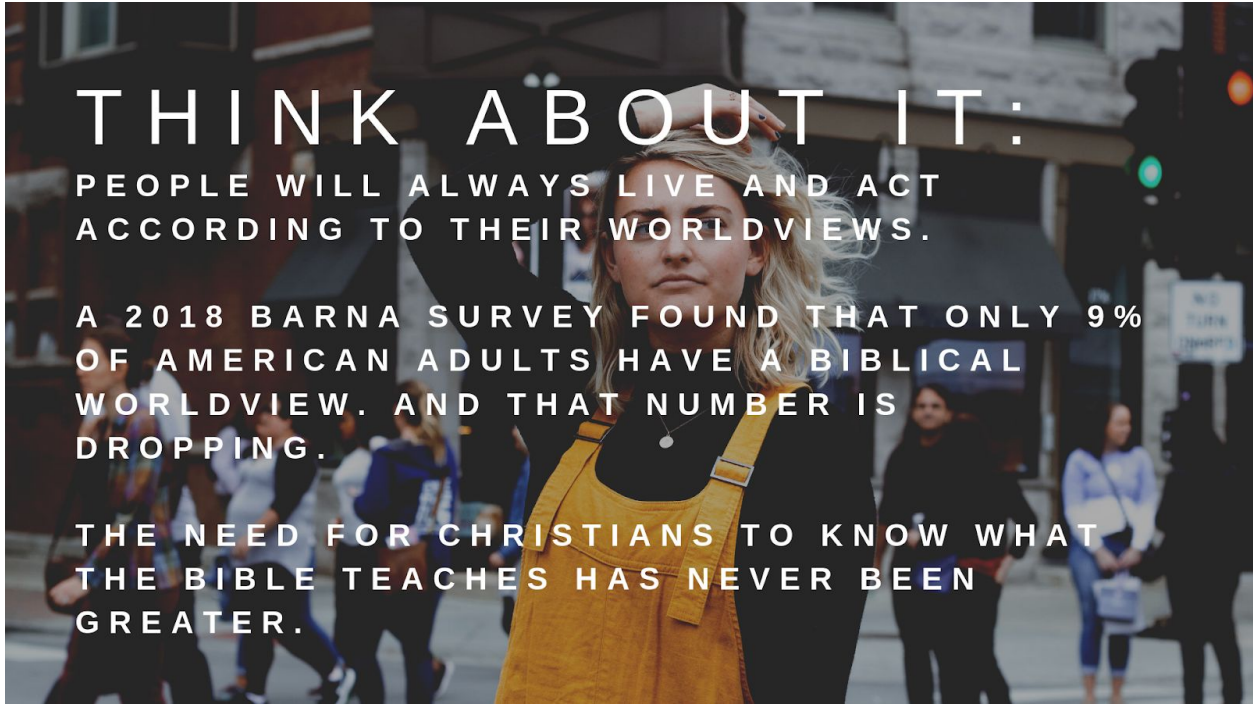
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THE BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW



SESSION NOTES


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Before we begin, on a scale of 1-10 how confident do you feel right now in your ability to give at least a basic outline of what the Bible teaches about life's biggest questions (God, Meaning, Human Nature, Jesus, Truth, Hope and Destiny)? (circle one)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Briefly explain your answer in the space below.

OBJECTIVES

Why are we here?

- To define what a worldview is and the importance of having a biblical one.
- To identify seven questions all worldviews answer and see how the Bible answers them.
- To compare and contrast the biblical answers with various unbiblical ones.
- To lay a foundation for Christians to know what the Christian perspective is, in order to better prepare to share its message and defend its truth.

So what is a worldview?

“A network of presuppositions... through which one interprets all human experience.”

--Jefferey Ventrella

“A set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false), which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic make-up of the world.”

--James W. Sire

Your worldview is like a pair of sunglasses--just as sunglasses colors everything you see, so your worldview affects your interpretation of everything you learn and experience.

Your worldview is your *perspective* about all of life. It gives you the complete set of answers you would give about all the questions in the world, if you were asked.

“They are generally unquestioned by each of us; rarely, if ever, mentioned by our friends; and only brought to mind when we are challenged by a foreigner from another ideological universe” (James W. Sire).

Why worry about worldview?

“The Christian system (what is taught in the whole Bible) is a unity of thought. I believe it is only Christianity that gives the answers to all the crucial questions” (Francis Schaeffer).

We have already seen that only nine percent of Americans hold a biblical worldview. This means that nine out of ten people in your city and neighborhood are looking at the world through false, unbiblical “lenses.” Surely many of those are even professing Christians!

As Christians, we are to conform our minds to God’s, not to the world (Romans 12:2), learning to obey all that Christ commanded (Matthew 28:19). Jesus prayed that we would be set apart from the world by the truth of God’s word (John 17:17). We need to know what we believe, which is the same as saying we need to know what the Bible says. As Cornelius Van Til has said, “The Bible is thought of as authoritative on everything of which it speaks. And *it speaks of everything*.”¹ If God has revealed the truth about himself, the world, and ourselves, then we as his people need to know and believe what he has said. This brings both great wisdom and incredible joy, peace and hope (Romans 15:13). There can be no greater joy than knowing God through faith in Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, according to his word.

¹ Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 4th ed. Edited by K. Scott Oliphint (P&R, 2008), 29.

Of course many of that 90% are not professing Christians. They are, “without Christ, ...without hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). They are under God’s condemnation (John 3:18) and, unless they repent, they will perish (Luke 13:3; John 3:16). These are the folks Jesus has commissioned us to disciple (Matthew 28:19). We must teach them the truth of the Gospel and the biblical worldview that makes sense of it. Yet how can we teach what we do not understand ourselves?

All this brings glory to God by bringing us to worship him. As we plumb the depths of God’s word and see how it applies to every nook and cranny of our lives, we cannot help but cry out with the Apostle Paul, “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and untraceable his ways” (Romans 11:33)!

Now let’s look at seven worldview questions and how various worldviews answer them.

Every worldview must answer seven questions:

1. **What is real?**

What is the nature of prime reality? What is ultimately real? What is God like?

2. **What is good?**

What is good and how do we know? What does it mean to sin or transgress the boundaries of goodness? What is beauty?

3. **What Can Be Known?**

What is truth and how do we come to know it? Is truth universal or subjective?

4. **What is man?**

*What does it mean to be human? What’s wrong with humanity?
How do we fix what’s wrong with us?*

5. **What is the meaning?**

Is there a point to all this? Does God have a purpose and how do we discover it?

6. **What is our destiny?**

Where are all things headed? Will justice finally prevail? Is history more like a Greek comedy or a tragedy? Am I on the right side of history?

7. **Who is Jesus?**

Is Jesus merely a man, a created, divine being, or God? What did Jesus claim about himself and are those claims true?

Q1: WHAT IS REAL?

What is the nature of prime reality? What is ultimately real? What is God like?

When it comes to views of definite reality, there are many conceptions. However, we can more easily categorize them by asking three simple questions about prime reality (what is really “there,” behind the world as we experience it):

1. Is prime reality personal or impersonal?
2. Is prime reality infinite (ultimate and unlimited) or finite?
3. Is prime reality all-one or is it diverse?

For hundreds of years, philosophers and religious scholars have wrestled with these three important questions. The existence of three things in the cosmos must be accounted for: *personality, unity and diversity*.

As human beings, we find all three elements in the universe. For example, we find personality in ourselves. We also find unity and diversity in ourselves. As individuals we are diverse, different. And yet as a human race, we are united--we are all of the same kind.

Because we are not infinite, we ourselves cannot be the ultimate explanation for the existence of personality, unity and diversity in humanity (or anywhere else in the universe).

Therefore there must be Someone or Something greater than ourselves that explains their existence. A prime reality that is “really there” must be able to account for unity, diversity and personality. And this is where non-biblical worldviews run into a problem.

A prime reality (or god) that is *infinite yet impersonal* (as in Hinduism) could account for unity, but not diversity.

A vast pantheon of diverse, personal, but limited “gods” (as in Mormonism or ancient Greek religion) could explain the existence of diversity, but not unity. None of those gods would be great enough to explain anything on an infinite level.

A god that were infinite and personal, but not diverse within himself (as in unitarian monotheistic religions like Judaism and Islam) could account for unity and personality, but not diversity.

The God of the Bible Accounts for Unity, Diversity, and Personality

- He is infinite:
 - *“Listen, Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one”* (Deuteronomy. 6:4).
 - *“I am the first and I am the last. There is no God but me”* (Israel 44:6b).
- He is personal:
 - *This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and the one you have sent -- Jesus Christ”* (John 17:3).
 - *“The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love”* (1 John 4:8).
- And he is diverse:
 - *“yet for us there is one God, the Father. All things are from him, and we exist for him. And there is one Lord, Jesus Christ. All things are through him, and we exist through him”* (2 Co. 8:6).
 - *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”* (Jn. 1:1).
 - *“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all”* (2 Cor. 13:13).

The church has historically taught that the “Godhead,” that is God’s divine nature, is triune--three-in-one. God is one in *essence* and three in *person*--Father, Son and Holy Spirit.² These three have known and loved one another perfectly forever, so it makes sense when Scripture says that “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:8).

The Venn diagram on the next page categorizes various religions and worldviews according to whether and which of the three elements, unity, diversity and personality, they account for.

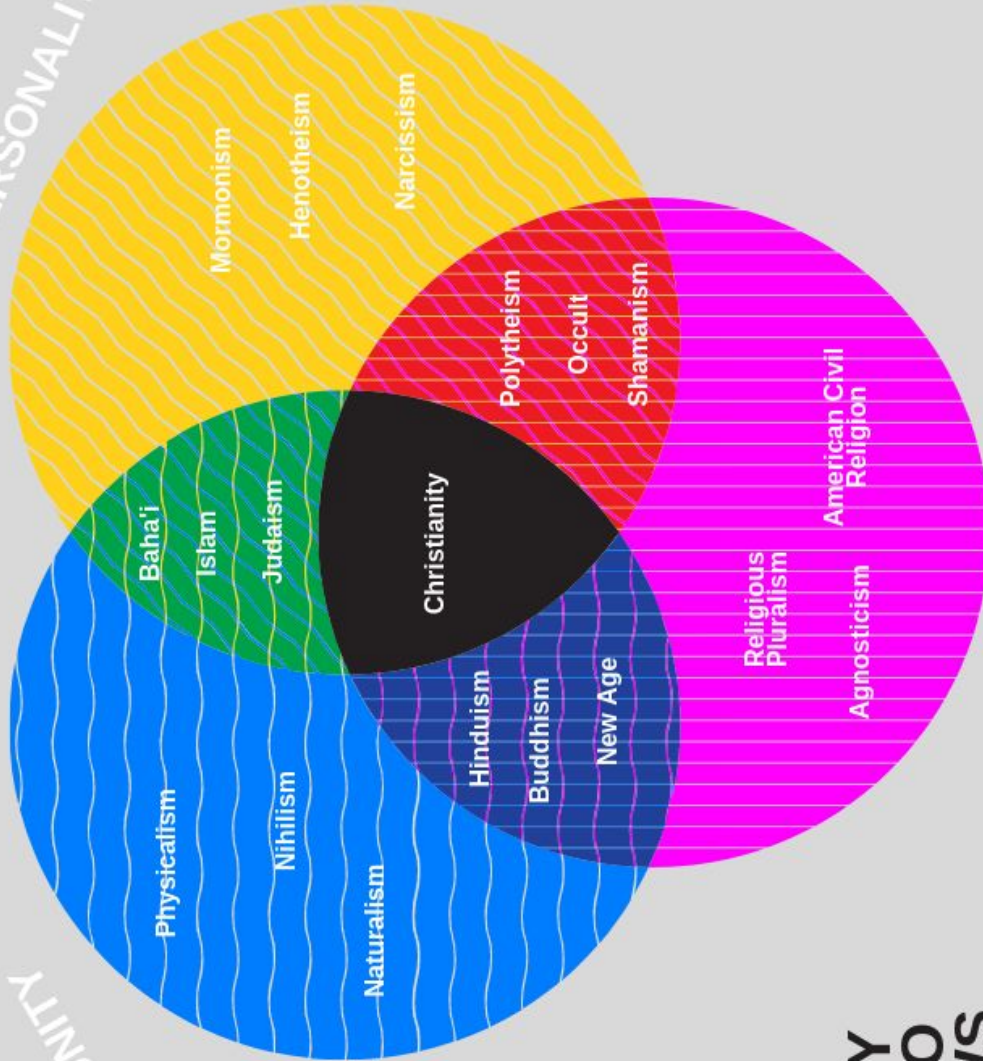
One fact will become apparent very quickly: only the God revealed in the Bible accounts for all three of the necessary elements.³

² Cf. the Nicene Creed.

³ For further reading on how God alone accounts for unity, diversity and personality, I recommend Schaeffer, Francis, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1972), 15-16.

PERSONALITY

UNITY



PRIME REALITY ACCORDING TO VARIOUS VIEWS

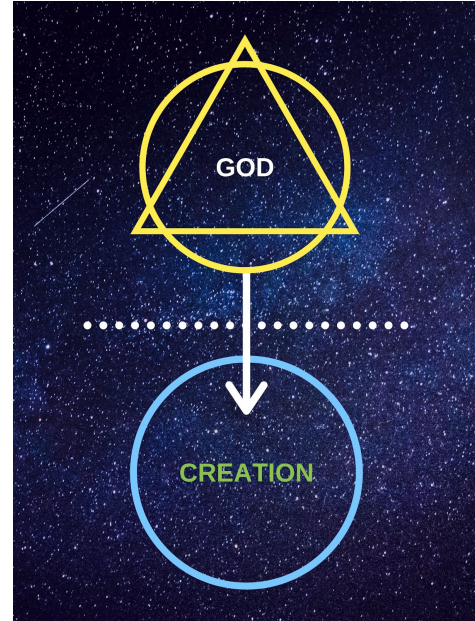
What is definite reality like? Does it account for unity, diversity and personality?

DIVERSITY

The Bible says that the God who is “there” is also rightly referred to as “Lord.” As Lord...

- He is **transcendent** (above creation) (Is. 40:22)
- He is also **immanent** (immediately present to creation) (Ps. 139:7-12).
- His **sovereignty** is expressed in his “Lordship attributes” of **Authority, Control and Presence.**⁴ (These will come up again later when we discuss Question 7, “Who is Jesus?”)

In the graphic on this page, the circle around “GOD” represents the oneness of God’s nature and the unity of his essence, while the triangle symbolizes the three divine Persons and his three “Lordship attributes.” The image illustrates how God transcends the cosmos (indicated by the dotted line, while also being able to intimately interact within it (indicated by the downward arrow.



Note that the creation is depicted as a circle, but one into which God’s influence is able to extend. In the biblical view, creation does have a certain consistency “baked in,” seen in the reliability of the laws of nature (e.g. gravity) and thought (e.g. logic).

Yet the cosmos is not a “closed” system, as though it were impenetrable from God’s outside influence. These truths explain why science is possible (which assumes the consistency of nature, as well as miracles (which *sometimes* involve the apparent contravening of those laws, such as when God made the sun stand still for Israel in Joshua 10:12-13).

Takeaways from this section:

Now we are ready to answer...

⁴ Theologian and philosopher John Frame has written extensively on this subject. I recommend reading his Lordship Series of books for more.

Q2: WHAT IS GOOD?

What are our moral duties and how do we know? What does it mean to violate the absolute standard of goodness? Is beauty objective or “in the eye of the beholder?”

“What is right?” is a question as old as time itself, and it is one that every culture addresses in some way or other. Every society has its own definition of what is morally acceptable, both for the society as a whole and for its individual members. These moral rules, or mores, are reflected both in formal laws that are written down, as well as in “laws” that are unwritten but which are expected nonetheless.

One culture views children as sacred, another says children should be neither seen nor heard. One culture allows a young man to personally avenge the murder of his brother, while another punishes such an action with jail time or even death. The question for us is, how can we differentiate between societal values, norms, and mores which vary from culture to culture? Without an overarching, objective and universal moral authority that transcends human society, there would be no way to judge between different moral systems.

The fact that all human societies *have* moral systems (even though they do vary, and sometimes dramatically in their particulars) shows that mankind has been created with moral intuitions. The biblical worldview explains that these moral intuitions are designed to correspond to an objective and universal standard that finds its basis in God.

God is the Basis for Morality

Because God is the sovereign Lord, his good, pleasing and perfect will is the basis for life’s absolute moral standards (Ro. 12:2). God’s moral commands are not arbitrary, nor does he appeal to some standard beyond himself. His very nature is the definition of goodness. He is magnificent, glorious and eminently praiseworthy, and he commands that his creatures live by his glorious standard (Mk. 10:18). God’s goodness was reflected in his creation as he originally created it (Gn. 1:31).

Only the Biblical Worldview Accounts for Absolute Morality

Recall that God’s nature is personal, infinite, and diverse within himself (we might say “tri-personal”). This provides the basis for absolute morality. Because he is personal, he has a will. Because he is infinite, his will applies to all people, everywhere and at all times. And because he is tri-personal, it is in his nature to communicate; he has communicated his will to his creatures, in the Bible.

The moral commands of the Bible reflect God's goodness. The Bible teaches that creation's greatest purpose is to praise God (Ps. 148:1-14), and man's highest moral duty is to love God (Mt. 22:38; Jn. 14:15), followed by the command to love one's neighbor as oneself (Mt. 22:38-39).

Although mankind sinned and has fallen short of God's glorious standard (Ro. 3:23), there remains an inherent moral sense--the "works of the law"--written on our hearts. (Ro. 2:15).

Takeaways from this section:

Q3: WHAT CAN BE KNOWN?

What is truth and how do we come to know it? Is truth universal or subjective? What reason do we have for thinking we can know anything at all?

We will address this question in two parts. First let's look at *knowledge*. Then let's examine the idea of *truth*.

Knowledge

The study of knowing, or the theory of knowledge, is called *epistemology*. Epistemology deals with the questions above. While we take the fact that we know things for granted, we really should not. After all, why *should* we think that we can know *anything*? Why should we think that we can have knowledge? Come to think of it, what *is* knowledge?

Knowledge is classically defined as “justified, true belief.” The word “justified” has led to much debate, and in recent years philosopher Alvin Plantinga has offered the definition “warranted, true belief.” We may say that Bob has *knowledge* when he believes a true proposition to be true, and his truth-seeking faculties (his mind, his reason, his five senses, etc.) are functioning properly and in a favorable environment. In this case there is alignment between the truth of the proposition, the belief that Bob has, and the *warrant* that Bob has for believing it.

So how do we arrive at knowledge? How do we come to know? And how do we know that we know?⁵

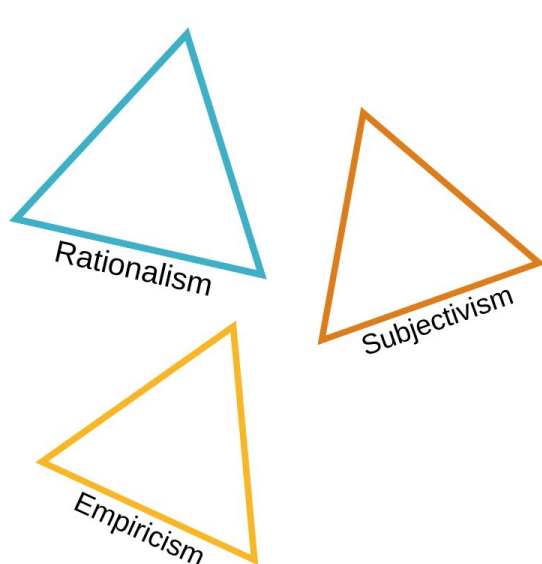
Philosophers (and others who spend their days pondering such questions) have developed many epistemologies, but these can be roughly divided into three categories.⁶

1. **Empiricism:** knowledge is based on the five senses. True knowledge begins with the scientific process of collecting data from the world, analyzing it, and drawing conclusions based on those observations. Man's reason can be deceived, but cold, hard facts don't lie. Example: William Clifford said, “It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.”

⁵ Francis Schaeffer poses this question in Chapter 3 of his book, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1972), 37-60.

⁶ For the three approaches to epistemology I'm drawing heavily on the work on John Frame and specifically from his article, “Epistemological Perspectives and Evangelical Apologetics,” Frame-Poythress.org, May 17, 2012, Accessed June 12, 2019

2. **Rationalism:** knowledge is based on certain principles, which we know apart from what we experience through our senses. These rules govern our thinking. Laws of logic are examples of these rules. When we know these rules, we can reason our way to all true knowledge. This view places high value in human reasoning and distrusts sense data, because after all, our eyes may deceive us! Example: René Descartes started with the maxim, “I think, therefore I am,” and developed a system of knowledge from there.



3. **Subjectivism:** knowledge of any absolute truth is impossible. All we can know is what is true “for ourselves.” We come to know these truths through processes that are completely internal and not necessarily verifiable by reason or science. Reason can be muddled, and our senses can deceive us, but there are some things, perhaps the most important things, that we “just know.” Example: Walt Whitman said, “Whatever satisfies the soul is truth.” Intuition relies heavily on experience. We rely on our intuition when we conclude that the future will be like the past.

It has been pointed out⁷ that no one has really been able to consistently hold completely to any of these three perspectives. Instead, the very best philosophers and thinkers have rather tried to combine these three approaches. This is because, at the end of the day, it is obvious that each one has merit.

As Christians we can affirm aspects of all three. We agree with the Empiricists that science is a valid way of gaining knowledge (in fact the first scientists were all Christians!). We further affirm

with the Rationalists the importance of logic and sound reasoning. And we join with the Subjectivists in saying that, by golly, there are some facts that we just *know* to be true, even if we can’t verify them scientifically or account for them logically (though they do not contradict science or reason).

Each of these three epistemologies focuses on its preferred truth-seeking faculty to the (unsuccessful) exclusion of the other two. While each one fails on its own, if there were a way of unifying them, we could approach a holistic view of how we really arrive at knowledge. As it

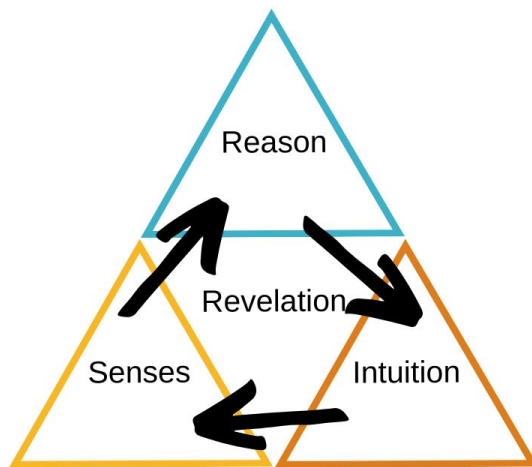
⁷ Ibid.

turns out, God’s revelation is the key to that unification. In fact, as believers we can look at all three of these epistemologies as perspectives on the truth.⁸

The world does not interpret itself. God, the Creator of the world and everything in it, is the Creator who speaks. He has spoken to us in an authoritative way, and by that speech he has revealed to us the truth about himself, the cosmos, and ourselves. He has not given us *exhaustive* knowledge, but the knowledge he has given us is true.⁹ True knowledge begins with a proper attitude toward God and a willingness to hear what he has to say. As Scripture says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7).

God reveals himself in two ways: by his works and by his word. We call the former “General Revelation” and the latter “Special Revelation.”

General Revelation is accessible to all men, through observing the “outer world” of the cosmos and analyzing the “inner world” of the self (Romans 1:18-20). For example, both the law of gravity governing the movement of physical objects, as well as the laws of logic governing our thoughts, point to the existence of God.



Special Revelation is God’s supernaturally revealing truth to us, which today is recorded in Scripture, the Bible. The Bible is “breathed out by God,” and was written by men who “spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21).

The Bible provides the basis for certain knowledge, and validates the three ways of knowing we referenced earlier. When we think biblically, we see that *Rationalism* is a false view, but the use of *reason* is good (Isaiah 1:18; 1 Peter 3:15).

Empiricism is false, but *empirical science* (based on sense data analysis) is good (Psalm 111:2; Isaiah 40:26; Psalm 94:9). *Subjectivism* is also false, but God has given us intuition, and truth is very personal (Job 38:36; Romans 2:14-15).

When unified by God’s revelation, these three are not in conflict but work together. We have a basis for using all three. Of course, the same Bible that validates these three methods of gaining knowledge also warns us about the effects of sin on our ability to know. We will discuss this later, when we talk about the nature of man.

⁸ John Frame has written extensively about “Triperspectivalism,” the concept that three ideas seemingly in conflict are actually perspectives on the same reality. For more see, Frame, John, “John Frame on the Trinity,” Frame-Poythress.org, November 21, 2016, Accessed June 14, 2019.

⁹ James Sire describes Francis Schaeffer as having made this point. Cf. James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door* (Wheaton: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 130.

So we have seen that knowledge is possible and accessible to us from the biblical worldview. Now let us turn to the question of truth. As we will see, “truth” is not only a biblical concept, but the very existence of truth is impossible without God.

Truth¹⁰

We must begin with a definition of the word truth, without just defining it by itself. This is harder than it would seem. Truth is one of those words that we use all the time, but we don’t really think about what it *means* because it seems so self-evident: “Truth is... what’s *true*.”

Webster’s says truth is “the state of being the case.” But then, this feels incomplete. *What* is in the state of being the case? *What* case? What sort of things *can* be true? Can a rock be “true?” No, truth is a quality of *propositions*, it cannot be possessed by *things*. A rock cannot be true, but the statement, “the rock is on the table” can.

For the purposes of this article, then, we will build a more complete and useful definition of the word truth—a *true* definition—and then demonstrate that truth is impossible without God.

Truth and Language

So we have seen that truth is an attribute of propositions, and propositions are by definition linguistic; they are statements made in a particular language, whether English, French, Koine Greek or something else. Propositions, being a function of language, only make sense if they accord with the laws of language (grammar and syntax, etc., but also they must contain real words that are meaningful within that language).

It makes sense to say in English, “The rock is on the table,” but not “The rock fleurglob table the.” That’s nonsense, not English. Language isn’t freeform, it has rules. That collection of “words” doesn’t follow the rules of the language and therefore it’s incomprehensible, meaningless. Such a “proposition” really isn’t a proposition, and it makes no sense to ask whether it is “true.”

So the first criterion of truth is that a proposition accords with the rules of language. It is comprehensible.

Truth and Logic

¹⁰ This second draws extensively from an article I previously wrote: Joel Settecase, “The Very Concept of Truth is Impossible Without God,” *TheThink.Institute*, May 10, 2019, Accessed on June 14, 2019.

Next, for any proposition to be sensible or possible, it must accord with the laws of logic. I have written about logic before, but in short, a logical proposition must not contradict itself (the Law of Noncontradiction). It must refer to what it refers to (the Law of Identity). It must affirm a state of affairs or its opposite, but not both (the Law of Excluded Middle).

These logical laws govern all thought and language. They are transcendentals, in that they transcend any one particular language or culture. Whereas vocabulary, grammar and syntax change from language to language, the laws of logic are unchanging. They are also immaterial, universal, and knowable.

A proposition (in any language) that contradicted itself or otherwise violated logic could not be meaningful, let alone true.

The second criterion for truth, then, is that a proposition accords with the laws of logic. It is coherent.

Truth and Reality

Finally we come to the third criterion, and this is the one most people think of when they think of truth. A true proposition is one that describes the actual state of affairs. It affirms the real world the way the real world actually is.

In this, it is necessary to believe that there actually is such a thing as “the real world.” More on this in a minute.

Therefore the third criterion for truth is that it accords with reality. It is correspondent.

All Three Criteria Presuppose God

We may now define truth as the quality of a proposition that is comprehensible in terms of language, coherent with regard to logic and correspondent to actual reality.

Now we can move on to why truth presupposes God. This is the case because all three criteria individually require God in order to be meaningful or real.

Comprehensibility Presupposes God

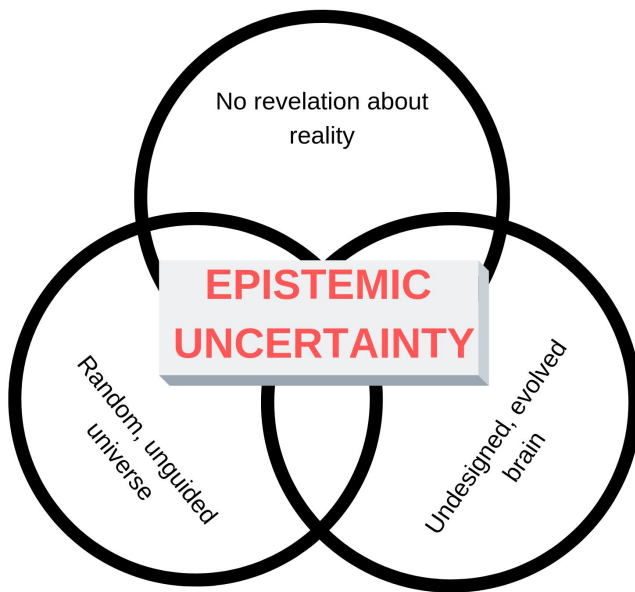
How does language presuppose God? Language presupposes God because it assumes that minds are designed to communicate and understand ideas. Further, the use of language assumes the uniformity of nature, that the future will be like the past.

That is, the speaker (and the hearer) must believe that words will mean the same thing in five seconds that they meant five seconds ago. “Is” will always mean “is” and never “is not.” This

requires a stability to the universe that can only be explained by the faithful, unchanging, good God of Scripture.

Coherence Presupposes God

What about logic? Logic presupposes God because it assumes that there are true, immaterial, unchanging, good, universal and knowable laws that govern thought and speech. God is all of these things. If you believe in God and the truth of the Bible, it makes sense that the universe would be governed by such laws. It also makes sense that human beings, created in the image of God, would think and speak logically.



Could an atheist (or someone holding to a view that excludes God) still affirm belief in logic or say logical things? Of course! Unbelievers do this all the time. The question is, can they do so consistently? No. By removing God from the picture, they are attempting to keep the laws but remove the Lawgiver. Without God, "logic" would simply be reduced to personal preference--subject to each individual's opinion as to whether

they wanted to adhere to them or not. The "laws" of logic would have no necessary application that would extend beyond the mind of each individual person. That is to say, they would not be laws at all.

Worse yet, an atheist evolutionist, who believes that his mind (which is just his brain) is the product of time + chance + millions of years and merely "aimed" at survival and reproduction (unrelated to actual truth-seeking), must believe that his own belief in logic is determined solely by his genes. Belief in logic isn't rational; by believing in logic he's merely dancing to his DNA. A mind evolved by chance could never "step outside itself" to analyze its own conclusions, including its conclusions about logic. On such a worldview there is no reason to believe in logic.

Because atheism posits a random, unguided universe, does not allow for revelation about reality, and supposes that man's thought is nothing more than the "secretions" of his evolved brain, it is a worldview without any basis for knowledge at all.

Correspondence Presupposes God

Belief in reality presupposes God because it assumes there is a state of affairs external to one's own mind. There is a world which is objectively "out there." That world is intelligible; it is capable of being known.

Similarly, this also presupposes that one's mind is able to know something about the external world. In order to be able to make correspondent propositions about the world, the human mind must also correspond to the world in such a way that knowledge about the world is possible, and conclusions about the world may be correct.

The Bible teaches that God created man in his image, with the ability to study the world and gain true knowledge from it. Without God there's no reason to believe this.

So far we've defined truth according to three criteria, defined those criteria and seen how each of them presuppose God. Now let's examine why truth is a problem for those who deny God's existence.

The Atheist's Problem With Truth

However you look at it, truth presupposes God. Atheists (and others holding to non-biblical worldviews) therefore have a huge problem.

If they affirm the existence of truth, they must also presuppose the existence of God and the truth of what the Bible teaches about God, the world and humanity.

On the other hand, if they deny the existence of truth, they must deny the possibility of saying anything is "true." This also precludes anyone from saying that it is true that God does not exist!

If there is no truth, then the fundamental proposition of atheism, "God does not exist," cannot be true. It is actually impossible to assert that truth does not exist, because to do so is to deny the truth of the assertion.

So then, truth exists, and absolute truth exists absolutely. There is no way around this.

Truth Presupposes God

None of the above proves that atheists and unbelievers can't know anything true. They know all sorts of true things. Truth is inescapable. Rather, all this shows that atheism cannot account for the existence of truth.

The Bible, on the other hand, is full of truth, and it centers on the One who is the embodiment of truth himself: the Lord Jesus (John 14:6). To know him is to know truth. That knowledge is bound up with obeying him as Lord. And then, Jesus says, “the truth will set you free.”

Takeaways from this section:

Q4: What Is Man?

We start this section by asking why we need to ask this question at all. That is, why do we need a definition of man at all? After all, we *are* human beings. Shouldn't it be obvious to us what we are?

The fact is, the answer to "What is Man?" is *not* obvious. Or at the very least, there is no shared definition of humanity across all worldviews. Therefore, if we want our thinking to be shaped by the Bible, we must ask this question and see how the Bible answers it. (It is also important to note here that we are using the term "man" in an inclusive way to refer not just to *adult males* but to male and female human persons of all ages. This usage is biblical and theologically significant in ways which we won't expound on here, but which will perhaps become clear as we go on).

Before we go any further, write your own answer to the question in the space below.
What is man? Man is...



We mentioned above that there is no unified way that all worldviews answer the question of mankind or human nature. Here are a few samples of the various answers out there:¹¹

- **Materialism:** Man is a complex machine or evolved animal, the product of an unguided process of evolution by natural selection over millions of years.
- **Mormonism:** Man is a spirit child of Elohim, the Heavenly Father, who himself is an exalted or deified man. As man is, God once was. As God now is, man may become.
- **Hinduism & New Age:** In Hinduism, "Atman" (man) is "Brahman" (ultimate reality or

¹¹ Cf. the "Theory Comparison Chart (Santrock Chapter 2)" Christinao.wordpress.com, accessed on June 18, 2019.

the cosmic soul). Man is one with the universe, though he may not be aware of this. New Age thought is similar, in that the self is god.¹²

- **Postmodernism & Intersectionality:** Man's nature is debated, but generally seen as being without any objective definition or essential nature (a Postmodernist would likely object to my use of "man" to describe humanity!). Neil Shenvi says, "As a non-theistic worldview, critical theory believes that our identity is not primarily found in our vertical relationship to God but in our horizontal relationships to other people and other groups." On this view, individuals define themselves and relate to one another and society according to an intersecting network of sub-groups, each with various levels of "privilege" and "oppression."

Then there is the question of the moral status of human nature: is man basically good, basically bad, more good than bad, more bad than good, or fundamentally broken? There are diverse answers to this question as well.

So what does the Bible teach? What does man's Creator have to say about his creation? According to the Bible, man is:

- Persons bearing God's own image (Genesis 1:27).
- Designed as an expression of unity-in-diversity, male and female each with their own roles and both equal in value and personhood (Genesis 2:18; 5:2).
- Created to procreate and exercise dominion over the animals and the natural world (Genesis 1:26).
- Valuable and possessing of dignity from the moment of conception (Psalm 51:5; 139:13; cf. Exodus 21:22-25; Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:41).

The first humans were a married couple, specially created by God (the husband from the soil and the wife from the side of her husband) (Genesis 2:7, 21-22). All humans since that time are descended from the same married couple (Genesis 3:20; Acts 17:26) and so are rightly considered a single race.¹³

Man is the only "animal" given personality, and as such people are more like God than anything else in nature and enjoy a status infinitely higher than animals, plants and machines. However, unlike God, who is infinite, man is finite. As such, he is infinitely lower than God and is dependent on him (Matthew 4:4).

¹² James Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic World View Catalog* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 156-209, especially page 200.

¹³ Although the Bible recognizes many ethnicities, it presents only one "race." That is, human beings of every ethnicity share the same primeval parents, Adam and Eve. However, biblically speaking there are really two "races," the race of Adam (unregenerate sinners still under Adam's headship) and the race of Christ--those who have been reborn and brought into God's family (John 1:13; 1 Peter 2:9), who have Christ as their representative or head.

Adam, our first father, sinned, an event we refer to as the Fall, recorded in Genesis 3:1-7. As the father of all mankind, Adam was also our representative. As a result of his Fall, sin and its consequences (death and hardship) spread to all mankind, who all became sinners (Genesis 3:16-19; Romans 5:12).

So man's nature is best described as fundamentally broken. That brokenness is both given to us (by virtue of our shared ancestry, according to Psalm 51:5) and chosen by us (by virtue of our own individual sins). We should not think of ourselves as victims but rather as villains. In man's natural state he is utterly sinful ("totally depraved," as the Reformers put it) and enters this world under God's judgment. Ephesians 2:3 describes our state apart from God's grace as living "in our fleshly desires, carrying out the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts," and being "by nature children under wrath."

Sin broke all human relationships--to God, to society and the world, and even to oneself. Although man was originally created to exist in perfect relational harmony (similar to how the Father, Son and Holy Spirit relate to one another), since the Fall man's default is interpersonal strife and jealousy (action that the Apostle Paul calls "merely human" in 1 Corinthians 3:3). Left to our own devices, we would become more and more sinful, and earn more and more of God's wrath and judgment. The final state of an unrepentant, sinful person is everlasting punishment in Hell (Matthew 10:28; Revelation 21:8).

Yet while man's nature is broken, his dignity as being God's image bearer has not been completely destroyed. Human life is still valuable and dignified (Genesis 9:6; James 3:9-10). Furthermore, mankind is not a lost cause. It is possible for sinners to be reconciled to God and reborn, given new life and adopted into God's family as his children (John 1:12; 3:7).

So we see that man, while having been initially created good, has gone astray and is in desperate need of restoration, forgiveness and redemption.

There has only ever been one human being who did not sin, namely Jesus Christ, who is both fully human and fully God (Philippians 2:6; Hebrews 4:15). Therefore, Jesus both flawlessly exemplifies what it means to be human, and perfectly provides the means by which broken and sinful humanity may be "fixed" and forgiven.

Now that we have finished this section, write your new answer to the question, "What is man?" in the space below. Go back and compare your original answer with your new answer, and note any similarities and differences.

Q5: WHAT IS THE MEANING OF LIFE?

Is there a point to all this? Does God have a purpose and how do we discover it?

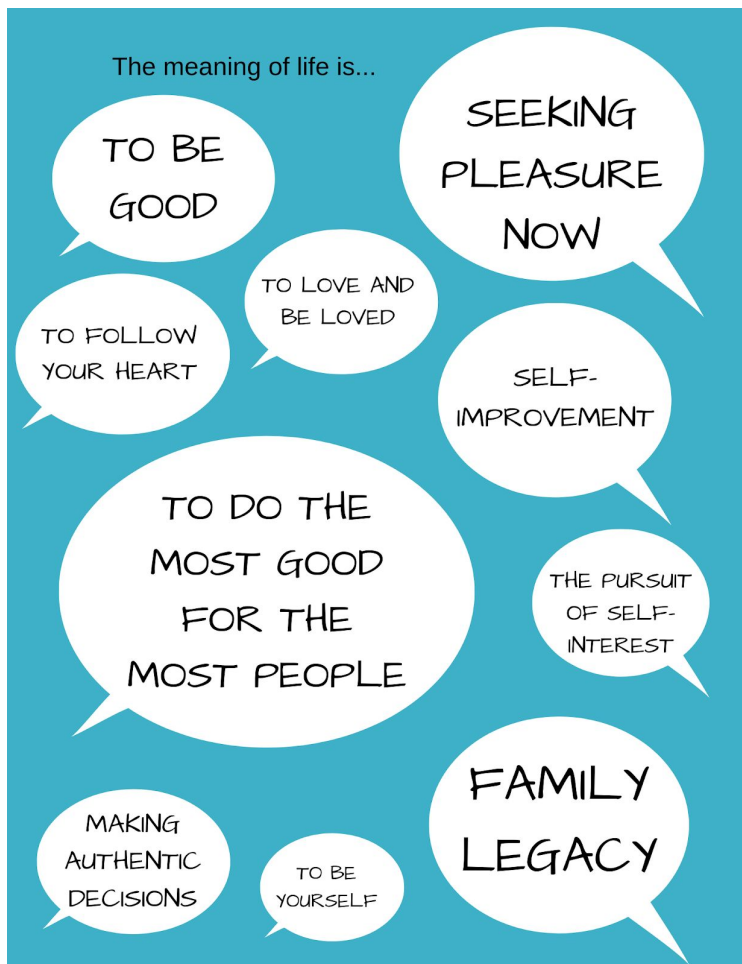
“What is the meaning of life?” has almost become a rhetorical question nowadays. It is often asked flippantly, as though the person asking doesn’t really expect to get an answer, or that there even is an answer.

Another way of asking this question--maybe one that seems easier for us to answer, is “What is the good life?”

Certainly, the prevailing view at the popular level of our society today seems to be that there *is* no meaning to life--at least no *objective* one--and therefore that each of us ought to do our best to define the “good life” for ourselves, to make our own meaning.

Many answers are given from the various worldviews, including (but certainly not limited to) the ones laid out in the graphic below.

While all of the answers reflected in this graphic may very well be good, there is a question we must answer *before* we can answer the question of life’s meaning, and that is this: “Who are we to say?”



In Romans 9:19-24, human beings are compared to pots, and God to a potter. The upshot of the passage is summarized in verse 20: “But who are you, a mere man, to talk back to God? Will what is formed say to the one who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’” God is the Author of creation, and as such he has authority (*author-ity*) to define the meaning of our lives.

If God has defined the meaning of life, then, it is his definition alone that matters.

He has defined it, and the definition is found in Scripture.

First, mankind shares its meaning with all creation, which exists to glorify our Creator (Psalm 19:1; 100:3). Beyond that, human beings are specially created to bear God's image in the world, exercising dominion and creativity in like fashion to his own (Genesis 1:28). As God's image bearers, all human beings are responsible to worship God and obey his commands with reverence (Ecclesiastes 12:13). In fact, when mankind fails to do this a sorry state of affairs results, in which our thinking becomes futile and we spin out into moral relativism and wickedness (Romans 1:18-24).

Yet there is another level of meaning to human life, beyond showing God's glory as creatures and even beyond bare obedience. This level of meaning is only available to followers of Jesus Christ. This is true, not because Christians are inherently "better" than anyone else. Rather it is only possible for Christians because of what it means to be a Christian. The highest level of meaning for a human life is found in deep communion with God, when we experience God as Father, the Son of God as Lord and Friend, and the Spirit of God as Counselor and Helper, living within us. This situation, which is definitional of the Christian life, is enjoyed only by God's chosen people, those he has redeemed by grace through their faith (Ephesians 1:3-14; 2:8-9). Salvation and reconciliation to God is only a reality in the lives of Christ's people, those whom he saves (Matthew 1:21), and there is no other means by which we may attain those blessings (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

What is truly awesome, is that restored status with God is not the *finale* of the "good life" for Christians but rather the beginning. Every follower of Jesus is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), (re)created in the image of Christ (Ephesians 4:24), intended by God for the accomplishment of good works--works of significance and value that God himself has prepared for us in advance (Ephesians 2:10)!

So while the culture at large may not be able to objectively answer the question, "What is the meaning of life?" (and how could they, unless they recognize the authority of God himself to answer that question!), God has answered it for us in his word.

We might distill the answer to something like this:

"The meaning of life is to know, glorify and enjoy God, through Jesus Christ, and to live for him by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Takeaways from this section: _____

Q6: WHAT IS OUR DESTINY?

Where are all things headed? Will justice finally prevail? Is history more like a Greek comedy or a tragedy? Am I on the right side of history?

Before we begin this section, I need to include an important caveat. When it comes to the details of *eschatology* (the study of “last things” or the End Times), there are many conflicting views across Christianity. The eschatological details over which orthodox Christians disagree are secondary ones. That is to say, two individuals can both be Bible-believing, Jesus-loving, Holy Spirit-having believers and still disagree on when Jesus is coming back and what specific events will occur immediately before and afterwards.

This cannot be said when it comes to *primary* doctrines, such as the Trinity, the Incarnation of Jesus, or the Gospel.

However, while the boundaries of orthodoxy (which simply means “straight teaching”) allow for broad divergence in the secondary details of eschatology, that is not to say that all of eschatology is secondary. There are some must-believes, some essential teachings, about the future taught clearly in Scripture.

We could turn to any number of passages to derive a biblical view of history and destiny. However, there is one verse in particular that is especially instructive:

Isaiah 46:10: “I declare the end from the beginning, and from long ago what is not yet done, saying: my plan will take place, and I will do all my will.”

From this single verse we learn three things about the destiny of our world. We learn that the story of the world is linear, that it is headed somewhere, and that it is ultimately God’s story.

History Is Linear

To clarify, we are using the word “history” to mean the whole story of the world, not just the events of the past.

Eastern worldviews conceive of history as circular. Just as the seasons rotate through spring, summer, autumn and winter, so all the life of humanity and the cosmos is a series of repetitions. Even human souls are reincarnated over and over in a cycle of life, death, and reincarnation (until, perhaps, they achieve release from the cycle through *Moksha* and become unified with the cosmic reality (*Brahman* in Hinduism)).

Not so in the West, shaped as it has been by a long history of biblical teaching. In Western worldviews, even including Western forms of atheism, history had a beginning and will have an end.

The Bible teaches that history had a beginning when God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing by his word (Genesis 1:1; Hebrews 11:3). From that moment, in which natural time itself was created, the story of the cosmos has been progressing toward an inevitable conclusion.

History Is Heading Somewhere

Isaiah 46:10 (with Scripture as a whole) teaches that history will have an end. Things will not continue on infinitely into the future.

At the end of this age, Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead by their words and their deeds (Hebrews 9:27; Matthew 12:36-37). Those who have been rescued by Jesus during their earthly lives (there is no recourse after death) will be judged not by the record of their misdeeds but rather by the inclusion of their names in the book of life (Revelation 20:11-15).

Our current world will not last forever but are being reserved for fire (2 Peter 3:7), after which a new heavens and earth will be created (Isaiah 65:17), the dwelling of God and his redeemed people forever (Revelation 21:4).

History Is “His Story”

Our passage in Isaiah says that history is ultimately the unfolding of God’s holy will. What he wants to happen will happen. So it is appropriate to say that history is actually “his story.” Isaiah 14:24 similarly records God as saying, “As I have purposed, so it will be; as I have planned it, so it will happen.”

The theological center point of history--the most important event ever--was the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the heart of the Christian message and worldview. The Apostle Paul called this the matter of “first importance” (1 Corinthians 15:3). The Gospel, then is the key to understanding history. In one sense, all the events prior to the death and resurrection of Jesus are pointing forward to it, and in some sense every event since then is pointing backward to it. In another sense, the cross points both forward and backward to all the events before and after it, giving them all meaning.

So history is neither purposeless nor is it ultimately determined by human choices. While our decisions and actions are morally significant, the ultimate flow and shape of history has been predetermined by God (Genesis 50:20). This is a great comfort to believers, because this means that we are never outside of God’s plan for us, and that he is always working our situations together for good and to make us more like his Son (Romans 8:28).

At this point we could get into a discussion of the divergent views Christians hold on the Millennium (the thousand years of Christ's reign with his saints mentioned in Revelation 20:4) and whether Jesus will physically return before or after that reign (or whether it is currently happening now). We could discuss the Rapture, the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, the Beast, and the Harlot mentioned in Revelation, as well as the 70 weeks of Daniel's prophecy (9:24-27) and the destruction of Jerusalem in the year A.D. 70. However, we will not get into these questions now, not because they are not important (all biblical teaching is important!) but because they are not *essential* to the biblical worldview.

Godly Christians disagree on these matters, but we all agree on the important issues. Jesus is Lord, Jesus is coming back, and the story of the cosmos is ultimately about him.

Takeaways from this section:

Q7: Who is Jesus?

Is Jesus merely a man, a created, divine being, or God? What did Jesus claim about himself and are those claims true?

The Most Important Question In the World

There is perhaps no historical personage whose identity and significance is debated more than Jesus Christ. Of course, this is appropriate given of what is at stake in answering the question.

Christians teach that Jesus is the Messiah (or “Christ,” the “Anointed One”) who has been given all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). If this is true, then correct belief about him (and *in* him) is a matter of eternal life and death. In that case, every human being on earth owes him complete allegiance and submission.

Because we humans are none too willing to surrender our autonomy to just anyone, and because (due to our broken and sinful human nature) we naturally rebel against God, it is to be expected that the identity of Jesus would be highly controversial. The unbeliever has literally everything to lose (and, the believer would add, everything to gain!) by believing in the biblical identity of Jesus. Below, we will briefly look at a few of the ways that adherents of different worldviews answer this question, before we examine the biblical data.

The Most Interesting Man In the World

At this point, you might be thinking, *Wait, I thought we were talking about seven questions that every worldview must answer! Belief in Jesus is a Christian thing. Why should other worldviews need to answer this?* This is a valid question. So then, *is* the identity of Jesus really a vital one for all worldviews?

The answer is yes, for two reasons. First, Jesus really *is* who the Bible teaches he is, and therefore his identity is of the utmost, cosmic importance. Secondly, as it turns out, all the major worldviews really do have an answer to the question of Jesus’s identity. This First-Century carpenter-turned-rabbi from Judea has been so influential that, when it comes to thinking about life’s biggest issues, he turns out to be unavoidable.

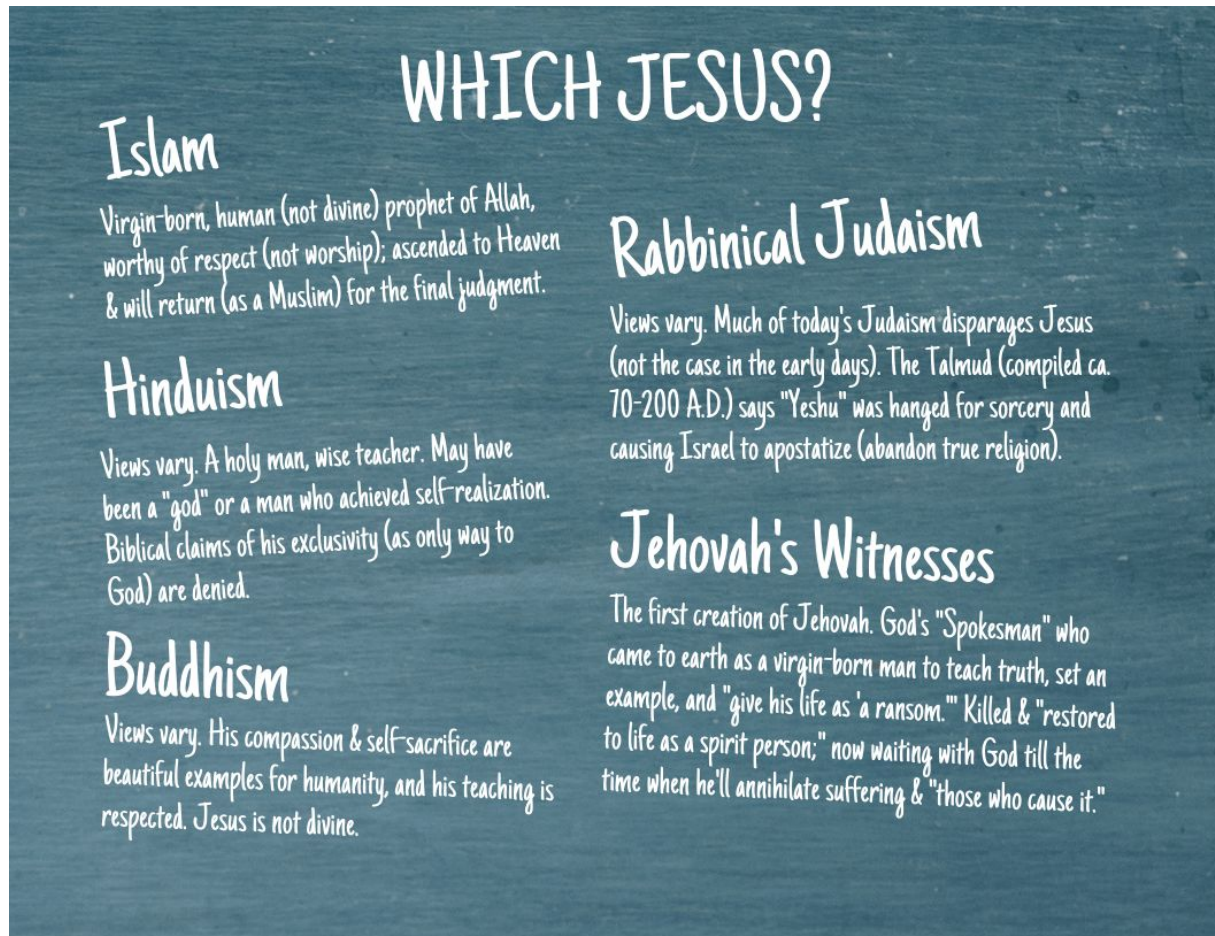
In a 2015 article for *Relevant Magazine*, apologist J. Warner Wallace said, “Every religion makes some effort to account for His existence and teaching... This ought to give seekers a reason to pause and consider the life of Jesus seriously.”¹⁴ It is amazing to see how nearly so

¹⁴ J. Warner Wallace, “What Other World Religions Think About Jesus,” RelevantMagazine.com, March 12, 2015, accessed June 26, 2019, <https://relevantmagazine.com/god/what-other-world-religions-think-about-jesus/>.

many adherents of different worldviews try to explain Jesus and even roll him into their own system.

Different Answers

So how have other worldviews explained who Jesus is? Let us now consider five alternative versions of Jesus, from Islam,¹⁵ Hinduism,¹⁶ Buddhism,¹⁷ Rabbinical Judaism,¹⁸ and Jehovah's Witnesses.¹⁹



¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. Rabbinic Judaism is based on a combination of the *Tanakh* (Old Testament) and the *Talmud*, the tradition of the Rabbis written in the early decades after the temple at Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70. and is distinguished from biblical Judaism, which was based on the *Tanakh* alone. Cf. "Question: What is the difference between Messianic Judaism and Rabbinic Judaism?" Bethadonai.com, accessed June 26, 2019, http://bethadonai.com/?page_id=511. See also, "Extra-Biblical Historical Evidence for the LIFE, DEATH, and RESURRECTION of JESUS," WestarkchurchofChrist.org, accessed June 26, 2019.

¹⁹ "Lesson 4: Who Is Jesus Christ?" JW.org, accessed June 26, 2019.

The Bible's Answer

We could continue and list the versions of Jesus from other worldviews, such as Atheism, Postmodernism/Intersectionality, Mormonism, and more. Such a list would be fascinating. However, it suffices to say that every worldview other than biblical Christianity views Jesus as less (far less!) than what he truly is, according to Scripture. Now, what does the Bible really teach about Jesus?

Whole libraries could be, and have been, written about the biblical Jesus. In fact the Bible itself is a library of 66 volumes, all testifying to his future coming (Old Testament) and his life, work, and ongoing presence with his people through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (New Testament).

His Identity

Remember that the Bible's presentation of the Godhead (the divine nature) is that he is triune (three-in-one), and that the three divine Persons are the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the Son, the second Person of the Trinity. He is also called the "word" in John 1:1, who is said to have existed at the beginning of creation, and through whom all things were created (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16-17). In all, there are at least 102 different names or titles for Jesus in Scripture,²⁰ including Alpha and Omega (Revelation 1:8), Bread of Life (John 6:32), and Captain of Salvation (Hebrews 2:10).

His Work

For Christians, Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God in the world (Colossians 1:15), and the only way to God (John 14:6). He is God in the flesh (John 1:14), and during his earthly ministry he presented himself as a sinless sacrifice to God on behalf of all his people (2 Corinthians 5:21). All who repent of their sins, confessing Jesus as Lord and believe that God raised him from the dead (validating his claims about himself, about which more below) will be saved from God's wrath (Acts 2:38; Romans 10:9-10; 1 Thessalonians 1:10).

His Roles

To believers, Jesus is king, defender and best friend. And he will be the judge of the world. These are just a few of his roles, and we could discuss many more. Yet there are three roles (or "offices") in particular, which Jesus carries out in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, in which all the other roles are bound up. These are the roles of Prophet, King, and Priest. Jesus fulfills all three roles simultaneously (it is not like he is a Prophet on Monday, a King on Tuesday, and a Priest every third Sunday). Each of the three roles is perfectly summed up and unified in him.

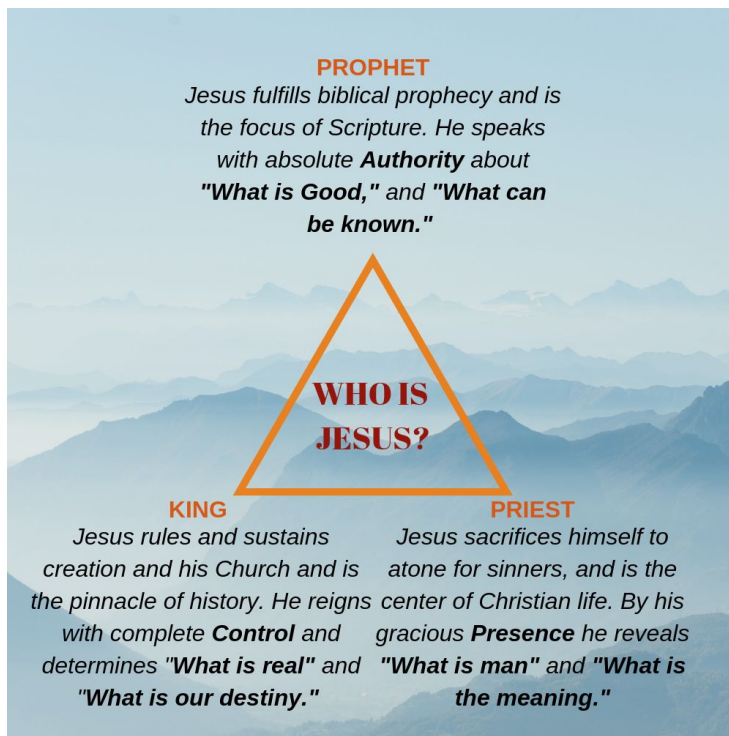
²⁰ Betty Miller, "All the Names of Jesus," BibleResources.org, October 10, 2005, accessed June 27, 2019.

Each one also gives meaning to, and provides a basis for, certain elements of the biblical worldview we have been discussing. In other words, the whole system we have been studying together all orbits around Jesus. He is the rock upon which our whole worldview is built. In fact, Scripture tells us as much:

- “Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Matthew 7:24).
- “...God’s household... with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:19b, 20b).
- “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone” (Luke 20:17, citing Psalm 118:22).
- “For no one can lay any other foundation than what has been laid down. That foundation is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11).

Each of the three roles also corresponds to the three “Lordship Attributes” we discussed earlier.

Let’s look at these three roles of Prophet, King and Priest.



Do you see how Jesus gives meaning to the whole biblical worldview? In this course we have truly been saving the best for last. Jesus is the best; he has the final word on the previous six questions we have been examining.

To know Jesus is to know the unifying principle of the biblical worldview. Think about that. If a worldview is the “network of presuppositions... through which one interprets all human experience,” and the biblical worldview is *the* true worldview, then the person, work and story of Jesus is *the* fundamental proposition by which we must filter all reality--and truly, all reality is all about

him!

This means that our investigation of the Christian perspective ought to lead us closer to Jesus, the “source and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2).

As we close this section, reflect on what you have learned. On a scale of 1-10, how confident do you feel right *now* in your ability to give at least a basic outline of what the Bible teaches about life's biggest questions (circle one)?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Did your answer change from the start of class? Briefly explain in the space below.

I hope you will leave this course both confident that the Bible is true and truly makes sense of all of life, and eager to share the truth about this worldview--and the Christ at the center of it--with others in your life. There can be no greater joy than to see someone else "get it!"

Take your worldview study further with these recommended resources:

- *To learn more about the worldviews of the world:* Sire, James. ***The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog***. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988.
- *To see how one of the great Evangelical minds of the 20th Century taught the biblical worldview:* Schaeffer, Francis. ***The God Who Is There (30th Anniversary edition)***. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998.
- *For worldview-based evangelism:* **Perspective Cards**. "Perspective Cards [allow] people to share what they believe, explore the Christian worldview, and take the next step on their spiritual journey in [a safe] environment." Go to PerspectiveCards.com

Thank you for your engagement with this course, which is a presentation of the Think Institute. We pray it was a blessing to you. To learn more about our ministry, access resources, and learn about partnering with us, go to truthinconversation.com.

"Hold on to the pattern of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit through the Holy Spirit who lives in us" (2 Timothy 1:13-14).