

*7 ideas that
turn the world
upside down!*

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by Brian Johnston

1. *Death is not the end*

Oxford professor, John Lennox, says he was travelling on the train to London and, sitting beside him, was a man in his late 50s who was reading what was obviously a scientific article. Lennox commented, "I see you're a scientist." The man said, "That's right, I'm a metallurgist. What are you?" "I'm a mathematician," Lennox replied. Lennox next took out a New Testament and started to read it and could see after a few moments that the other fellow was glancing over to see what book it was that he was reading. So he made it easy for him to see what it was. And after a moment or two the man said, "Excuse me, you're reading the New Testament." Lennox said, "That's right," and continued reading. After 3 minutes the man said, "I don't want to disturb you, but you did say you are a mathematician and now you're reading the New Testament. How is that possible?" At that point Lennox asked him: "Have you got any hope?" The metallurgist went white and started to shake and after a moment or two he said, "I guess we'll all muddle through." But Lennox didn't let him away with that, He continued, "You know, that's not what my question was: have you

got any personal hope?" And he said, "None whatsoever." Lennox then said, "And you ask me why I'm reading the New Testament!"

The New Testament of the Bible, a copy of which was handed over that day, points to a personal hope that extends beyond the grave for those who receive its message. At a time when the apostle Paul was defending Christianity, he said: "... *I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!*" (Acts 23:6). So a personal hope that stretches beyond the grave is a major, defining feature of Biblical Christianity. Christianity gives hope. The first of seven uniquely Christian – and totally revolutionary ideas – which this booklet will explore is that death is not the end, but that we can have ... *a hope in God ... that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.* (Acts 24:15 ESV)

Christianity is unique in making the bold claim that all dead people will hear the voice of God's Son and exit their tombs in bodily resurrection bound for one of two destinies. Jesus says: "... *all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth.*" (John 5:28-29)

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Notice, Jesus plainly says that all will be bodily raised. How better could he prove the authority of his words than by his own bodily resurrection after his sacrificial death on the cross? Professor Thomas Arnold, former chair of history at Oxford stated, "I have been used for many years to study the histories of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is PROVED BY BETTER AND FULLER EVIDENCE of every sort, than the great sign which God has given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead."

As such then, it gives objective, testable, and decisive evidence for the Christian faith. As the Apostle Paul says: *if there is no resurrection of the dead, [then] not even Christ has been raised; if Christ has not been raised, then ... your [Christian] faith also is vain.* (1 Corinthians 15:13-14)

Christians, Jews, and most informed atheists agree that Jesus was crucified and buried. The key belief for Christians is that he was also resurrected — proving he's the Son of God, and the unique way of salvation for all who truly believe in him. As Paul says, this is the critical evidence for Christianity, and what's exciting is that it's testable as an objective fact of

history – in exactly the same way that any other historical claim can be established as fact. The questions we need to ask are: 'What's the evidence?' and 'Which possible explanation best fits the evidence?'

Beginning with the evidence for the empty tomb ... Matthew's Gospel goes on to support the claim of Jesus' resurrection by volunteering the information that the guards who had been assigned to stand watch over the tomb of Jesus ... *came into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened. And when they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, and said, "You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.'"* (Matthew 28:11-13)

So an alternative explanation – that the disciples simply stole Jesus' body – was the first to be put forward by the earliest opponents of Christianity. But I'd



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like you to notice that this was in order to explain away the empty tomb. We shouldn't skim over this. The point was conceded at the time (by those hostile to Christianity) that the tomb was standing empty!

Now for the evidence of eyewitnesses: the Gospels report that women were the first eyewitnesses of the empty tomb and the risen Christ – but the testimony of women was not legally accepted in that culture at that time. So it's unlikely the Gospel writers would use it if they were simply inventing a story. The apostle Paul also appealed to eyewitness evidence for Jesus' resurrection in order to show that Christianity is true. In the fifteenth chapter of Corinthians, he wrote: *that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now ...* (1 Corinthians 15:3-6)

Why did Paul add that last remark – about most of the eyewitnesses being still alive at that time? This level of detail is evidence of a genuine account. But more than that, surely it was inviting the audience to go and interrogate the eyewitnesses

themselves! And the only people we know of who actually questioned early eye-witnesses changed their verdict and became believers.

Which brings us finally to the evidence of transformed lives. There are two outstanding examples: James, the Lord's half-brother and the rabbi, Saul from Tarsus. Their U-turn from total disbelief and violent hostility is hard to explain if the resurrection never happened. Concerning the others, Mark tells us in his Gospel (14:50) how at the first, *they all forsook [Jesus], and fled*. But something immensely significant must have happened to that small band of frightened and humiliated men, for less than two months later, they went back into Jerusalem to preach boldly and, at the threat of death, that Jesus Christ was alive! Luke records them saying, "For we cannot but speak the things **which we have seen and heard**" (Acts 4:20). Many of them would go on to lose their lives for sticking to their version of events. I know some will say that people will die for any weird thing they passionately believe to be true – but that's not what resurrection-deniers ask us to accept. If Christ did not rise from the dead, then his followers invented it all as an enormous hoax – and we're expected to accept that these early Christians died for the sake of a lie which

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they themselves invented. That's not at all likely.

Now, if you're a fair-minded person, I want to set you a challenge. One sceptic (Hume) said we should only accept a miracle has taken place if to disbelieve it would require us to accept something which seems even less likely. So, take the various explanations that are offered as fitting the evidence, for example: the 'body was stolen' theory; the 'witnesses were just hallucinating' theory; the 'Jesus later revived in the cold tomb' theory; as well as the view that Jesus really did rise from the dead: and measure each of them against just these three evidences we've looked at: the empty tomb, the number of eyewitnesses and the suddenly emboldened Christians who started Christianity. And ask yourself: which of these explanations explains more of the evidence more convincingly, than any other?

And now let me share this illustration with you. It's especially for those who would want to rule out anything which is inexplicable in terms of our

understanding of natural law. A man one day put £20 British pounds in his bedside drawer. The next day he put another £20 into the same drawer. Then on the third day he counts the money in the drawer and finds it amounts to only £15! How can that be? How is it possible that the laws of arithmetic have been broken? Ah, you say, they've not. The laws of arithmetic have not been broken, but it seems as if the laws of England have been broken – by some thief breaking in and stealing some of the money he'd deposited there. That thief wasn't a prisoner to the laws of arithmetic when he stole the money. And neither was God a prisoner to the laws of nature when he became a glorious intruder into our history!

Not only did Jesus himself come back to life after death, he also promised that all who place their trust in him will be able to live forever with him, even after their death. This has power to give hope and meaning, a hope and meaning which is not wiped out by death: Christians need never fear death – but can actually look forward to it as a blessing.

2. God once lived among us!

Leo Tolstoy (the famous author of 'War and Peace' and 'Anna Karenina') wrote of his personal search for the meaning of life ('A Confession' in 1879). He had rejected Christianity as a child and, after university, he entered the social world of Moscow and Petersburg. There, drinking heavily, living promiscuously, gambling and leading a wild life, he became ambitious for money – which he obtained through book sales and an inheritance. Now, having money, he next looked for success, fame and importance. These he also achieved, for the Encyclopaedia Britannica lists 'War & Peace' as 'one of the 2 or 3 greatest novels in world literature.' But he was still left asking the question: "Well fine. So what?" At this point, he became ambitious for his family – that he might give them the best possible life (he had a kind, loving wife and 13 children). But the other question which brought him to the verge of suicide was: "Is there any meaning in my life which will not be annihilated by the inevitability of death which awaits me?" To try to answer this, he searched in every field of science and philosophy. He saw that his contemporaries weren't facing up

to the 'first order' questions of life ... like where did I come from? Who am I? Where am I going? He eventually found that the peasant people of Russia had the answer – in their Christian faith. The hope for which he'd been searching was found in Jesus Christ! So, Tolstoy did find a meaning that was not annihilated by the inevitability of his impending death – and he could only find it in Christianity.

Jesus Christ is the only religious leader in history who claimed to be God incarnate: God come as man. The claim of Christianity is that God visited this earth in Jesus Christ to show just how much he really cares about human beings. Obviously, this is a radical idea, but is it true? Professor Richard Dawkins says about Jesus Christ: 'It is possible to make a serious case that Jesus never existed.' I put it to you that all that statement shows is that we've all got some kind of bias that goes against our better judgement (Romans 1:18b). Let me illustrate what I mean. I remember once having an old car which I had patched up. When it came time for it to go in for its test of roadworthiness I was really hoping it would get a pass

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certificate. I was hoping against my better judgement, since the car probably wasn't very safe. I was biased against accepting any view of the test inspector which was in conflict with my own self-interest – and anything that was going to cost me money to have it repaired properly was against my self-interest, or so I thought. In the same way, it's just as easy for us to be biased against accepting a view of God if it seems to conflict with our own self-interest. We may not always want a God who's fair – especially if we're conscious of our own shortcomings. That's just one possible bias we might have against discovering the truth.

Having said that, let's face up to Dawkins' challenge when he says: 'It is possible to make a serious case that Jesus never existed.' Actually, this is nonsense. I'll confine my comments to two points. First of all, the historian Tacitus – no connection with the Bible – wrote in 115AD of Jesus' existence by recording how Nero in AD64 put the blame for the fire of Rome onto the hated class of Christians so-named after their founder whom he states suffered the death penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of the then proconsul Pontius Pilate. In fact there's far more documentary evidence for the life of Jesus Christ than there is for Julius

Caesar – and you don't hear many people disputing that Caesar was a historical character, do you?

Then there's W.H. Lecky who wrote a history of Europe in which he stated that the impact of the three public years of Jesus' ministry had a more profound impact than all the writings of moralists and philosophers have ever had. Ah, you say, I'm happy to concede that Jesus Christ truly existed, and that he was a good man whose moral teachings have proved beneficial to many, but what if the Jesus of history and the Jesus of faith are two different persons? Well, it's easy to be biased, as we've shown, and it's easy to be cynical: one speaker visiting a school assembly to talk to the children about God asked for questions. One lad near the back of the hall smirked as he asked: "You ever seen God, mister?" The speaker paused for a moment, then said: "No, but if I'd been around 2,000 years ago, I could have!"

Former US president, Ronald Reagan, once said – and this touches on the Jesus of history being the Jesus of faith: "... meaning no disrespect to the religious convictions of others, I still can't help wondering how we can explain away what to me is the greatest miracle of all ... A young man whose [supposed] father is a carpenter grows up

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working in his father's shop. One day he puts down his tools and walks out of his father's shop. He starts preaching on street corners and in the nearby countryside, walking from place to place, preaching all the while, even though he is not an ordained minister. He does this for three years. Then he is arrested, tried and convicted. There is no court of appeal, so he is executed at age 33 along with two common thieves. Those in charge of his execution roll dice to see who gets his clothing – the only possessions he has. His family cannot afford a burial place for him so he is interred in a borrowed tomb. End of story? No, this uneducated, property-less young man who ... left no written word has, for 2000 years, had a greater effect on the world than all the rulers, kings, emperors; all the conquerors, generals and admirals, all the scholars, scientists and philosophers who have ever lived – all of them put together. How do we explain that? ... unless he really was who he said he was."

The decision we have to make concerning the identity of the historical Jesus has famously been presented like this. Jesus Christ himself claimed to be the Son of God, and so the only options for us are: that he was either a liar or a lunatic or truly Lord of all. You see, Jesus claimed to be God's Son which, if

true, simply means that he's, in fact, Lord. But, if it's a false claim, then Jesus cannot be considered to have been even a good man (for they don't make false claims), so, in that case, he must have been either a liar or a lunatic (depending on whether or not he knew the claim he was making was false).

We said there that Jesus Christ claimed to be God. You might object, "Jesus never actually said the words: 'I am God'." Perhaps that's true, but imagine you're out driving one day and your car breaks down. You call George's Garage. Half an hour later a breakdown truck pulls up in front of you with George's Garage written above the cab. The mechanic's overalls and the bill you have to sign both say the same thing: George's Garage. Very soon the car's fixed, but when you arrive home someone says to you, "But did you ask the bloke – and did he say – he was from George's Garage?" Well, no you hadn't, but everything about the man – especially in those particular circumstances – totally convinced you.

That's like the way in which Jesus effectively claimed to be God. What he did, and everything about him, speaks for itself. What he did wasn't done in a corner. The works which were his credentials were very public. People – who were not yet his followers – said at the time that

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no one could do the things Jesus did unless he came from God.

One, who was his follower, Peter, put it like this: "*Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know*" (Acts 2:22). That last point is important: Peter could say to a hostile audience 'as you yourselves know'. Even they couldn't dispute the facts.

Whereas legends like that of King Arthur were built up over centuries; Peter was talking to Christ's contemporaries.

Born a Jew, Jesus endorsed fully the commandment: *You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only shall you serve* (Luke 4:8). But, yet, at times, for example after healing the blind man in John chapter 9, Jesus allowed people to worship him (v.38). Put these two facts together and what else can you make of them, but that Jesus was, in fact, claiming to be God? On another occasion Jesus caused quite a stir by publicly saying to someone: "*Your sins are forgiven*" (Mark 2:9). The Jewish religious authorities who were within earshot were shocked and they protested;

"*Who can forgive sins but God alone?*" Now if someone sins against my neighbour, it's not appropriate for me to grant forgiveness simply because I'm not the offended party. But the Jews knew from their book of psalms (Psalm 51:4) that all sin is ultimately against God. And so, to them, by claiming to forgive a man's past sins, Jesus was unmistakably claiming to be God.

Jesus came to make God known to us. It's because God came as man in the person of Jesus, that we really can come to know God. And you could say that the kind of character Jesus displayed – in even loving his enemies, for example – is all that we could ever wish God to be like. His was the most attractive human life ever, the ultimate. Faced with that – and coupled with his astounding claims – we must make a stark choice and say either he was, in fact, exactly who he claimed to be, or he was bad or mad because he was a deceiver. The Bible emphatically describes him as both our Saviour and our God (Titus 2:13)!

3. The cosmos had a beginning and was fine-tuned

The Bible famously begins by saying, *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth* (Genesis 1:1), and Christianity affirms that God brought the universe into being from nothing, creating it very precisely to support life (John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2,10; 11:3).

And science most definitely affirms that this universe is quite ideally designed to support human life. Astronomer Sir Fred Hoyle (who invented the term 'the Big Bang' to describe the popular scientific view of how the universe began) admitted it was as likely to obtain a single protein by chance as it was for a solar system full of blind men standing shoulder to shoulder all to solve the Rubik's Cube puzzle simultaneously. And as if that wasn't enough, he added that the simplest cell arising all by chance was as likely as "a tornado sweeping through a junk-yard ... [and] assembling a Boeing 747 from the materials therein."

Well, and as we most likely know, some of science's best-established and most widely applicable laws point to this universe having a beginning. And one Nobel prize-winning researcher (Penzias) says that his research (into cosmology) has caused him to see "evidence of a plan of divine creation." In fact, this is exactly what he's on record as saying: "the best data we have are exactly what I would have predicted, had I had nothing to go on but the five books of Moses, the Psalms, [and] the Bible as a whole" (Browne, 1978). In other words, his view is: the science data and the Bible agree on the fact that this universe had a beginning.

You may now be asking, "So what's radically different about Christianity's message then? After all, it seems like science and the Bible agree on the universe having a beginning, and being wonderfully suited to supporting life." The difference, of course, is all about 'why?' Why is it that it's like this? Why should our universe have had a

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beginning, and be precisely right for life?

The Discovery Channel television program called 'How the Universe Works', in one of its episodes entitled 'Big Bang', features commentaries by Professor Lawrence Krauss, and tells us: "Everything in the universe is made from matter created in the first moments of the big bang." The program then asks: "How did nothing become something?" Professor Lawrence Krauss answers: "The laws of physics allow it to happen." Then we're told: "At the instant of creation all the laws of physics began to take shape." But how can the laws of physics allow nothing to become something when these laws, we're told, were still taking shape then?

There is only one way of getting something from nothing, and that is by an act of Creation by a Creator – in fact, by the Almighty Creator God of the Bible. We occasionally hear the comment

today that there's such a thing as matter being created out of a so-called 'quantum fluctuation.' This is described as being how, starting from nothing, we got equal amounts of particles and so-called 'antiparticles.' In a way, that's just like how 'zero becomes +1 added to -1': two numbers or somethings whose sum together is nothing. And this is often used to 'explain' how the universe popped into existence. But for this explanation to work, it would require the pre-existence of the laws of quantum physics - which is hardly 'nothing', I'm sure you'll agree.

Whenever something is being created, there's simply got to be something doing the creating. There really is no way round that. To say something, even the universe, simply created itself is nonsense, because it would first have to exist in order to create itself! Anything which has a beginning to its existence must have a cause. That seems an obviously true statement to make, but let's test it by running it past a famous sceptic. David Hume (1711-1776) was a Scottish philosopher, historian and, above all, a noted sceptic. David Hume wrote, "I never asserted so absurd a proposition as that something could arise without a cause." (David Hume, in J.Y.T. Greig, ed., *The Letters of David Hume*, 2 vols. (New York: Garland, 1983), 1:187.)



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So, where have we got to? We've reviewed how a Nobel prize-winning scientist has confirmed the general opinion in modern science, which is that **this universe had a beginning**. And, added to that, we've seen how a leading sceptic, has conceded that **nothing can begin to exist without a cause**. Taken together, both of these statements mean that the universe must have had a cause. And yet, atheism tries to tell us that the universe just happened, all by chance. What's more, scientists have discovered that there are famously six numbers that make the equations which describe our universe work – and the stunning thing is that, if even a single one of those numbers was just very slightly different, we wouldn't be here! In the words of famous scientist, Stephen Hawking, "The laws of science, as we know them at present, contain many fundamental numbers – the remarkable fact is that the values of these numbers seem to have been very finely adjusted to make possible the development of life."

Scientists who don't believe in God – unlike those who do – struggle to explain scientifically how chance (a pure fluke occurrence) could be so precise in its result. Take, for example, Richard Dawkins who's forced to concede that science has – and I

quote – no 'strongly satisfying' explanation on that precise point, but urges his readers in his best-selling book, 'The God Delusion' (pp.157,158), 'not to give up hope' in 'some kind of multiverse theory' – which is the idea that the so-called 'Big Bang', which he believes started it all off, did so in such a way as to produce infinitely many 'pocket' universes of which our universe is but one.

This part of his book 'The God Delusion' hasn't received a lot of attention, but it's actually in print that this strident voice of atheism appeals to his readers not to give up hope in the discovery of some new scientific theory that will one day save atheism! Isn't there a hint of desperation there? But through the media, the impression is still usually given that science has somehow disproved God.

But how does this weird idea help Dawkins anyway? Well, it's a notion that builds on the idea that it's rare to throw 3 sixes in a row with a single die, but if instead you have enough people (216 to be precise) and they're all throwing dice, then you would in fact expect to find someone among them who does get 3 sixes in a row. Arguing like that, they say that if there are a trillion trillion parallel universes, you'd expect there to be one (and it turns out to be ours) which is finely-tuned in exactly the way ours is. That's really the

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best Dawkins' science can do as a way of explaining how we're here at all as we are.

The choice we're faced with, then, is a blind faith in a trillion trillion other universes or rational faith in a single creator God – but notice one way or the other, it's down to faith. But I'd like to ask you

which kind of faith is the most reasonable? One which believes that information and powers of scientific reasoning have their source in the mind of a super-intelligent creator God; or, a faith that believes that our ability to reason arose out of random mindless processes – but is somehow still to be trusted!

As we've seen, those who sustain their atheistic belief in the 'mere appearance' of design put forward the idea (totally without evidence) that myriads of so-called parallel universes exist. They are trying to load the dice in their favour. But it remains the case that the extremely delicate complexity of the arrangements necessary for life on this planet are far less well explained by the assumption (or belief) that life is purely the result of an accidental combination of chance events.

This fact is so remarkable that Antony Flew, an academic who promoted atheism for most of his adult life, stated, not long before he died, that the fine-tuned universe arguments had finally

undermined his atheism. They had convinced him to the point where he said, "I am very much impressed [with] the case for Christianity" (There Is A God, by A. Flew). That's an example which shows how this unique and revolutionary idea of Christianity can be a very telling one – and is where the evidence leads us.

The first 3 ideas which we've shared in this booklet are all summed up in the public address which the Apostle Paul's delivered in Athens:

"The God who made the world and everything in it, ... made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us ... The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." (Acts 17:24-31)

God says, *come let us reason together* (Isaiah 1:18) and Jesus Christ, his son, says, *"Come to me."*

4. *Christianity explains the universe better than atheism does!*

At Athens, the ancient centre of learning, the Apostle Paul's reasoned case for Christianity caught the attention of some who belonged to various schools of philosophy. Some of them effectively wrote Paul off as a 'babbler'. The actual word they used literally described Paul as a 'seed-picker'. It seems to picture someone gathering up seeds in order to scrape together a meal for himself, just as some desperate person today might sift through rubbish bins or garbage cans in order to find enough food to live on. Applied to Paul, they were sneeringly suggesting that here was a poorly educated person who travelled around picking up other people's ideas and feeding on their opinions before trading in them as though they were his own. They couldn't have been more wrong. There are those who give a reasoned case for Christianity today – and they get sneered at too. History will once again prove the sneering wrong. The sneering may raise a popular

cheer, but the intellectual case for Christianity is stronger.

Consider, first, how, **if atheism is true, then life is ultimately without purpose:**

The Nobel prize-winning scientist, Steven Weinberg, an outspoken atheist, writes: 'The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless. But if there is no solace in the fruits of our research, there is at least some consolation in the research itself ... The effort to understand the universe is one of the very few things that lifts human life a little above the level of farce, and gives it some of the grace of tragedy' (from *The First Three Minutes*). Weinberg considers life as being ultimately without purpose, but he does talk about how a passion for actually doing science gives life a temporary lift above the level of farce – and he finds a crumb of comfort in that.

On the other hand, a real sense of purpose is to be found in the Bible's proposition that '*we [were] ... created in Christ Jesus*

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for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them (Ephesians 2:10).

Consider also, how, **if atheism is true, then life is ultimately without meaning or value:**

In an address to the American Academy for the Advancement of Science in 1991, Dr. L.D. Rue encouraged his distinguished audience to cheat on their atheistic worldview if they wanted to be happy. He recommended that they should deceive themselves into believing some kind of 'Noble Lie' which gave them and the universe some meaning. He said: 'The lesson of the past two centuries is that intellectual and moral relativism is profoundly the case.' He explained that this, when taken to extreme, results in a drive by each of us to live only for ourselves without a sense of community. To avoid the fabric of society being destroyed in this way, Dr. Rue saw only two possible solutions to overcome this logical result of atheism. One was a totalitarian state, where the wishes of individuals were suppressed by the state imposing its own values on all of society (he didn't want that). The alternative was to embrace some form of Noble Lie. A Noble Lie 'is one that deceives us, tricks us, compels us [to go] beyond self-interest, beyond ego, beyond family, nation,

[and] race.' Why call it a lie? His answer was because it tells us the universe is infused with value and because it makes a claim to universal truth – things which atheists deny. Rue adds: 'Without such lies, we cannot live.'

On the other hand, Jesus Christ said: "*I am the way, the truth and the life.*" What Dr. Rue judged to be missing is in reality to be found in Christ, and in the Noble Truth of Christianity, when Christ's faithful followers live selflessly *for the interests of others* (Philippians 2:4).

Consider also, how, **if atheism is true, then life is basically unliveable:**

The German philosopher Nietzsche, who died in the year 1900, made popular the saying: 'God is dead.' People at that time failed to realize – and many still do – the consequences of killing God philosophically by declaring that he doesn't exist. That's why Nietzsche concluded, 'I have come too early. This tremendous event is still on its way' (from *The Madman*). But 45 years after his death, the time had come, and everyone since then should know the terrible consequences of believing that there's no God. The point Nietzsche anticipated was this: in a world which believes there's no God, objective right and wrong can't exist, and so all things may be

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permitted. When Nietzsche's fellow-country-man, Hitler, put Nietzsche's ideas into practice, the world soon learnt the horrors that follow when we live consistently with the idea that God is dead, and life is senseless. If God doesn't exist, then our world becomes an Auschwitz. This is man without God. It's life without sense.

On the other hand, Jesus claimed: *"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly"* (John 10:10).

Consider, finally, how, **if atheism is true, then it's not supported by scientific explanation:**

Atheistic scientists like Richard Dawkins concede that science has no 'strongly satisfying' explanation for why the universe appears to have been fine-tuned with the precise conditions ideally suited to life as we know it, but he urges his readers (*The God Delusion*, pp.157,158) 'not to give up hope' in 'some kind of multiverse theory'. In this unpublicised section, Dawkins appeals to his readers not to give up hope in the discovery of some new scientific theory that will one day save atheism!

On the other hand, *that which is known about God is evident ... for God made it evident ... for since the creation of the world His invisible attributes ... have been clearly seen ... through*

what has been made ... [but] they did not honour Him as God ... but they became futile in their speculations (Romans 1:19-21).

Leading the siege of Syracuse was a Roman general Marcus Claudius Marcellus, whose nickname was 'The Sword of Rome'. When Marcellus brought his troops and the Roman navy up against the citadel of Syracuse, the Romans encountered frightful war machines they had never seen before, and far more sophisticated than anything the Romans had invented. One of those war machines was especially astonishing and downright terrifying to the Roman navy: as their ships approached the cliffs outside Syracuse, the sailors looked up and saw huge jaws descending from the sky. These jaws came down, gripped a Roman ship, hoisted it a hundred feet or so into the air, and then the jaws released the ship and crew dashing them upon the rocks. The Romans couldn't believe what they were seeing as ropes and metal, manipulated by the unheard of technical marvels of pulleys and levers, came down and gripped their ships. However, eventually, the Romans were victorious.

General Marcellus' command was that the engineer who had developed these new weapons was to be unharmed, when and if

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he was found. But as a Roman soldier approached the engineer as he was sitting with other prisoners; he found him passing the time by doing mathematical equations in the sand. The man was so absorbed in calculation that he didn't notice it was a Roman soldier. Without taking his eyes off his calculations in the sand he said, "Be careful! Do not disturb my diagrams!" And the Roman soldier killed him on the spot. Thus Archimedes met his death ...

Greek by birth, born in 287 BC in Syracuse to Greek parents, educated in Alexandria, Egypt, Archimedes went on to become a remarkable mathematician, an exacting engineer, a brilliant inventor, an master craftsman, a skilful builder and something of a philosopher. It was Archimedes who, after having figured out the laws of buoyancy as he was stepping into his bathtub, ran into the streets naked crying out, "Eureka!" "I have found it!" Archimedes also defined the principle of the lever. He was one of the most brilliant men, not only of the ancient world, but of all time.

You may know the words he spoke to the king of Syracuse on one occasion: "Give me a lever long enough, and a place to stand, and I will move the whole world." A little over two hundred years after Archimedes made

that statement a lever was indeed found that was long enough to move the whole world. Revealed in the Gospel of the cross is the power of God to right a topsy-turvy world. It was the message of the cross, which created the necessary leverage that continues to change the world.

Acts 17:6 reads, "*These men who have turned the world upside down ...*" when referring to Paul and Silas who used that Gospel lever to turn their world upside down.

By the way, when the Bible speaks of turning the world upside down, it's really speaking in terms of turning the world right side up. For we live in a topsy-turvy world, a world where all around us the wicked prosper, and the righteous suffer; where sin is often exalted, and virtue mocked; a world in which it's been said that, "Beggars ride on horseback while princes walk in rags" (see Ecclesiastes 10:7). Ever since Eden, this world has been the wrong way up. And the message of Christianity is about what God has done, through the cross of Christ, to turn the world the right way up again. That's why this booklet is show-casing the counter-cultural, ideas of the Christian message.

5. Salvation is by God's grace, not by our own works

Through our high opinion of modern achievements, our society deceives us into thinking that we can do anything. Probably nothing did more to promote this illusion than Dale Carnegie's blockbuster book 'How to win friends and influence people.' It was all about how to put the other person in a position where he or she cannot decently say 'no'. From this, optimism spills over to the belief that we can even repair our relationship with God. After all, we've long since learned to split the atom and put a man on the moon.

Just as the pagans long ago believed they could put their gods in a position of not being able to say no to them by means of offering them gifts and sacrifices; nowadays we think we can do the same by our church-going and good deeds. But the sober reality is that we simply can NOT do anything to make ourselves acceptable to God. Regaining God's favour is something that's beyond our power, for the Bible declares "by the works of the Law no flesh will

be justified" in God's sight (Galatians 2:16).

The Bible says: "By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph.2:8). These verses tell us that our own good works can't save us. This is because, the Bible adds, we're actually dead in God's sight – and that's because of our sins (Ephesians 2:1). That's why we can't even begin to hope that God will be pleased by our good works and let us into heaven.

Now that's a truly radical idea like the others we've been covering in this book – and this one certainly distinguishes Christianity from all religions. God's not asking us to do anything to merit salvation, he's simply inviting us to receive what he's already done for us in Christ, his son – and full forgiveness will be ours. We do, however, need to be prepared to let God humble us and turn us from our hopeless and helpless position before him.

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Please allow me to illustrate how many people think, so that we can realize for ourselves how utterly hopeless belief in our own good deeds is. Let's imagine a dispute between neighbours which comes before a local magistrate. One man is accused of stealing his neighbour's motorbike. This is what he says to the magistrate: "I am here today to demand justice. I don't want mercy or compassion, I simply want justice. In connection with the theft of the motorbike, I admit that I did it. But there have been many other days when I did not steal his motorbike. I have even done some good things for him on a few occasions. So, on that basis, I demand justice. I demand to be declared innocent and free to go!" What do you think the magistrate will say? Will he be convinced? No, of course not! And neither will God be if we plead that our good works should cancel out our sins.

Let me again try to illustrate why you still might find it hard to accept that salvation from future judgement isn't something we can influence or to which we can contribute. In his book 'The Hidden Persuaders' – one I remember being asked to read at school – Vance Packard tells of homemakers' problems with cake mixes in the early days when such mixes first appeared. Cake-mix packages would warn

housewives not to add milk, but to "just add water." Some housewives would add milk anyway, as their own special contribution, and then they'd be disappointed when the cakes or muffins didn't turn out so well.

Obviously, some market research was needed to find out what was happening, why the product was not meeting with success. Women interviewed said: "What sort of cake is it if you just need to add tap water!" So the marketing needed to be changed. The mixes needed to tell the homemaker that she and the mix together could produce the cake. A white cake mix box now proclaimed, "You add fresh eggs." The message was: you do have a contribution you can make!

It seems to be in our nature to insist on making our own contribution – especially in spiritual matters. But God in his Word has not changed his recipe for human salvation. The cake-mix recipe might have changed away from 'water alone'; but the unchanging Word of God still says, 'faith alone.' It says, "*Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved*" (Acts 16:31).

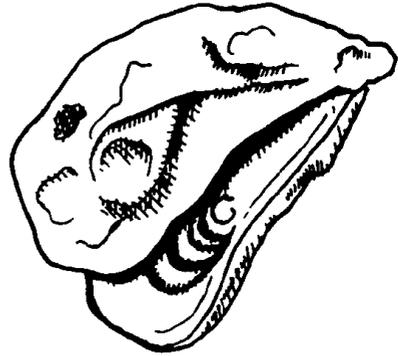
Finally, I'd like to share with you the true story of a pearl fisher. By the time this story takes place, he's an old man (his name was Rambhau) and he'd earned his living on the shore of the

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Indian Ocean by diving into the water and hopefully returning to the surface with an oyster between his teeth. When opened, the beautiful, shining pearl inside would bring him some money to live on when once it had been sold at the local market.

It was to this same shoreline that a missionary by the name of David Morse came. He spoke earnestly to the old pearl fisher and the other fishermen about the Christian message of forgiveness. He told them how the Bible says that everyone who comes to God in repentance, and then receives his son, Jesus Christ, as their own personal Saviour by faith, is promised forgiveness. The old man, however, was not persuaded by the Christian message. He clung to his own religious ideas. In fact, he told the missionary that the Christian message seemed too simple a recipe for forgiveness. "Perhaps I am too proud," he said, "but I want to do something to get a place in heaven. I intend to go on a pilgrimage to Delhi for my sins and by doing that I hope to earn God's mercy."

No matter how often David Morse talked to him, the old diver simply couldn't understand the miracle of God's grace. David Morse tried time and time again to explain to the pearl diver that we can't in any way earn or merit God's grace towards us as



sinners – but that we can only accept it as his gift. Nevertheless, even although the fisherman was not persuaded, the two of them – the missionary and the old pearl diver – became good friends.

Then one day, the old fisherman came to see the missionary. He'd come to tell him he was finally leaving to go on his pilgrimage to Delhi. He was being realistic when he told the missionary that he might never return. He was visiting him in order to hand over a little box. "You're my best friend," he said. "I want you to have this." The missionary opened the box to see a very large pearl.

"I've kept this pearl for years," the diver explained. "Now that I'm leaving for Delhi, perhaps never to return, I want to give it to my best friend, to you. Here you are. That pearl, Sahib (teacher), is perfect," he explained. The missionary was

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touched by his kindness, but politely declined. It was much too generous a gesture for the poor old man to make. The pearl diver looked hurt. The missionary tried a compromise. Looking up, he said, "Well, my friend, let me buy this wonderful pearl, I'll give you \$1000 for it." The pearl diver shook his head. "It's not for sale. It's for you, my friend." "No," replied David Morse, "as much as I want the pearl, I cannot accept it. Maybe I'm too proud, but to accept it just like that seems too easy to me. I want to pay or work for it." "Sahib," the diver responded in a severe tone while straightening up, "this pearl is invaluable, it's priceless. Nobody in this world can pay what this pearl is worth to me." He then began to explain. "I had a son who was also a diver. He was the best pearl diver along the Indian coast. He had the keenest eye, the longest breath. He could dive down to 30 metres. He was the delight of my heart. He always dreamt of finding a pearl better than any that had ever been found. One day he thought he'd found it. But the oyster was nearly inaccessible, deep down and well secured in a rocky crevice. Finally, he succeeded in getting it out and up to the surface. But he'd stayed under the water for too long. He'd strained his heart. Soon afterwards, sadly, he died." The old man bowed his head, and for a moment his whole body shook,

but he made no sound. "Now you see, Sahib, why this pearl is invaluable; it's priceless. Nobody in this world can pay what this pearl is worth to me. You do understand, don't you? My only son gave his life to get this pearl. I can't sell it. I can only give it as a present. Just accept it, please, as a proof of our friendship."

Holding back tears, the missionary, replied, "Don't you see? That is exactly like what I've been telling you about God's gift of salvation." The diver gave the missionary a long, searching look as he ever so slowly began to understand. The missionary continued: "God is offering you salvation as a free gift, at no charge. It is so great and costly that no man would be able to pay for it. It cost God the life of his only Son to open the door to heaven. Even by pilgrimages of thousands of miles you could never earn God's grace. God's love and deliverance of sinners like you and me – from the punishment which our sins truly deserve – can only be accepted as a gift in faith and thankfulness. God deliberately gave up his only Son to the terrible death of the cross."

God's light entered the old pearl diver's heart. "Now I understand," he said. Then he turned round and went away, deep in thought. An hour later he came back and said: "I don't want to wait any longer, I want

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to come to God right now, just as I am. I cannot earn God's mercy, the price is simply too great. As a lost person I want to accept this love of God. Though it is beyond my understanding, I want to thank him and his Son Jesus Christ for it."

So, may we, too, understand the radical message of Christianity that acceptance is by grace not works.

6. Christianity gives a dignity to human life that nothing else can match

In the United Kingdom, in December of 2012, the results of a national census (held in 2011) were published which showed that now only one in every three people profess to be 'Christian', while one in four returned an answer of 'no religion'. The actual number of those reporting 'no religion' was 14.1 million which, when compared to 8.5 million in 2001, shows a 67% increase over 10 years in those who profess 'no religion'.

Presumably, some of these people may still have some belief in God despite not aligning themselves with any particular religious organisation. However, many of them will likely be atheists and believe in some form of naturalistic evolution: which is the view that ultimately sees humans as highly evolved pond scum. That doesn't seem to be a very appealing, or even a very dignified description of human beings. But the likes of Richard Dawkins would say, "Tough! Too bad, for that's just the way it is." Dawkins once said this:

"We are going to die and that makes us the lucky ones. Most people are never going to die because they're never going to be born. The potential people who could have been here in my place, but who will, in fact, never see the light of day outnumber the sand grains of Sahara. Certainly those unborn ghosts include greater poets than Keats, scientists greater than Newton. We know this because the set of possible people allowed by our DNA so massively outnumbers the set of actual people. In the teeth of these stupefying odds, it is you and I in our ordinariness that are here. We privileged few who won the lottery of birth against all odds, how dare we whine at our inevitable return to that prior state from which the vast majority can never start." (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wFY8tIcJR8Q> accessed June 2013)

Or, perhaps you prefer the description of human beings as recycled star stuff? Astronomer Alan Dressler has written that every atom in our bodies, save

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hydrogen was once at the centre of a star. We'll allow Neil deGrasse Tyson to explain what he finds appealing in this point of view:

"The Big Bang endowed the universe with hydrogen and helium and not much of anything else. But there are stars, and stars manufacture heavy elements from light elements. They take hydrogen in and fuse the atoms to become helium, and helium fuses to become carbon, and carbon fuses to become silicon and nitrogen, and so on. Thus, elements other than hydrogen and helium have no origin other than [in] the centres of stars. And stars not only manufacture the heavy elements, they also explode them into space. Since life itself thrives on these heavy elements, we owe our very existence to stars ...

The very molecules that make up your body, the atoms that construct the molecules are traceable to the crucibles that were once the centres of high mass stars that exploded their chemically enriched guts into the galaxy enriching pristine gas clouds with the chemistry of life. So we're all connected to each other, biologically; to the earth, chemically; and to the rest of the universe, atomically."

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QADMMmU6ab8> accessed June 2013)

It seems to me that these are attempts to give some sense of awe and dignity to a hopeless and purposeless existence, but they fail to account for the origin of information. How did the chemical hardware of our cells write its own software? Reducing everything down to chemistry doesn't really get us very far, because if you take the printed page of a book, you can indeed reduce it all down to chemistry – except that it leaves totally unexplained the fact that the page communicates information through the text – and that happens by the physical ordering of the letters, something quite independent of chemical makeup. If that's true of a single page of a book – and it is, quite indisputably – how much more is it the case that life, with all its DNA information, is more than mere chemistry?

This is where, once again, I want to emphasise the revolutionary nature of the Christian message. How and why is it radical? I would say because it's the only truly coherent worldview. What do we mean by that? First, a 'worldview' is a perspective: a way of interpreting, or making sense of, the world around us. And second, every worldview (and it doesn't matter whether we're talking about atheism, pantheism or polytheism) has to be able to answer 4 questions. These are:

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- Where did we come from?
- What's the meaning of life?
- How do we define right from wrong?
- What happens to us when we die?

You have crowned him with glory and honor.

You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands;

you have put all things under his feet.

These are the four most fundamental questions of life. Every thinking person asks them at some time or other in their life. You'll have noticed, of course, that they boil down to questions of origin, meaning, morality and destiny. And the point is that, in Christ, through the Gospel, we have a coherent set of answers to these four worldview questions.

- Humans have been created in God's image,
- to enjoy a relationship with our Creator,
- who has summarized his moral standards for us most famously in the 10 commandments,
- and through the cross of Christ has secured an eternally glorious future for all who believe.

If I was to select a verse from the Bible to highlight human dignity and contrast sharply with the bleak views presented earlier belonging to those who say there's no God, then I would choose from Psalm 8: It asks, 'What is man ...?'; and answers,

That was God's purpose in creation.

In moving away from the failure of any philosophy which wilfully rejects God's existence – including its failure to invest our humanness with any real sense of dignity – let's now view ourselves biblically, and we see that human dignity is something which is derived. It descends from the revealed reality that we're created equally in the image of God. While in certain cases that image and dignity seem to be more fittingly and prominently displayed than in other cases, nevertheless, the essential dignity of our humanness is an absolute given that doesn't rise and fall within the span of individual human existence. By this I mean it's unaffected by the degree by which our biology is as yet undeveloped or later begins to malfunction. For even humans who exist in some degree of dependence on others are essentially no less dignified – not when we reflect on how God, by becoming flesh himself in the incarnate Christ, dignified even such a state through becoming

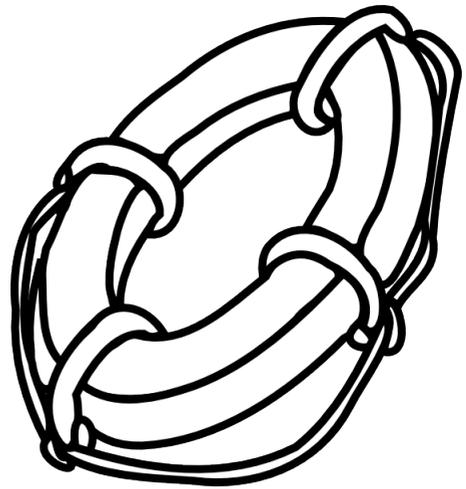
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dependent on human breasts and all the other normal menial duties of care on which every infant depends. In this way, prominent aspects of helplessness are seen not to diminish our essential human dignity which, as we say, is something that's God-given.

In the book 'Finding Your Way', Gary LaFerla tells an amazing story, pieced together from the records of the United States Naval Institute following the Second World War. The USS Astoria had engaged the Japanese during the battle for Savo Island before any other ships of the US navy arrived. During the crucial night of the battle, August 8, the Astoria scored several direct hits on a Japanese vessel, but was itself badly damaged in the process.

At about 02.00 hours, Signalman 3rd Class Elgin Staples, was swept overboard by the blast after the Astoria's gun turret exploded. Wounded in both legs by shrapnel and in semi-shock, he was kept afloat in the sea by a narrow lifebelt. At around 06.00 hours, Staples was rescued by a passing destroyer and returned to the Astoria, whose captain was attempting to save the cruiser by beaching her. The effort failed, and Staples, still wearing the same lifebelt, found himself back in the water! It was now lunchtime. Picked up again, this time by the USS

President Jackson (AP - 37), he was one of 500 survivors of the battle who were evacuated. On board the transport, Staples hugged that lifebelt with gratitude, and studied the small piece of equipment for the first time. He scrutinized every stitch of the lifebelt that had served him so well. It had been manufactured by the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company of Akron, Ohio, and it bore a registration number.



Given home leave, Staples told his story and asked his mother, who worked for Firestone, about the purpose of the number on the belt. She replied that the company insisted on personal responsibility, and each checking inspector had their own personal number which they put on the belt when signing it off. Staples remembered everything about the lifebelt, and quoted the

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number. There was a moment of stunned silence in the room and then his mother spoke: "That was my personal code that I affixed to every item I was responsible for approving." Try to imagine the emotions within the hearts of mother and son. The one whose DNA he bore had also been instrumental in his rescue in the waters that had threatened his life.

If an earthly parent can provide a means of rescue without knowing when and for whom that belt would come into play, how

much more can the God of all creation accomplish? His 'registration number' is on you, for God, our sovereign creator, originally imprinted his image on his human creation. Then he also took upon himself the personal responsibility for our rescue. He's the one who leaves nothing to chance in bringing all the threads together in our life story. The God who designed us with a dignity which we despised has now thrown us a lifeline in Jesus Christ. Will you now stretch out to regain the purpose you were made for?

7. Christianity can make sense of suffering

I'm reminded of a time when Malcolm Muggeridge, the British journalist and author, had been speaking at All Soul's Church in London, UK. There followed a question and answer time in which the speaker was often called upon to defend his conversion to Christianity. After what had been described as the last question was dealt with, Muggeridge noticed a young boy in a wheelchair trying to say something. He said he would wait and take his question. The boy struggled but no words came out. "Take your time," Muggeridge said reassuringly. "I want to hear what you have to ask ... I'll not leave until I hear it."

Finally, after a real struggle, one often punctuated with agonizing contortions, the boy blurted out, "You say there's a God who loves us." Muggeridge agreed. "Then – why me?" Silence filled the room. The boy was silent. The audience was silent. Muggeridge was silent. Then, he asked, "If you were able-bodied (fit), would you have come to hear me tonight?" The boy shook his head. Again Muggeridge was silent. Then he

added: "God has asked a hard thing of you, but remember he asked something even harder of Jesus Christ. He died for you. Maybe this was His way of making sure you'd hear of His love and come to put your faith in Him."

In the answer that Muggeridge gave, with empathy, on that occasion, there are hints of an overall biblical framework which is available for us to use as we communicate the Christian Gospel to hurting people. If shared sensitively, it can help people to at least begin to put suffering in the broader context of God's dealings with a broken world.

What, then, is that Bible framework? It's one which would see suffering as a consequence of the separation that exists between God and man. And that this separation has been caused by sin. So we can't blame God for human suffering. The Bible tells us that God created the world in love and that he loves us individually. But if God is good, and on the side of good, why do terrible things happen – like in the mass shootings in

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Aurora and Connecticut in 2012? What's gone wrong? Well, the Bible's answer is: we did. The 'London Times' leader column said the day after a massacre at an Infant school in Dunblane, Scotland (13 March 1996): 'Christ was born among innocent slaughter and died on the Cross to pay the cost of our terrible freedom - a freedom by which we can do the greatest good or the greatest evil'.

The Bible makes it clear that God created us with free will ... but then we chose to disobey God and do our own thing. That broke our relationship with our loving Creator. It's this separation between God and ourselves that is the cause of all the suffering that's in the world – and which will finally result in eternal separation from God unless we each personally obey the message of Christianity. For only God has the answer to this problem: Jesus Christ. When Jesus died on the cross, he took on himself the consequence of our disobedience. His death made a way between us and God again. By rising from the dead, Jesus conquered the power of death for ever. Now God requires that we each personally repent and receive Jesus, his Son, as our Saviour.

What's more, it's clear that God is concerned about our pain, to the extent that he came as a man in the person of his son,

Jesus Christ, and 'joined us in suffering'. That was the expression used by a Church of Scotland minister when interviewed by a BBC News reporter on December 21, 1988, when Pan Am Flight 103 exploded in the sky over the Scottish town of Lockerbie. "It was like meteors falling from the sky," one resident there said. Others told how pieces of plane as well as pieces of bodies began landing in fields, in backyards, on fences, and on rooftops. Fuel from the plane was already on fire before it hit the ground; some of it landed on houses, making the houses explode. Twenty-one houses were destroyed with 11 occupants killed. The total death toll was 270, including those on the plane. The reporter savagely turned on the minister and spat out the question: "Where is your God now?" To which the calm reply was: "God has joined us in suffering – in the person of his son, he came as a man, Jesus Christ, and joined us in suffering."

Beyond that, Christ's sacrificial death on the cross for our sins laid the basis for bringing all suffering to an end, but the time for that hasn't arrived yet. And until it does arrive, God uses suffering to work out his higher purposes in our lives – in a way that's not very different from how a surgical procedure

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involves pain, but is directed towards a positive outcome for us.

Perhaps that's where the Christian Gospel's perspective on suffering is at its most radical. First of all, **God himself**, the supreme being, **has joined us in suffering**. And second, before eliminating it entirely from human experience, **he uses it to mature and refine Christian character** (Romans 5:3,4; 1 Peter 1:6-7). Becoming a Christian doesn't guarantee freedom from physical suffering on earth while we wait for Jesus to come again and take believers away from suffering to be forever with him. The Bible teaches that God treats as a Father those who are his children by faith and this can also involve suffering for corrective purposes – just as happens in an ordinary human family.

In the town of Baguio, located north of Manila in the mountains of the Philippines, there are a number of gold mines to be found. Small cars on tracks are loaded with rock from within the mountain and emerge from an opening in the hillside. The rock is then crushed, pulverized, and submitted to various chemicals. By this process, minute particles of gold are separated from the useless shale and then submitted to fierce fires in the refining furnace. Later, the molten shining gold is poured into bricks

worth tens of thousands of dollars each. Suppose that those stones in the mountains could speak and ask: "Why do I have to be removed from my place in the hills to be pounded and pulverized, attacked by biting chemicals, and submitted to furnaces?" A reply might be: "What use are you buried there beneath the tons of useless debris? You have within you something that's valuable, useful and beautiful. Only through this apparently destructive process can you be separated from the impurities that keep you from the usefulness, beauty and purity that might be yours." And so, perhaps, we begin to glimpse how God – who's not the author of suffering – can still use it to shape our lives and refine our characters for his glory and the benefit of others.

In sharing the Gospel, we learn to expect the fact that events like the attack on the Twin Towers on 11 September 2001 in New York will be raised as an objection to the very existence of God. In responding to events like this, someone spoke for many when he said: "I want to sue [God] for negligence, for being asleep at the wheel of the universe." But we betray our instinctive morality when we react to things that happen by labelling them 'good' or 'evil'. Can words like 'good' or 'evil' really have meaning if we don't

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believe in God? One bold atheist, Oxford University's Richard Dawkins, would say, "No". Since he doesn't believe in God, he also flatly says there's 'no evil and no good'. At least he's being consistent.

But suppose you were to accept there's no God – and so basically no 'good' or 'evil', can we then accept that September 11 is just a morally meaningless event in a meaningless world? If we feel we can't go that far, then we're forced to draw the conclusion that a consistent atheist doesn't appear to have any answers after all – and no basis for even asking the questions about the morality of such atrocities. The more you think about it, the more the existence of evil in our world points us towards the existence of God – and not away from it. Why? Because unless we refuse to label atrocities as 'evil', we're still faced with the reality of God. Suffering remains a tragic experience, the Christian perspective is not an easy one, but the atheist alternative is simply unrealistic.

Basically, what's the relevance of Christianity to the atrocities of this groaning world? Edward

Shillito, while viewing the destruction of the Great War, helpfully wrote: 'to our wounds only God's wounds can speak'. Yes, there's pain and suffering at the heart of the Christian message, but it's not only human pain: it's the pain of God. After all we've said, a question mark remains over human suffering, but we do need to put it in the context of the cross of Christ – which is the mark of divine suffering. We may have to wait for justice and peace in the world, but we can know God's forgiveness for our sins on a personal level and be at peace with him right now. For God has joined us in suffering to give us the offer of ultimately being with him in a pain-free future: *He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.* (The Book of the Revelation 21:4).

It's been said that suffering is not a question requiring an answer; nor is it a problem requiring a solution; but rather a mystery requiring a Presence. And that Presence is one which only the world-turning Christian Gospel can bring us to know.

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Search for Truth,

Church of God, Leicester, LE5 6LN England
P.O. Box 748, Ringwood, Victoria 3134, Australia
P.O.Box 70115, Chilomoni, Blantyre, Malawi

Web site: www.searchfortruth.org.uk

Email: sft@churchesofgod.info