

Introduction

First of all, I am so pleased that you all are here. I have been at ULM four years now, and for all four of those years I have hoped to have something like this take place and it has finally occurred. I am especially glad that our new church shares my vision for a ministry like this—and I do mean our “new” church, since we’re only seven months old! I should, from the beginning, be very clear that this meeting has nothing to do with ULM, is not some illegal mixture of “church and state,” etc., and has absolutely no bearing on any of your classwork. This study is and, if it continues after tonight, will be a ministry of Providence Reformed Bible Church, whose elders have allowed and encouraged me to start such a ministry under their supervision.

Whatever shape this study takes, however often it meets, and wherever it winds up meeting, I am thankful that the Lord God has allowed this meeting to take place. And, let me be plain, neither this study nor anything else would ever take place if God did not allow it. Ephesians 1:11 states that God **works all things according to the counsel of his will**, and Romans 11:36 tells us that **from him and through him and to him are all things**. And while it is difficult—indeed, impossible for us to understand all of God’s workings—particularly when things seem bad for us, it ultimately is a great comfort to know that God directs everything to bring about His purposes, since otherwise He could not give Christians the promise of Romans 8:28 **And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose**.

But, I digress—or at least am getting ahead of myself. I am especially glad to be having this study today because I do and always have found it difficult, in my officially “neutral” (we’ll discuss this later) position as a state university professor to avoid all discussions of Christianity while teaching. Some of you will say that I have failed miserably in doing so, since I discuss matters of faith with some regularity, at least with those that seem interested. And, it is not surprising that I have failed so completely in doing so, since the Christian faith becomes a mere shadow of itself if it does not encompass every area of life. Popular “church culture” will call this “putting God first” or “giving God first place,” but, as is often the case with popular culture and particularly with popular church culture, these clichés contain a grain of truth, but with massive oversimplifications.

And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."
(Matthew 22:35-40)

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.
(Colossians 3:17)

As you can see, God’s demands of us are comprehensive, making claim on every facet of our lives, our work—our being. Francis Schaeffer, a great Christian philosopher and apologist of the late 20th century, borrowed a term from the eighteenth-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant to describe this aspect of Christianity. That term is *Weltanschauung*, which in English is easily translated *worldview*. Schaeffer rightly reasoned that Christianity is indeed a religion, but it extends beyond the concept of “religion” to which many in the modern world subscribe. It is, philosophically, a *worldview*—a lens, if you will, through which one views everything in life, complete with certain beliefs, assumptions, presuppositions, etc. about the world and how it is. As we’ll discuss in a few minutes, everyone has a worldview, everyone has presuppositions, everyone has assumptions about how things are—and how things should be. Logically, only one worldview can be correct, as all others will have elements in them which do not correspond to reality. Naturally, since this is a Christian study, I will be presenting Christianity as this one correct worldview.

What This Study is Not

Now, before we move further into this study, let’s go over a few things that this study is not. First of all, a Bible study like this should not, cannot, and must not take the place of regular, indeed weekly involvement in a local Christian church. If you profess to be a Christian, one that names, follows, and indeed belongs to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, this is commanded of you:

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.
(Hebrews 10:24-25)

If you don’t have a church, if your home church is in some other town and you don’t have a place here, or even if you do not profess to be a Christian, you are welcome to visit our church on Sunday mornings. Providence Reformed Bible Church, 6611 Cypress St. Suite 2, West Monroe. We have Bible Study at 9:30, Worship at 10:30, and usually lunch and fellowship afterwards (optional).

Now, some of you work on Sunday mornings, and perhaps you have even been condemned by professed Christians for doing so (ironically, these people are often patronizing your place of business while offering such condemnations). We will not condemn you for doing this, since we live in a society that does not want to allow people to consistently reserve a day for worship and rest. On occasion I also am not able to avoid working on Sunday—for example, the Baadsvik concert last fall was on a Sunday evening. However, I will say that, while working on Sundays is not condemned in the same way in the New Testament as working on Saturdays was for the Jewish community in the Old Testament, it still falls far short of God's ideal for humanity. The Bible teaches that God ordained the work six days, rest one day pattern Himself.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.
(Genesis 2:1-3)

God did not rest on the seventh day because He was tired—He is, after all, God! The only possible reason He would do this is to set an example for how we are to pattern our lives, and since we saw above that God works all things for the good of His people, He must have set this example because it is the best pattern for us.

So, if you have a work situation that necessitates that you work on Sundays (and excepting works like those in the medical profession, etc. which provide necessary services that cannot be interrupted), it will be better for you to seek work that allows you to reserve Sundays for worship and rest. Am I saying that you should quit your jobs now? No, but I am suggesting that you actively seek employment that will allow you to reserve Sundays for this purpose, and if you let us know we will pray for you as well that God will allow you to find such employment.

Moving on, the next thing that this study is not is a referendum on the truth, accuracy, or dependability of the Bible. Yes, during this first meeting I am engaging in a bit of apologetics (the science that involves developing a defense of one's beliefs) so that you all have a basic idea of where I am coming from, why I hold that perspective, and why you should, too. But, for the most part, these meetings will consist of exposition and discussion of what the Bible says is true. You are free to accept or reject it, but full-time apologetics is not the goal here. I will be working from the presupposition (yes, I admit to having presuppositions) that the Bible is the Word of God and therefore true, and that our responsibility is to read, understand, and obey its teachings. As the Apostle Paul told his associate Timothy,

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.
(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Thirdly, this study will not engage in the shallow excesses that plague much of modern church ministry, and which I've heard at least one of you criticize in the past. God did not reveal Himself to mankind in clichés, pithy slogans, and emotionalism, but in words and even sentences and paragraphs—in propositional truth. While incidents are recorded in the Bible in which God confirmed the preaching of His Word with miracles or signs of some kind, such occurrences were rare, and almost never “the main event”—the purpose of these displays was, again, to confirm the veracity of the message being preached. The example I hope to follow is that of the Bereans, recorded in Acts 17:

The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.
(Acts 17:10-11)

Like the Bereans, we will examine the Scriptures to see if they confirm the things that I am teaching. That means that we will have Bibles out, examining passages throughout the text to gain a comprehensive, systematic understanding of what the Bible says about each issue it addresses. (It is ok if you are unfamiliar with finding stuff in the Bible—it's a fairly easy skill to learn with some practice.) You are free to disagree with what I am saying, though it is my goal to never say anything in a meeting like this that does not agree completely with the teachings of the Bible. If you think I have the Bible's teaching wrong, fine, but you'll have to show me from the text that I'm wrong before I will concede the point—“I just don't think that's right” won't cut it. If you disagree despite knowing that I am accurately presenting the meaning of the text, well, that's another matter altogether, and a serious one at that.

What this Study Is

In these meetings we will study the Scriptures in a structured, intellectual, and even academic manner. In contrast to the “hyped-up” emotionalism that has for so long characterized many Christian ministries, I want us to leave these sessions having a better knowledge of what the text actually says. As a tertiary goal, at least a cursory knowledge of the Bible is part of what it once meant to be an “educated” individual in Western countries, and so meetings like this help to remedy that deficiency in our collective education. Beyond that, though, even those studying the Scriptures for religious purposes (which will hopefully include all of us) can and should do so with the intellectual faculties fully engaged. Jesus Christ commanded this, after all, and the Apostle Paul demonstrated it.

**And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.
(Matthew 22:37)**

**When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments.
(2 Timothy 4:13)**

Books? Parchments? What was Paul talking about? Paul was not some backwoods preacher. Paul was highly educated, and one of the Jewish religious leaders before becoming a Christian. As he was writing letters to the various churches scattered throughout Europe and Asia to confirm and strengthen their faith, identify and condemn errors, and expound doctrine, he sought counsel from his various **books**, which might have contained volumes of history, philosophy, poetry, etc. both Jewish and Greek, since he knew and quoted from both as the situation demanded, and the **parchments**, which might have been drafts of letters he was composing but more likely included the books of the Old Testament—if he had nothing else, he was concerned that he might be equipped to read, study, and expound God’s Word itself when ministering to the young church. No one will accuse Paul of not being “spiritual” enough, since he wrote nearly half of the books in the New Testament, but he clearly found scholarship to be an aid to spiritual growth, not a hindrance, and we will do well to follow his lead.

Next, to those of you that are not Christians, it is my hope that you soon will be. I’m not going to insult you with pretend “objectivity” and fail to be forthright with my motives; and even though I hope that discussions we will have will be both rigorous and intellectual, I’m not just setting out to begin and then win an argument (as much fun as I find that to be...even when I don’t win). I have two motivations for wanting to see every last one of you become Christians. First of all, Jesus Christ, the One I call Lord, Master, Savior, and God, commanded that His followers seek the salvation of every individual.

**And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.
(Mark 16:15-16)**

Secondly, and this motivation was already mentioned in the above verses, Jesus Christ is a very exclusive Lord. Unlike some popular and even wannabe “scholarly” portrayals of Him, He wasn’t some kind of hippie itinerant teacher that just “loved everybody” and wanted everyone to love each other as well. Scripture presents Christ as God Himself incarnate in human flesh, and the only Way for mankind to receive forgiveness of sins and, therefore, eternal life. I want every one of you to be able to know and enjoy this life, rather than receiving the punishment that each of us deserves.

**Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.
(John 14:6)**

**"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.
(John 3:16-18)**

**Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."
(John 20:26-29)**

Thirdly, to those of you that profess to be Christians, I want to challenge your faith. So much of what passes for “evangelism” in Christian churches today presents a half-Gospel, one that, I am afraid, does not save. Now let me be plain: if God has truly saved you from your sins, then nothing can or will change that—God promises to keep you forever.

**My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one."
(John 10:27-30)**

But at the same time, the Scriptures challenge each of us that profess to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior to examine ourselves thoroughly, to see if our faith is genuine.

**Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?--unless indeed you fail to meet the test!
(2 Corinthians 13:5)**

Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.

(2 Peter 1:10)

So, we as Christians are actually supposed to test ourselves to make sure we really and truly are Christians. The question is, how are we supposed to do that? Believe me, you will never find a place in the Bible that instructs us to “look back to a time” when we “made a decision,” “walked an aisle,” “shook the preacher’s hand,” “prayed a prayer,” “signed a card,” or, at least for this purpose, “got baptized.” In fact, the Bible never speaks of looking to past events of any kind as evidence of salvation, no matter how “sincerely felt” any “decision” was. The question is, then, since I’ve just thrown out much of what lots of well-meaning churches and individuals regard as “evidence” of salvation since these things aren’t found in the text, to what does the Bible command us to look for such evidence?

And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

(1 John 2:3-6)

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

(Hebrews 4:14-15)

We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.

(1 John 5:18)

The Bible says that if we really are Christians, if we profess to know and serve the risen Christ, then we will actively seek to **keep his commandments**, and **to walk in the same way in which he walked**. How did He walk? **Without sin**. Does this mean, then, that a true Christian is a person that does not sin? No, of course not. However, the true Christian does seek to gradually eliminate sin from his or her life, to **not keep on sinning**, as the text says, and instead actively seek to obey and serve God better. As the text says, **For this is the will of God, your sanctification.... (1 Thessalonians 4:3a)** This sanctification will continue throughout life—it is not a one-time event, after which one can live however he or she wants. As the text says, **But the one who endures to the end will be saved. (Matthew 24:13)**

A Clash of Worldviews

Now, moving back to the subject of worldviews, I said earlier that everyone, whether he or she realizes or acknowledges it or not, has a worldview, a set of beliefs, presuppositions, assumptions, etc. that form the “lens” through which he or she views the world. Christianity does function in this way, as does every other religion as well as atheism and various humanistic and naturalistic philosophies. With acknowledgements to the aforementioned Francis Schaeffer as well as two of his followers, Chuck Colson and Nancy Pearcey, when considering different worldviews we can gain a fair summary of their perspectives by considering their responses to three questions:

1. *How did we get here?*
2. *What has gone wrong with the world?*
3. *How do we fix what is wrong with the world?*

Every worldview will answer these questions. Logically speaking, the worldview whose answers most closely correspond to reality will be the correct one. For the sake of time, I am going to “paint with a broad brush,” so to speak, and consider worldviews in three groups: naturalism/atheism/humanism/deism, (most) religions other than Christianity, and Christianity. Such grouping will no doubt result in some degree of oversimplification, but I don’t think so much so that the basic argument is discredited.

Beginning with the first question, *How did we get here?*, we have some similar answers, and some dissimilar ones.

Naturalism, etc.: The universe has always been or was spontaneously generated, and all life, including humanity, has evolved over billions of years through random mutation and natural selection. (In the case of deism, God “started things” and then allowed natural processes to “take over.”)

Other religions: A god or gods created the universe, or in some cases the gods evolved along with the universe and exercise more or less power over its continued development and existence. Some allow for a special creation of man, others take a position more like that of naturalism.

Christianity: God created everything that is by Divine fiat. Man was specially created by God in His image.

Naturalism is, of course, the “scientific consensus” of our day, yet does have some problems, the most glaring being that such systems rest on a premise that something can come from nothing without some type of external cause. Even if it were conceded that humanity and all of life did indeed evolve over billions of years through random mutation and natural selection, where did the material come from to start this process? Where did the physical universe come from in which life began? Most scientists agree that the universe did indeed have a beginning—it has not always been. Spontaneous generation violates the laws of physics, including both the first (matter and energy can be neither created nor destroyed) and second (increasing entropy within a closed system) laws of thermodynamics. At some point, either the universe must have acted in contrast to the known laws of physics in order to generate itself, or it was created by a Being outside of itself that possessed the tremendous power and intelligence necessary to create everything that exists. (Deism, of course, avoids this problem, and will be discussed shortly.)

Among non-Christian religions, some side with the naturalists, others with Christianity on the question of Creation. Islam’s teaching on Creation, for example, is quite similar to that of Christianity.

Christianity’s answer to this question is very simple: God created the universe by Divine fiat. This premise is rarely discussed and never really defended in Scripture—both God’s existence and His Creation of all things are simply assumed to be so from the very first verse.

**In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
(Genesis 1:1)**

Because He exists independent of His Creation and is possessed of unlimited power and intelligence, God could create an orderly universe in which scientific laws like those of thermodynamics act consistently and dependably, while reserving unto Himself alone the ability to abrogate those laws when doing so suited His purposes. Deism, of course, also claims such a god (even though it states that this god is no longer active in the physical universe), so there must be another element to the Christian concept of Creation.

This “other element” involves the creation of Man. The Bible is very plain that Man was specially created by God, and did not evolve from the other animals.

**Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.
(Genesis 1:26-31)**

What evidence do we have of this other than the testimony of the Bible? Only this: large-scale, sometimes called *macroevolution*, in which lower forms of life evolve into higher forms of life, would require massive additions of genetic information in order to occur. The problem with this is, mutations in all life forms involve the loss of information, not an addition. This process certainly is inadequate to generate an evolutionary process from amino acids and single-celled organisms to a creature so complex as Man, and the Bible contradicts this theory by describing Man as having been particularly created as God’s image-bearer. But even if macroevolution were indeed so and Man and all of the other currently existing species did evolve from lower life forms, the addition of information needed to accomplish this would require the constant intervention of a being like the Christian God and could not occur independently. This is where deism fails as compared to Christianity, since the god of deism is more like a “divine watchmaker” that simply started things and lets them run on their own with no intervention from himself. Even if the evolution of life on earth has occurred in precisely the manner posited by mainstream scientists, the intervention and guidance of a tremendously powerful and intelligent being outside of our “closed system” would be necessary for success.

(Also, in questioning the truth of macroevolution no one is disputing that evolution does occur—such *microevolution* has given us a vast variety of human beings, dogs, cats, lizards, etc. Perhaps even dogs, coyotes, wolves, etc. descended from a single ancestor. The only thing being disputed by those adopting a strictly Biblical view of creation is the teaching that all life is descended from a single common ancestor.)

So, strict naturalism fails because the intervention of a Being such as God is logically necessary to create the universe, and deism fails because the variety and complexity of animal and plant life in the world likewise would require the constant intervention of such a Being, even if macroevolution were indeed true. While this line of reasoning does not specifically prove the veracity of the Creation account in Genesis, I think it does establish the absolutely wanting nature of atheism and deism, and at the very least demonstrates the necessity of God, and the reasonableness of the biblical account.

Moving on to the second question, *What's wrong with the world?*, we likewise see a variety of mutually exclusive answers. A cursory glance at the news each day will tell us that the world is not all that it should or could be, along with a cacophony of voices suggesting various solutions. These proposed solutions indicate the worldview of the person writing or speaking.

Naturalism, etc.: Life on earth, and humanity in particular, are still in a nascent stage of development, experiencing the "growing pains" of a planet, species, and society that are still gradually "working out the kinks." In time, as humanity grows and matures as a species, these problems will be eliminated and utopia will ensue.

The problems with this view should be obvious: do we see any evidence whatsoever that human society, or even the physical world, are slowly but steadily improving? History is rife with examples of societies that advanced for hundreds, perhaps even thousands of years before slowly declining and ceasing to exist, often being absorbed into inferior societies that were far less developed than they had been at their peaks. Moreover, studying the historical records and literature of these societies reveals a humanity that is, with the exception of their lack of modern technology, not at all different from ourselves, possessing similar powers of thought, reason, emotion, and spirituality. Indeed, as Solomon said,

What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said, "See, this is new"? It has been already in the ages before us. There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to be among those who come after.
(Ecclesiastes 1:9-11)

So far, the historical evidence that humans or human societies are evolving at all is lacking. At best, our history is one of tremendous development followed by equal or even greater decline. The naturalists may be right in saying that we as humans "aren't good enough," but their implied optimism regarding the possibilities of human progress is not justified by the historical record.

As for the natural world, we hear often of the destruction of ecosystems, extinction of species, and natural disasters. Improvement of the natural world, despite tremendous human effort, isn't really going anywhere, either.

Next, other religions. As with the first question, some side more with the naturalists, others with the Christians, at least to some extent. Eastern religions in particular view the individual's lack of spiritual development as the problem—in Buddhism, for example, people's problems are solved as they reach "nirvana" through self-denial, transcendental meditation, etc. In Hinduism, we see people striving to do well in life so that they might escape the constant cycle of reincarnation and achieve "enlightenment." In other systems, we see some concept of sin, in which meriting the disfavor of a god or gods brings calamity upon human individuals and societies.

These views also have numerous problems. In many Eastern countries people will do all kinds of things to reach "nirvana" or "enlightenment" and not only are they not achieving it, but their societies are crumbling around them. The most successful cities and countries in that part of the world have largely abandoned their religions and adopted Western practices of various kinds. Meanwhile, those in other countries trying to appease their gods in order to turn away difficulties consistently find their efforts to be futile.

Christianity traces all of our individual and collective problems to one source: sin. First, let us find a definition of what sin is.

Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.
(1 John 3:4)

Other translations render the word "lawlessness" as "**disobedience**" or "**transgression of the law.**" Sin, then is the breaking or disobedience of God's commands. The Bible records the very first sin to have taken place, and God's judgment upon the transgressors:

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."
(Genesis 2:16-17)

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom you

gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."
(Genesis 3:1-19)

When Man was first created God gave him one command: "don't eat of this one tree," and Man broke that commandment. As a result, hardship, decay, and death became a part of Man's existence, and that of the entire Creation.

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned--
(Romans 5:12)

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.
(Romans 8:19-22)

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
(Romans 6:23)

The Bible teaches that death and suffering, not just for humanity but for all of Creation, is a result of Man's sin. Our inclination to evil, which we inherited from our ancestor Adam, is the cause of all the evil in human society, while the introduction of sin into the world caused the entire Creation to become a perverted shadow of its former self, producing **thorns and thistles** rather than good food, as well as hurricanes, earthquakes, famine, disease, wildfires, and all sorts of misery and destruction, all the while **groaning** under the oppressive weight of human sin. Sin is our problem.

Ok, then *How do we fix it?*

The naturalist's answer is obvious. If our problems are caused by our not having progressed far enough in our individual and collective evolution, then these problems will be eliminated as we become further developed. This idea is entirely discredited as we read human history. Not only have societies come and gone without any evidence of human development, but the more organized attempts to create such a society have been monstrous. You've heard the names of those that have attempted to do this: Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Mao Zedong, others. Each of these rulers committed unspeakable evils, and each believed that he was doing good, making society more advanced, more efficient, maybe even more just...and improving humanity by eliminating those individuals considered "unfit" due to ancestry, physical or mental disability, or even simply disagreeing with the leaders' methods for achieving utopia. Please don't misunderstand me—everybody likes the idea of a just, peaceful, utopian society, but even the most well-intended human efforts to achieve this have resulted instead in the deaths of millions of innocent people. In short, human schemes to remedy society's evils ultimately result in the commission of even greater evil by at least an order of magnitude.

The answers to this question given by other religions are divergent, but all have a common thread. Followers of some religions, acknowledging, like Christians, the role of human sin in creating our problems, still seek to appease the wrath of their gods by various rituals as well as animal or even human sacrifice, while others only hope that their "good" works outweigh their "bad," and that their god or gods will be satisfied with this, bringing peace and prosperity to their earthly lives as well as promises of good things for the afterlife. Some, seeking "nirvana" or "enlightenment," hope only that their good deeds will allow them to reach a state of optimum spiritual development, though these systems offer little hope for healing or improvement to society as a whole, or to the Creation itself.

The common thread in these religious systems: the success of any of them depends upon deeds done by the individual. The problem is, tainted by imperfection at best and an inborn tendency toward evil at worst, how can people expect even their best efforts to be "good enough?"

Indeed, this is the crux of Christianity's answer to the third question: no mere human being is, has ever been, or ever will be "good enough." We have already read that sin brings death to individuals and to Creation itself. The Bible also teaches that all of our efforts to appease God's just wrath and receive his blessings are insufficient. We are not good enough for God!

We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

(Isaiah 64:6)

The only hope for each of us individually, and for society itself, is that God Himself has provided a means of forgiveness, of salvation, of healing for us, since we can never provide this for ourselves. Christianity, rightly recognizing that humanity cannot save itself or the Creation marred by sin, therefore looks to the Creator Himself to provide what we cannot. Thankfully, the Bible teaches that God has done just that.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ

The above “worldview” arguments do not infallibly prove the truth of Christianity or the Bible. However, I do think they establish that the Christian view of Man and of the world is reasonable (indeed, more reasonable than the other two views presented), and therefore worthy of consideration. In the coming meetings we will examine the Bible in tremendous depth, and I think you will find that its teachings offer better answers to questions than other religions or philosophies about life, society, God, humanity, and every other topic which it addresses. Its truthfulness really is self-evident. But, before I close for tonight, I want to present Christianity’s answer to the third question in more depth. What is the ultimate solution for our individual and collective problems? That question can be asked more specifically, “How can we as sinful individuals be made right with God?”

The first premise of Christianity is that God exists, and He made everything. This is, as I said earlier, stated very simply in the biblical text and always assumed to be true.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

(Genesis 1:1)

If God made everything, then He and He alone has the right to determine what is right and wrong—not only in the physical realm, but the moral realm as well—and to determine the rightful consequences of the transgression of His decrees.

"Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"

(Psalms 46:10)

And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

(Matthew 22:35-40)

And God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. "You shall have no other gods before me. "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. "You shall not murder. "You shall not commit adultery. "You shall not steal. "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."

(Exodus 20:1-17)

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

(Matthew 5:21-28)

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned--

(Romans 5:12)

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Romans 6:23)

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

(Revelation 21:1-8)

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

(1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

God made everything, and His first priority is that all of Creation glorify Himself. Those that do not bow the knee to Him in this life and remain in their sin will be punished forever **in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death**. But, in the midst of all of this discussion of law and sin and judgment, there is hope. Look at that last verse: **But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.**

You see, God is merciful, and takes no pleasure in meting out punishment.

Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?

(Ezekiel 33:11)

However, God also is inexorably just, and requires that sin be punished with death. Because of this, He sent His only Son Jesus Christ to die, taking upon himself the righteous punishment of sin for everyone that believes, so that we might be cleansed of sin and regarded as righteous in His sight, the penalty of our sin being completely paid. He then raised Jesus from the dead, that everyone that believes might also, in Him, have the promise of eternal life in **a new heaven and a new earth**, a Creation no longer spoiled by man's sinfulness.

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

(2 Corinthians 5:21)

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

(1 John 4:9-10)

"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know-- this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David says concerning him, "'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.' "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.' Let

**all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."
(Acts 2:22-39)**

What must a person do to be saved? Bow the knee to Jesus Christ as Lord, Master, and Savior. Confess and turn away from your sins, throwing yourself upon His mercy. He promises to grant eternal life to all that truly repent and believe.

**because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.
(Romans 10:9-10)**