

Reason and the Christian Hope

Can we know that Christianity is true?



Henry M. Morris

Reason and the Christian Hope

by Henry M. Morris. Ph.D.

Institute for Creation Research

P.O. Box 59029, Dallas, Texas 75229

1806 Royal Lane, Dallas, Texas 75229

Phone: 214/615-8300

Customer Service: 800/628-7640

www.icr.org

Copyright © 2005 by the Institute for Creation Research.

All rights reserved. No part of this booklet may be reproduced in any form, except brief excerpts for the purpose of review, without written permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

Dr. Henry M. Morris was Founder and President Emeritus of the Institute for Creation Research.

Reason and the Christian Hope

Can we know that Christianity is true?

Maybe you have been skeptical about the claims of Christianity. You have thought that the glorious hope of the Christian is just built on wishful thinking. But now, try to be fair, for the time being, to shelve whatever objections you may have until you have carefully and fairly considered the positive evidence.

The Origin of the Universe

It is certain that the universe as we know it must have had a definite beginning. The older philosophies of the eternity of matter have been set aside by modern physics and astronomy. Some compare the universe to a clock that is running down. The Second Law of Thermodynamics states that every energy change or transfer must be in a downward direction, as far as the usability of the energy is concerned. Every mechanical device of man's invention delivers less energy than it receives, the remainder being dissipated in unrecoverable heat energy. The same principle applies throughout all nature. Suns and stars continually send out tremendous quantities of energy, most of which is lost in space.

Obviously, this cannot go on forever. Either the universe must eventually die a "heat death" or some unknown principle

or person must sometime, somehow intervene to renew it. Equally obviously, this cannot have been going on forever in the past. There must, beyond any question, have been a beginning, when the universe was much more highly charged with energy in a high degree of availability than it is now.

As to who or what began it, there are only two real alternatives. There is the possibility that some eternally existing Law or Principle or Force, something intrinsic in matter and the universe, about whose origin we can know nothing, somehow shaped things into their initial form, and then set them to following out a deterministic process of development, or rather degeneration. Or, there is the possibility that all things were created in the beginning by a Person, also about whose origin we know nothing. It comes to this: The universe was begun either by a Person, or by something without personality.

But if the law of cause and effect means anything, the universe could only have been brought into existence by a *cause* adequate to account for every thing, every concept, every character exhibited by the universe. It is axiomatic, at least as far as anything now going on in the universe is concerned, that the effect cannot be greater than the cause. A cause must have *at least* all the characters of the effect it produces. How, then, could it be possible, even by a nearly interminable process of evolution, to produce intelligence, to produce feeling, emotion, will—in short, to produce personality (which is certainly an effect observable in the universe and in our own self-consciousness)—if the cause is not itself possessed of personality?

Some philosophers have attempted to deny the validity of the reasoning processes when applied to such matters; others have sought to question the applicability of the law of cause and effect when applied to questions of origins. Such speculations,

however, are completely divorced from the world of reality that we know, a world in which cause and effect do operate, and in which logical reasoning based on correct premises leads to correct conclusions.

Therefore, the only reasonable conclusion, if the law of cause and effect means anything, is that the universe and everything in it was created by a great *personality*—a Person we call God.

One further conclusion comes easily. There is something in our own finite personalities that we call a conscience or a moral urge. Whatever it is, each individual recognizes something in him that tells him that he ought to do the thing that is right morally and ought to shun the wrong—even though individual standards as to what constitutes right and wrong may seem to vary somewhat with time and place. As far as personalities in the universe are concerned, at least, it is a moral universe. Therefore, the Creator must be a *moral* being, who has placed in his creatures a moral consciousness. One more logical inference is that this consciousness of moral values implies a moral responsibility to the Giver of that consciousness.

Thus, we have found it reasonable and necessary to believe in a Personal God, who has created and who sustains the universe by the Word of His Power. As the highest of His creatures, man also has personality. He has intelligence to comprehend and study an intelligent universe, he possesses a moral sense which he intuitively realizes implies a moral responsibility to God, he has a will which enables him and impels him to make moral choices, and he has emotional capabilities for love, for hate, for joy, sorrow, anger, peace—which emotions must inevitably be related to his moral nature and ultimately to his relation with God.

Man's Purpose and Destiny

It is the belief of the best among men of every nation that the highest emotion, the noblest feeling, is that of love. If love really prevailed among men and nations, there would be no war, no crime, no suffering, and no want. God has evidently placed the capacity to love and the desire for love at the very center of man's personality. By cause-and-effect reasoning, if nothing more, we can be certain that love must likewise be at the very heart of the personality of God. We may find it difficult to reconcile the evil and suffering in the world with this fact of God's love, but surely the real presence of love and goodness and beauty in the world and the instinctive recognition of all men that these things are better and more to be desired than evil and hatred should satisfy the minds and hearts of right-thinking men that God is a God of love.

Because of these facts, we must believe that the creation of man is intimately connected with God's nature of love. It is clearly conceivable that God has created man in His own spiritual likeness, in order that He might have someone on whom to lavish the love flowing from His own nature, and someone who would freely and voluntarily reciprocate that love.

Man's chief purpose, then, it is quite reasonable to believe, is to love and to be loved by God. This is a logical, and certainly the most ennobling, explanation of the existence of love in the universe and in individuals.

God's love, however, cannot be exercised at the cost of His holiness and righteousness and justice. There can be no possibility of an infinitely Holy Creator allowing evil to go overlooked or unpunished. But the possibility of wrong entering the universe and thriving for a time cannot be doubted. There is obviously much evil and suffering in the world. Therefore,

even though we must conceive of God as perfectly hol^y in all His actions and plans, we must also concede that somehow in the infinitude of His creation, there exists the possibility of unholiness and sin in that creation.

Indeed, it is difficult even to think of good, except in opposition to bad, of truth except as against falsehood, of holiness except as contrasted with sinfulness. The good qualities can mean nothing unless freely chosen and exhibited in preference to the bad. A properly designed machine would deserve no credit and would elicit no love for accurately and dependably doing what was expected of it; it has no choice in the matter.

Now, if man's chief end is to love God—and to satisfy the longing of the God of love for the love of creatures of His own image—there must obviously be real moral freedom on the part of man to exercise that love; otherwise, he would be a mere piece of machinery, and God would derive no satisfaction from an involuntary love—indeed such a love is inconceivable and involves a contradiction in terms.

But, obviously, moral freedom involves the possibility of a wrong moral choice, of hate or indifference instead of love, of doubt instead of faith, of a desire for independence from God rather than a loving trust in Him. That such a wrong choice has been made by mankind, and by all individual men, cannot be doubted.

Here is the real explanation for our own lack of knowledge of the person of God, and our lack of the fellowship with Him for which we were created. We have chosen wrongly, and His holiness cannot permit fellowship with sinners. We have, of our own volition, rejected His proffered love and righteousness, for independence and sin, and have therefore prevented Him from exercising His love toward us as He would. It is our own sins that

have separated us from our God, and there is no way of our undoing them, or starting over. We cannot call back all the lies, the cursings, the bitter words that have escaped our lips, nor can we unthink all the evil thoughts or undo the evil deeds we have been guilty of, and that have continued to pain the heart of God and to separate us yet further from Him. We seem to be, because of our sinful words and deeds, to be completely and eternally lost from God's presence and His plan for us.

God's Plan of Redemption

But it is not possible that God would leave His creatures in this condition without doing something else to make possible a restoration. He, being omniscient, must have foreseen all that has taken place, before the beginning of the creation. He created man to love and to be loved, and it is inconceivable that God could fail in His purpose. Accordingly, He must have planned from the foundation of the world to work out a plan *of* redemption for lost mankind.

But it is almost impossible to conceive of a method that would do everything necessary and still be consistent with God's character. This plan must be one that would reveal God's holiness to men and that would make them desire holiness and hate sin: it must be something that would adequately and completely remove all the accumulated effects of sin from the characters of men: above all, it must be something that would change the desires and affections of men in such a way that they would no longer be in a condition of rejection of God's will and His love, but would have their love and gratitude drawn out to Him as His love is revealed to them.

None of the ordinary philosophies or religions of men have discovered any such method. It is something that seems to be

beyond human wisdom; it is past finding out. We *can* think of *one* way, however; but we could not have thought of it had not God revealed it to us. But having once seen it and believed it, we can see in it the infinite wisdom of God!

God, though infinite, might take upon Himself the form of man, might be made part and parcel of mankind. By a thoroughly human life, He then might exhibit in Himself, and in a way that could be understood by men, His own holiness and His love. As the staggering burden of the sins of mankind, of which He then would be a part, would press upon Him, more and more coming into conflict with His nature. He might then allow Himself to bear the weight of all the sins and resultant suffering of all men, ultimately to experience and endure the inconceivable awfulness of hell—to endure what men who have rejected the love and fellowship of God deserve to suffer, the complete absence of that love and fellowship, the presence of nothing but sin, completely forsaken of God.

As yet, we do not realize what it will mean to be completely and eternally cut off from all the evidences and the effects of the presence and love and care *of* our Creator, but such complete separation is the logical result of our rejection of His love and must eventually be the fruit of what *we* have sown. But, if God Himself were to undergo, in substitution, all this suffering for us, may we not be set free?—may we not then be restored to our lost estate?

This possibility becomes more evident when it is remembered that God desires to draw our love to Himself—to have and enjoy our love. There is nothing conceivable that could so make a man love God—a man who has sinned and is lost from God and can do nothing about his sinfulness—as for that man to know that God Himself has borne and suffered for and carried away his

sins. When he rightly views his own lost condition, deserving nothing at all from God, but then sees God going to such lengths to save him, his whole being must surely be changed. He can and must love God with all his heart and soul; he must be eternally grateful to Him; he must come to love the things God loves and hate the sin that had separated him from God.

But further, it is the infinite God thus suffering for a finite number of finite men. And though His suffering under such circumstances may have been infinite, as far as we can understand, it could not be eternal. He who is the Maker of life, He who is Life, could not die forever. When His soul is once made an offering for sin, He must prolong His days; He must be alive forevermore.

These thoughts do not fully explain everything about God's plan of redemption. It is too much, too great, too grand for us to comprehend. But at least we have seen it reasonable to believe that God must have taken this course of divine substitution for sinful man. No other plan could be conceived that could accomplish God's purpose for men, that could be consistent with His own character of holiness and love, and that could satisfy His own heart.

Should we not, then, when His person and plan are revealed to us, by His own revelation and by history, thereupon open our hearts to Him, love Him, and serve Him forever? And as our hearts open to His love, is it not possible that all the beauty of His own holiness and all the power of His eternal life, His resurrection life, may become ours?

The Revelation of His Plan

It is possible and it is reasonable that God could reveal His plan of redemption to men. In fact, as we have intimated, it is

necessary, since the only course that God could follow is incomprehensible to man unless divinely revealed. Still, God must not force the acceptance of it; He desires real love, voluntary love. Not only His character and His creation are now available to elicit such love, but also His marvelous provision of salvation from the penalty and power of sin. This must be revealed to men, but only in such a way as to *encourage* faith and love, not to force them.

Accordingly, we may be sure that God has revealed this plan to men in some definite way, *but not in such a way as to be beyond doubt*. There must be either the promise of His plan to be worked out, or the record of His plan having been worked out, or both—and they must now be available to all men who *desire* to know God and to be restored to His fellowship.

Thus, we can be satisfied that none of the religious or philosophical systems of the past, now dead, were true revelations of God; had they been, God would not have allowed them to die out. Similarly, we can infer that none of the purely local or national religions are true revelations of God; all men need to know it, and therefore, the true religion must be missionary.

Besides Christianity, only Buddhism and Islam meet even these two qualifications. It is evident that only one of these can be God's true revelation, because each is radically different from the others, especially in the all-important matter of the way of salvation. Buddhism has rather markedly degenerated from its original form, but both originally and now emphasizes good works as the means of salvation. It is mostly silent about God; there is nothing whatever in it to draw out man's love toward his Creator and Redeemer. The Muslim conception of God is somewhat similar to that of Christianity, but the incentive to obey Him is not that of love for Him, but rather fear of

hell, and the promise of a very sensual paradise to the faithful follower of Mohammed.

Neither Buddhism nor Islam knows anything of the saving grace of God, nor of obedient love in response to that grace. Buddhism has been a missionary religion, but it was spread by political power and by compromise with and absorption of other existing religions. Islam was spread mostly by the sword, wielded in the hands of fanatical followers, expecting a heavenly reward for dying while fighting those who would not accept Mohammed as the last and greatest prophet of God. Christianity has spread around the world as a result of neither force nor compromise, but through the transformed lives and the loving testimony of those who have believed that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.”

The Testimony of History

Today, great numbers of people, though admittedly a minority of all mankind, believe that God was born into the world as a man some 2000 years ago as Jesus of Nazareth, that He lived a sinless life, that He died on the cross of Calvary as the divine Substitute and Saviour of all men, that He rose bodily from the grave three days later, and ascended into heaven, there to wait until the time of His return as the Judge of the world.

These beliefs, and the Christian Church built around and upon them, have existed in the same essential form since the time of Christ Himself. This much can be denied by no one who is at all acquainted with the facts. All the evidences of archaeological discovery, textual criticism, the writings of early church fathers and every other pertinent line of objective evidence assures us that the Christians of the first century, many of whom had known the Lord Jesus Himself, thoroughly

believed in a thoroughly supernatural Christ, One who had performed mighty miraculous works and who had Himself risen from the dead and in whose atoning death was their hope of salvation and eternal life.

It is also a matter of certain history that these early Christians suffered terrible persecution, often martyrdom, for their beliefs. Surely they had every reason to examine most thoroughly the grounds for their faith and the reason for their hope. Yet in spite of every inducement to recant, their testimony held firm, and “so, mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.”

It is beyond the scope of this booklet to discuss it, but the antiquity and authenticity of the New Testament writings have been abundantly confirmed. There can be little doubt that, in the Gospels, we have the apostolic writings in essentially their original form. Thus, if they do not reveal Christ as He really was, and the things He actually said and did, only two things are possible. The early Christian leaders were either fools or frauds.

If they, for some reason, were attempting to produce false records, perhaps in order to establish a new religion, there is no getting around the fact that they were deliberate liars. But surely no one who has fairly read the Gospels could charge the writers of such marvelous documents with fraud or forgery. There are overpowering internal evidences against such a notion, but the conclusive thing is this: men do not suffer willingly and gladly, materially and physically, for something they know to be a lie. Many false causes have their martyrs, of course, but always they believe implicitly in their cause. But it is absolutely inconceivable that the early Christian writers and leaders could have conspired in a deliberate fraud and then gone forth to suffer the loss of their possessions and friends, to

endure the most severe physical persecution, and finally to prison and death—all for preaching a gospel they knew to be false. There are some things that just cannot be.

But admitting they were sincere in what they preached and wrote, could they not have been mistaken? They certainly had every reason to examine this possibility. But they wrote about things they had actually seen and heard out in the open, among crowds of people. They were not epileptic visionaries, recording dreams and mysteries. They saw and handled the body of the risen Saviour. They knew that the body, which had been placed in Joseph's tomb, was no longer there. Incidentally, if the body of Jesus *were* available, the Jews would most certainly have produced it to halt the spreading "heresy" about His resurrection.

Thus, it is nothing less than absurdity—the claim that the early Christians were either deluded or deceivers. There is, then, one and only one conclusion. Christ *did* conquer death. He *was* God manifest in the flesh. The Christian faith is founded on *absolute historic truth!*

The Written Word of God

Thus far, none of the arguments presented have been based upon the teachings of the Bible. Many, of course, don't admit or believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God and thus appeals based on its authority have very little weight with them. Consequently, it has first been shown that the truth of Christianity is thoroughly and convincingly attested without resorting to Scripture.

But this by no means implies that we should not believe in the absolute inerrancy and authority of the Bible. We have seen the reasonableness and necessity of a revelation from God, and

that this revelation must be in Christianity. But it is the Bible that contains this revelation—in fact, the Bible *is* this revelation.

In support of such a tremendous assertion, it should be stressed that, whether inspired or not, the Bible is an absolutely unique book. It is the world's all-time best seller. More books have been written about it, even more books written against it, than any other book. It is the only book that has been proved to have a real heart interest for absolutely *every* class of people; it has been translated into more languages, it contains the finest literature, it plumbs the greatest depths, it teaches the highest ethics, it has had the greatest influence on civilization, and it has resulted in more transformed lives than any other book ever written since the dawn of history.

It contains sixty-six separate books, written by some forty different authors over a period of some fifteen hundred years in widely scattered localities and in every walk of life. The authors, with one possible exception, were all Jews; its chief characters are Jews, yet its appeal is universal. And, most marvelous, it is essentially one book, developing one grand theme from beginning to end. The central character is the Son of God. Jesus Christ, and the theme is the eternal plan of redemption for lost mankind.

It is not a book of science, yet contains scores of modern scientific truths, and no provable scientific errors. It records hundreds of marvelously, precisely fulfilled prophecies.

Surely, no one could expect man alone to produce such a book. No other book in the entire world or from all the ages is even remotely comparable. Then, is it not significant that its writers assert over and over and over again that what they wrote came from God? Something like four thousand times, in

various ways, appears the assertion that these are the words of God Himself.

Is it possible that the writers of this, the greatest Book of all the ages, were fools, fanatics or liars? No, they were what they claimed to be—“moved by the Holy Ghost,” and the Bible is the Word of the Living God!

There is one standard of ethics all through the Word—the character of God Himself. Sin in every form is ruthlessly condemned, nothing more so than the sin of hypocrisy and that of lying. Therefore, sinful, lying men could not, would not have written it of their own will. Neither could good men, if there *were* such, have written it, because the writers claim that God wrote it and good men would not lie. God alone could have given the Bible. Therefore, we must read it, study it, obey it constantly, if we would know and do the will of God!

Empirical Demonstration

In science or technology, the accuracy of a theory or a hypothesis is necessarily subject to doubt until put to experimental test. It must be recognized that in Christianity as well the ultimate demonstration of its truth awaits the return of Christ. In the meantime, however, it is empirically proven, millions of times over, that reception of Christ into the heart of an individual, by faith, transforms that individual into a new creature, old things having passed away, and all things having become new (II Corinthians 5: 17).

It is sadly true that not all professing Christians give any such evidence of a transformed life. Many consider themselves Christians on the basis of church membership or baptism or sacraments or a more or less Christian ethical standard. The existence of such no more disproves the reality of the thing than

does the imitation diamond disprove the genuine diamond. Even genuine diamonds may be very rough before cutting and polishing, and this is true of genuine Christians also.

But the certainty is this: there are great numbers of people, not yet perfect, but whose lives have been reclaimed from sin, whose affections have been transferred from the things of earth and of self to those of God, in whose hearts has been implanted the love of Christ toward God and toward the brethren. And these people, with absolute honesty and sincerity, testify that this change in nature and purpose resulted from their decision to believe in Christ Jesus as the eternal Son of God and their personal Saviour.

And so it is that God's eternal purpose for man is being worked out and fulfilled in the hearts of individuals who see their need of salvation and long for the lost fellowship with their Creator to be restored. When they have seen God in Christ taking the guilt of their sins upon Himself, then their gratitude and love has flown out toward Him in such a way that He can enter their very souls and restore them to His life and presence. The love of Christ constrains them, because they recognize that if "One died for all, then all were dead . . . that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again" (II Corinthians 5:14-15). Joyful obedience and holiness, therefore, spring not from fear of punishment or hope of reward, but from a heart of love and gratitude toward Him who is now not only their Creator, but also their Redeemer.

There is nothing else in all the world like this! None but the Lord Jesus Christ can make holy that which is evil, can bring peace and rest to those who are laboring and burdened, can give joy in sorrow, can bring the assurance of sins having been

cleansed and forgiven, can make union with God a reality, and can give everlasting life!

We have seen that the Christian hope is reasonable, and uniquely so. For those who have put their trust in Christ, it is not merely hope, it is certainty. But it is not enough to be mentally satisfied of its truth: one must personally appropriate the Lord Jesus to himself, believing in his heart and soul that Christ, and He alone, can save. “Come unto me,” says Jesus—and—“Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (Matthew 11:28, John 6:37).

But to reject God’s matchless love-gift, even to neglect it, is to prove that a person does not want to know and love God, that he could never be happy in the presence of God through the eternal ages, and that he prefers sin and self to God’s righteousness. Therefore, in perfect justice and mercy, God must keep such a one away from His presence forever. This, essentially, is hell—the eternal absence from the presence and the power of God, existence forever in a state of darkness and sin.

In the present economy, God gives each of us the privilege and the necessity of making the choice as to which course we want to follow. His love has given its ultimate expression in order that His holiness may be vindicated. Every individual in the world can be freely and forever saved if he wants to be, if he wants to know God and love and serve Him. “God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners. Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

But it is in this life only that the decision must be made. In a very real sense, God grants us life here on earth simply in

order that our decision may be made and our characters be given their eternal inclination. One minute after death, the truth of God's revelation will be instantaneously clear to each soul, but the decision, whatever it is, will have been made previously.

Therefore, may we make a final, personal appeal? God has given us a lifetime in which to choose, but there is no way of knowing how long will be our lifetime. Nothing is assured beyond the very moment. "Behold, now is the accepted time . . . now is the day of salvation" (II Corinthians 6:2). "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" (Hebrews 2:3).

What you should do right now is to bow before God and thank Him for His great love, receive the Lord Jesus as your eternal Saviour and King, then confess Him before men and seek henceforth to love and live for Him.

"If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead. thou shalt be saved" (Romans 10:9).

Other Easter Booklets of Interest

The Resurrection of Christ

The Wonder of It All

God's Plan for Your Life

Christ Our Life

Impact of the Empty Tomb

Better Than the Angels

The First Two Witnesses of the Resurrection

God's Way of Salvation

Institute for Creation Research

1806 Royal Lane

Dallas, Texas 75229

214/615-8300

Customer Service: 800/628-7640

www.icr.org



INSTITUTE for CREATION RESEARCH

1806 Royal Lane
Dallas, Texas 75229
214/615-8300

Customer Service: 800/628-7640

www.icr.org