

TEN Q. and A. ABOUT OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH

The following 10 questions are raised by two seekers who have been searching for truth for a while but have had some difficulties accepting the gospel message in the bible. I tried to provide some answers, but ultimately it is the Holy Spirit who has to convict and illuminate them. You may come across seekers who ask tough questions. I hope my answers, which are by no means complete, will be helpful when you are asked the same questions. Feel free to distribute this paper as there is no copyright for anything I write.

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1. If God is loving and powerful, why let sin enter into mankind if God already knew man will sin. I have heard other believers saying God give man the free will, and Adam and others chose to sin.

God is indeed loving and almighty, but He is also totally righteous and sinless. Man was originally created with the same kind of righteousness and holiness (i.e. without sin), as the bible tells us man is created in the image of God. And God did create man with a free will in that he can choose between obeying and disobeying God. Adam did choose to disobey, thus sin entered the human heart and the world. Why did God not prevent this from happening if he is almighty? Why did he not prevent Satan from tempting Eve? God allows it to happen so he can show his love towards man through His marvelous redemptive plan which brings man back to total righteousness and holiness. (As a loving father yourself, you do not dictate everything your children do even though you have the power to do so). The redemptive plan is established by God the Father, and carried out by God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, when Jesus takes on all human sins upon Himself and, in exchange, gives us God's righteousness and holiness. It is an exchange that first requires the taking on of all man's sin, and then suffering the punishment of spiritual death (i.e. separation from the Father). This is what Jesus accomplished on the cross. The whole redemptive plan demonstrates God's immense sacrificial love for us. It also makes us understand how precious this imputed righteousness is – because we first know how devastating sin is. And by receiving the righteousness and holiness that Jesus gives us man will one day, when we leave this world, become sinless like the way we were originally created.

2. If God is powerful and know what the future is like, why "play us like fools"? Why create and let all the agonies go on?

Even if we know someday our children may suffer pain and sickness, and ultimately every one of our children will die (some die more tragically than others), we still bring them into the world. Why? Can our children say to us "Dad, you know sickness and death will happen to us some day, why do you still bring us into the world?" We bring our children into the world to treasure, to love and to enjoy them (and, hopefully, vice versa). Similarly God creates us to love and to enjoy us (and, hopefully, vice versa). That is why of all the beings he created in this

world man is the only being that is created in His own image, and with an everlasting soul. He provides a way for us to regain all the glory that originally belongs to us. By becoming His children such agonies (the ultimate agony being eternally separated from God) are turned into joy and bliss. So God does provide a way out of agonies for us, and the way is through the redemptive work of Jesus.

3. Christianity doesn't exist in many places in the world including China before Christ and only a little shortly after Christ. Those people didn't have the opportunity to know what it is. What happened to those people?

Roman 2:12-16 says: "All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.) This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares."

The "law" mentioned in the above verses refers to the laws that God gave to the Jews through the patriarchs and prophets including Moses. The 10 Commandments are a part of these laws. God laid down over 600 laws specifically for the Jews to guide their worship (relationship with God) and their behavior (relationship with men). Some of these laws are ceremonial requirements (e.g. making burnt offerings, keeping the Sabbath) while others are moral in nature (e.g. Thou shalt not kill). Actually these laws formed the basis of many human laws in existence today. Jesus summarized the essence of God's law by the following: Love God with all your heart, your mind, your might; and love others as yourself". It covers our relationship with God and with man.

The law also has an important function: it either saves us or condemns us eternally – if we are able to obey all God's laws all the time from the moment of birth to death we can enter heaven (i.e. God's presence) for sure. Unfortunately no one can ever do that, as one single sin during our life time would put us out of reach. Then the law serves as our judge as it convicts us of our sins and condemns us to eternal death (i.e. separation from God). Jesus came to take away our sins so we are deemed righteous in God's sight. So man is saved by being in Christ (i.e. accepting Christ as Savior).

But what about people who are before Jesus, or never heard of Jesus? That would include all the Jews who lived before Jesus' time, and a lot of people in the world (including our ancestors in China) who never heard of Jesus. The Jews before Christ had God's laws and they can put their faith in God and tried their best to obey the laws. Their faith in God causes them to be saved – "Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness." (Genesis 15:6, James 2:23). The Book of Hebrews mentioned the examples of faith by Old Testament

saints. So Old Testament Jews and non-Jews are saved when they trusted God and tried to obey the laws.

What about non-Jews who have never heard of Jesus, like our Chinese ancestors? As Roman 2 explained, God will not judge these people on the basis of laws given to the Jews. God also will also not judge them on whether they have accepted Christ as Savior because they have never heard of Christ. For these people, God will judge them by whether they have followed their consciences to do good rather than evil. I believe human conscience is a part of the soul that God gives us. Conscience helps us know right from wrong.

Ever since the late 19th Century the good news of Jesus Christ has reached nearly the entire world. With modern day technology almost everyone has heard about Jesus. For people who have been told about Jesus and the gospel message they are not judged just by whether they follow their conscience but by whether or not they accept Christ as Savior.

4. I think most people accept they will die when they get old, with or without the confidence that they will go to heaven or not. They just don't want to suffer for years of bad health before they die, but die peacefully and quickly.

Death happens to us all someday (except the people who are still living when Jesus returns to earth and all Christians will be caught up to heaven, and this is called “the Rapture”, a subject I will be happy to share if you are interested in it). Death occurs at all different ages, not just old people. Some people know they are dying and can prepare for it. Others die suddenly, like Justice Scalia did recently. I recently sat next to a Christian lady at a wedding and I found out her profession is to prepare bodies for viewing at funeral homes. I asked her if there is any difference between the bodies of Christians versus non-Christians. She told me: “There absolutely are major differences. Bodies of non-Christians are uptight as if they struggled mightily right to the moment of death. Some had a frightened look on their faces. But Christians’ bodies are typically relaxed and flaccid. They have a peaceful look on their faces.” Indeed I think when each of us face death what we know will happen next is very important to how we handle and react to the last moments.

All human physical bodies deteriorate with age, and that happens to Christians and non-Christians alike. But the difference is in the heart and mind – if we know where our ultimate home is then there is nothing to fear when it is time to go home. No one can tell us where we go after death except the one who comes from there. Buddhism tried to tell us where we will go after death, but it is so vague and confusing – sometimes they say we go to the “western sky”. Sometimes they tell us our souls transmigrate back to earth and become another being. These are all wild guesses and speculations. But we have someone who comes from there and he tells us “I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. “ (John 14:3)

5. You said Christianity is different from most other religions in that salvation by Jesus and the belief in it is the fundamental point. However, that doesn't mean it is the "right" one. I understood that Judaism and Islam considered Jesus to be a prophet, not a Messiah.

You are right – just because Jesus declare He is from heaven and “He and God are one” does not automatically make it right or true. Jesus could have been a liar (one who knows the truth but deliberately misleads by telling untruth), or a self-deluded lunatic (one who does not know the truth from untruth, so what one says is out of a warped or confused mind). Things coming out of the mouth of a liar or a lunatic are not trustworthy. But when we examine the life and the words of Jesus, even Non-Christians have to admit that he is neither a liar nor a lunatic. And it cannot be just “half-truth” because telling “half-truth” would put him into the liar category. The only logical conclusion is what He said is indeed the truth.

Judaism relies on the Old Testament but the Old Testament has many prophecies about the coming of the Messiah. To Christians and careful observers of prophecies we know Jesus is indeed the Messiah because His life fulfilled every prophecies about the Messiah. But Jews fail to recognize Jesus as the Messiah because they have confused the Messiah’s redemptive role (i.e. his first coming, which happened 2,000 years ago) with His kingly role (i.e. his second coming, when he returns as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords). They thought the Messiah has to be a powerful ruler who would save the Jews from their plight. Yet Jesus came as a meek and lowly man who told people “my Kingdom is not of this world”. So when Jesus declared that He is equal with God they considered it blasphemy and got rid of him through the Romans. But the bible tells us someday in the future the Jews will recognize Jesus as the Messiah and savior.

Islam started about 610 AD, some 600 hundred years after Christ. Muhammad, an illiterate man with a checkered past, claimed that he had received visions from the Allah god. He dictated the Quran and the Hadith but a close examination of them reveals that the concepts within were taken from pagan religions existing at the time, together with some Christianity mixed in. In the Quran Muhammad named 25 of Allah’s prophets, and he puts himself as the leader and the greatest of these prophets. Right behind him is Jesus, or Isa. The other 23 prophets included many Old Testament personalities such as Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Solomon, Job, etc.

It is a historical fact that Islam and Quran came some 600 years after Christ. For it to claim supremacy over the bible it has to provide some proof that Muhammad is greater than Jesus (or Jesus is nothing more than the number 2 prophet behind Muhammad). If you examine Muhammad’s life you will find that not only was he an ordinary man, but one with many vices. I did not make this up, as in the Hadith, the Book of Sahih al-Bukhari, Volume 8, Muhammad prayed the following prayer:

“Oh God, I acknowledge and confess before You, all my sins, please forgive them, as no one can forgive sins except You. Forgive my mistakes, those done intentionally, or out of my ignorance, with or without seriousness. Oh God, forgive my sins and my ignorance, forgive my sins of the past and of the future, which I did openly or secretly.

Forgive the wrong I have done, jokingly or seriously. I seek Your protection from all the evil I have done. Wash away my sins, and cleanse my heart, from all the sins as a white garment is cleansed from the filth, and let there be long distance between me and my sins, as You made the East and West far from each other.”

As we examine the life and words of Jesus we found that it is truly “One Perfect Life” (the book I recommended to you to read). I would trust Jesus much more than any human being.

6. Do you feel Catholic has pretty much the same faith as Christianity?

I have to be honest and answer NO. But let me hasten to add that I believe some Catholics do put their faith in Jesus and are therefore saved. But Catholicism has added so many beliefs and practices that are extra-biblical that it hinders, rather than helps, people to truly understand salvation. The bible clearly tells us it is by faith alone that we are saved, and we only do good works (and are capable of doing good works) after we are saved. Catholicism says faith plus good works equals to being saved. In addition, the worship of saints and Mary, the teaching of purgatory, the confession of sin through priests, the celibacy requirement on priests, the belief of transubstantiation of the bread and wine (turning into real body and blood of Christ) during Eucharist, the infallibility of the Pope, etc. are all contrary to the teaching of the Bible. While by God’s grace people can still find Christ through Catholicism, it becomes a daunting task. It is even more difficult for a born-again Catholic to grow spiritually. The reformation under Martin Luther was how God brings people back to the bible, and to focus only on Jesus who alone is the Savior.

7. Why is there so much suffering in the World if God is love? Why doesn't he remove all pains and suffering so we can see that He is a loving God?

God is love, but he is also righteous and holy. When He created the heavens and earth He saw that everything is good and perfect. But then sin entered into the human race through the first man, Adam. Sin caused death, both in the physical and spiritual senses -- physical life became finite, and man's spirit is dead. The former is easy to understand -- we all live only a finite number of days on earth and then we all die. But the death of our spirit requires a bit of explanation. When God created man He puts a special gift into each of us -- a spirit (or we call it our soul). Man is the only created being that has this. Our spirit causes us to know God, to love God, to desire God and to communicate with God. Sin brought an instant death to man's spirit because God is holy. So we are all born with a dead spirit -- we do not know God, we do not love Him, we have no desire for Him and we cannot communicate with Him. Sin's other effects include destructions of human relationships, of the earth, idol worshipping (finding substitutes in place of God) and all the sinful thoughts and actions that naturally come out of a sin nature within man: greed, lust, jealousy, etc. Man's sinful nature and all the resultant sinful actions have brought pain, suffering, strife, conflicts, murders, wars, into the world. But the worst kind of pain and suffering actually comes from death, both physical and spiritual. We are usually more saddened by the death of our loved ones. But being cut off from God due to spiritual

death is the worst kind of pain and suffering because it means eternal separation from our Creator.

Although oftentimes pain and suffering come from sin, there is another kind of suffering which has nothing to do with sin. In the bible (John Chapter 9 verses 1-41) there is a person who was born blind. When he came to Jesus for healing, Jesus' disciples wondered whether this person's blindness is due to his own sin or his parents' sin. Jesus' answer to them points to a kind of pain and suffering which is not due to sin but due to God's special plan in a person's life: "And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." (John 9:1-3) For this person, his blindness was a way to bring out God's glory. The story continued that after he was healed he was able to lead many to faith in Jesus.

But the first kind of suffering (because of sin) is the most serious and prevalent kind of pain which raises question about whether God is love. Let me suggest we think along this line: because of sin man should bear suffering, including death. In other words man deserves to die. But because God is love He must find a way for man to be saved (no man can save oneself since all men are sinners). Because God is righteous He cannot just declare that man's sin is OK. Someone has to take the consequence of sin so God's righteousness is upheld. So we have the greatest dilemma in the universe: how can a loving God be righteous at the same time? If he loves me he should not make me suffer, but if he is righteous then I must suffer for my sin. The answer lies in the substitutionary death of the second person in the Triune God – Jesus Christ. God Himself took my punishment and died in my place so I become righteous in God's sight. All I have to do is to believe in Jesus, and I am a sinner no more (I can still sin while I am on earth, but I continue to receive forgiveness). The curse of death – the ultimate pain and suffering – is reversed in that my spirit is alive towards God, and my physical body will one day resurrect and changed to a new, permanent and glorious body which will re-unite with my soul and will live with God in eternity.

So why would a loving God allow such suffering in the world? God allows suffering because sin has to be dealt with. God allows suffering also because it demonstrates his glory. But God is love in that He took my ultimate pain and suffering and turned it into eternal life through the death of Jesus.

8. There are so many religions in the world. How can I be sure which is the right one?

There are only two kinds of religions in the world: religion of man's good work, and religion of salvation. The former says if there is a God you can earn your way to his favor by doing and being good. The latter says you are hopeless and helpless in your sins so there is no way you can earn your way to God. It is sort of like a drowning man who cannot swim. If God does not reach out to save you then you are doomed.

All world religion including Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism are of the first kind. They all believe there is a God or there are many different gods. But they all teach that you must work hard and be good so you can reach God. Judaism stands apart from the other religion in that the God in Judaism is the true God we also believe in. But Jews stay in the pre-Jesus era and they do not believe they can be saved simply by believing in Jesus. So they kept waiting for the Messiah (which means the anointed one) to come and to save them. In the mean time they try very hard to follow God's law (including the 10 Commandments) contained in the Old Testament. They do not realize that it is impossible to follow all the laws all the time, and they do not understand the purpose of God's laws is not to save them but to condemn them. It is grace, through the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ, that saves us. Judaism, like all other world religion that is based on human effort to do good work, does not bring true salvation.

Christianity is the only "religion" that teaches man is born spiritually dead. A dead man is incapable of doing any good works. A dead man needs to come alive. Since it is impossible for a dead man to come alive on his own, something must happen to him before he can come alive. We call this process "salvation". Salvation comes only from God, and we receive it freely by faith. The way to receive it is to first realize that I am a sinner who cannot save myself. Then I trust Jesus as the son of God who died for me. By putting my faith in Him I am saved.

One more thought about how Christianity is different from all other religion including Judaism – Christianity is the only religion which can clearly, logically and consistently explain the origin of the universe, the earth we live in and mankind as well as give a plausible future of the world. In addition, it is the only religion whose revealed document (the bible) contains nearly 2,000 prophecies, many of which have already come true. Just think about Israel – God's chosen nation. No nation in the world ceases to be a nation for 2,500 years and come back to rebuild itself as a nation again. The bible clearly predicted this.

9. Why do God's own chosen people not believe in Jesus and the New Testament?

Excellent question. I alluded to Judaism above, but this issue deserves more discussions.

There are two main reasons for the Jews' unbelief. One has to do with their misunderstood view of the Messiah, and the second has to do with God's eternal plan.

The Jews were originally a band of nomads when they were chosen by God. They at one point were slaves in Egypt but God used Moses to bring them out, and gave them their own land in the Middle East. But Jews are always rebellious and disobedient to the point of worshipping man-made idols instead of worshipping God. For this reason God put them through tremendous suffering (partly as a punishment for their sins, and partly to show His Glory, see below). Jews reached their pinnacle as a nation about 1,000 B.C. at the times of King David and King Solomon. Then the Jews' fate rapidly declined all the way to this day. They ceased to become a nation around 600 B.C. and they were scattered all over the world for nearly 2,500 years (until Israel came back as a nation in May 14, 1948). During these 2,500

years they were persecuted (they suffered much worse fate before the Hitler holocaust). Even though God punishes them through suffering, God repeatedly assured them (through many prophecies) that there will someday be a Messiah who would come and rescue them. In the bible there are two kinds of Messianic prophecies: Messiah as a lowly, humble, suffering savior, and Messiah as a King of Kings, Lord of Lord, judge of all mankind and victorious savior. We Christians know that these two kinds of prophecies are referring to the first, and second coming of Jesus Christ, respectively. We know that Jesus came 2,000 years ago as the slaughtered sheep whose blood was shed for our sins. We also know that when he comes the second time He will be the judge and the King. But Jews, because of their great suffering and spiritual blindness, expect the savior to be the King of Kings who would rescue them from their ages of persecution, suffering and shame. So when they met Jesus they could not believe that this humble and ordinary man whose life was ended by the Roman in the most shameful way (dying on the cross) could be their Messiah and savior. It is sad that they are still eagerly waiting for the coming of the Messiah, not realizing he had already come and finished God's salvation work on the cross. Without the understanding that Jesus died for our sins so we can receive God's grace of life, Jews are still working on their salvation by being pious and religious, by following the laws in their outward actions. We Christians who know the work of Christ because we believe in the New Testament can enjoy the grace and love from our loving Heavenly Father.

But God is not finished with the Jews as "His gifts and calling are without repentance" (Roman 11:29). God still loves the Jews and wants to save them. And the way God will do it is through what is called the "Great Tribulation" in the future. The bible clearly tells us that before the world ends there will be 7 years of great tribulation (suffering) which is for the purpose of convincing the Jews that Jesus Christ is indeed the Messiah. During this tribulation period many Jews will put their faith in Jesus Christ. "And so all Israel shall be saved, as it is written" (Roman 11:26). Lately I have spent a lot of time studying the end-times and God's eternal plan, and I must say what God has laid out for Christians in the eternal future is unbelievably great and grand.

10. Can you share with me about your belief about Jesus? What makes you think Jesus is real and is GOD?

I am glad you ask. May my answers below help you know Jesus a bit more.

Reason #1: His miraculous birth. The whole world has been celebrating Christmas (Jesus' birth) for 2000 years. Many details about his birth were prophesied by prophets hundreds of years ago.

Reason #2: He told us very directly many times that he is God. His enemies finally got the Romans to nail him on the cross because he was very clear about who he is, and they considered him blasphemous. Of course just because a person claims he is someone does not automatically make him so. The person could be lying, delusional

(crazy), or self-deceiving. But watching the life of Jesus no one could come to that conclusion.

Reason #3: He performed many miracles in plain sight of many people. Even his enemies acknowledged his miracles. His miracles included raising the dead, giving sights to people who were born blind, casting out demons, calming the raging sea, feeding 5,000 people with 5 loaves of bread and two fishes, etc.

Reason #4: His death on the cross and his resurrection – these two facts are clearly documented not just in the bible but in world history. No one escapes death on the cross. He died and was put into a grave from Friday to Sunday morning. Then he resurrected, and many saw him with their own eyes. All his disciples gave up their lives for Jesus – no one would do that for a liar.

Reason #5: Many (including myself) put their faith in him and experienced remarkable changes in our lives. Only God can change a person from within. One of the changes is the fact that we love Jesus, for he first loves us.

I hope you read about Jesus in the four gospels and read about what he did and said. In the process pray that God will open your eyes and heart so you can tell whether what Jesus said makes sense, and what Jesus did was extraordinary and divine.