

God and the Existence of Hell

APOLOGETICS

The reality of Hell

Of all the different doctrines in Christianity, Hell is the most burdensome to believe. In a world absent of Heaven and Hell, life's choices lose their infinite significance. The triumphs and failures, the victories and defeats, become relative and measured against each other, diminishing their inherent value. Without Hell, Heaven itself becomes a mundane and automatic destination, accessible to all without distinction or consequence.

The reality of Hell is firmly established in both Scripture and the teachings of the Orthodox Church. Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself spoke about Hell and warned of its existence. Dismissing this concept solely because it may be unbearable or unpleasant would set a dangerous precedent, leading to the potential rejection of other challenging or uncomfortable truths. To better understand the Orthodox Church's perspective on Hell, it's essential to explore the relevant beliefs and address common objections raised against the concept. The Orthodox Church holds that Hell is a real and distinct place, separate from both Heaven and the physical world. It's a realm of eternal torment and suffering, where unrepentant sinners and those who reject God's love and mercy will abide.

However, the Orthodox Church emphasizes that Hell is not merely a place of punishment but also a manifestation of God's love and justice. It serves as a reminder of the consequences of sin and the importance of striving for spiritual growth and communion with God. The existence of Hell underscores the significance of free will, as individuals have the choice to accept or reject God's grace and salvation.

Let us then understand what does the Orthodox Church believe with regards to hell? Then we will move on to the objections about hell and why they are not correct.

What is Hell?

The concept of hell is shrouded in mystery and often evokes fear and trepidation. Divine revelation, through scriptures and teachings, provides limited information about hell compared to heaven. This disparity can be understood from the perspective of human purpose and design. Humans were created for a heavenly existence, not for a place of torment.

Just as a travel agent would focus on promoting the beauty and amenities of a beach resort rather than the dangers of a swamp by the highway, divine revelation emphasizes the joys and blessings of heaven over the horrors of hell. This approach aligns with the belief that humans were intended for a life of love, joy, and eternal happiness.

However, it is important to acknowledge the existence of hell as a place of punishment and separation from God. While it was not intended for humans, the torments of hell were primarily designed for Satan and his fallen angels. Passages like Matthew 25:41 in the Bible indicate that hell was prepared specifically for the devil and his followers: “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels ...’ (Mt 25:41)

The concept of hell serves as a reminder of the consequences of straying from the path of righteousness and embracing evil. It highlights the importance of making moral choices and living a life aligned with divine principles. By emphasizing heaven as the ultimate destination for those who follow God's teachings, divine revelation guides individuals towards a life of virtue and spiritual growth.

What do we know about hell?

While no one truly desires to physically experience the nature of these torments, the Holy Scriptures provide us with numerous examples to deter us from sinning and guide us toward repentance.

Comparable to the heavenly reward, of which it is written, “eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man,” the same words can be applied to the punishment in hell. We may not fully comprehend its exact form, but certain elements have been revealed to us.

- **Binding of the hands and feet** (Matthew 22:13): This symbolizes the complete loss of freedom, representing the inability to act according to one's will or make choices that could potentially lead to liberation.
- **Outer darkness** (Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30): This signifies alienation from God, who is the true light and source of life. It portrays the profound isolation and despair experienced by those separated from the divine presence.
- **Weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth** (Matthew 13:42, 50): This imagery conveys a state of extreme guilt, sorrow, and anguish. It reflects the profound regret and remorse felt by those who realize the consequences of their actions and the magnitude of their sins.
- **Unquenchable darkness** (Mark 9:43-48): Jesus speaks of an unquenchable fire and worms that do not die, symbolizing severe pain and suffering. This fire is not physical but spiritual and signifies the lack of communion with God after death. The resurrection of our bodies will transform them to conform to the resurrected body of Christ, which will differ from our current earthly bodies.

Now let us ask. Is there any contradiction between the “unquenchable fire” and the “outer darkness”? The concepts of “unquenchable fire” and “outer darkness” in theological discourse may initially appear contradictory, presenting a paradox that challenges our understanding of eternal punishment. However, a closer examination reveals that these concepts are not mutually exclusive and serve distinct purposes in conveying the nature of eternal consequences. For instance, the microwave ovens generate heat without light. The concept of darkness in the Bible is often associated with evil, chaos,

and the absence of God's presence. In contrast, light is often associated with God, truth, and salvation. John 1:4, as mentioned in the input text, highlights this connection, stating that "In Him (Jesus) was life, and the life was the light of men." This verse reinforces the idea that God is the ultimate source of life and that separation from Him results in a state of darkness and spiritual death.

The description of "unquenchable fire" evokes the image of a perpetual and intense state of suffering, reminiscent of the torments experienced in earthly fires. Therefore, eternal punishment can be understood as both a state of intense suffering and a state of profound alienation from God's love and presence. The "unquenchable fire" symbolizes the perpetual consequences of sin, while "outer darkness" represents the absence of communion with the divine. These concepts serve as warnings against rejecting God's grace and the importance of seeking reconciliation with Him during our earthly existence. In this sense, eternal punishment is not simply a vindictive act of divine retribution but a natural consequence of choosing a path that leads away from God. Just as physical death is the result of a body's separation from its vital life force, eternal death, symbolized by the unquenchable fire and outer darkness, is the consequence of a soul's separation from its true source of life, which is God.

Hell: Eternal Torments

The concept of eternal torment in hell is a significant theological tenet within various religious texts, particularly in Christianity. Numerous verses in scripture provide evidence supporting the belief that the punishment for sin in the afterlife is everlasting. One prominent passage often cited is Matthew 25:41, where Jesus is depicted saying, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." This verse suggests that the fate of those who are condemned to hell is not temporary but extends infinitely.

Another notable verse is Revelation 14:11, which states, "And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest day or night." This passage emphasizes the relentless and unending nature of the suffering experienced by those in hell. The imagery of perpetual smoke rising conveys the idea that the torment is continuous, without any respite or relief.

There are many more verses in scripture that confirm that Torments of hell are eternal:

- "... Some to shame and everlasting contempt." (Dan 12:2)
- "These will go away into everlasting punishment." (Mt 25:46)
- "... to whom the gloom of darkness is reserved forever." (2 Pet 2:17)
- "Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them ... are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." (Jude 7)
- "... for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever." (Jude 13)
- "They will be tormented day and night forever and ever." (Rev 20:10)

The concept of eternal torment is often contrasted with the notion of purgatory, which is believed by some Christian denominations to be a temporary state of purification for souls before they enter heaven. However, the idea of everlasting punishment in hell stands in stark contrast to the concept of purgatory, as it suggests that there is no possibility of redemption or eventual salvation for those who are condemned. The Catholic Church believes in the existence of Purgatory, a place of temporary punishment or purification for souls who have died in a state of grace but have not yet fully atoned for

their sins. However, this doctrine lacks a clear Scriptural basis and contradicts certain passages in the Bible.

One such passage is found in Luke 23:43, where Jesus tells the thief crucified alongside Him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." This verse suggests that the thief would go directly to Paradise, or Heaven, upon his death, without undergoing any intermediate purification in Purgatory.

Another passage that contradicts the doctrine of Purgatory is 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: "And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord." (1 Thess 4:16,17). This passage implies that believers will immediately be with the Lord after death, without the need for any intervening period of purification.

The doctrine of Purgatory also contradicts the doctrine of Atonement and Redemption. If Purgatory exists, it implies that the blood of Jesus Christ was not sufficient to fully cleanse believers from their sins. This would undermine the central tenet of Christianity that salvation through the incarnation, death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ alone. If human sufferings were capable of satisfying the Divine Justice, then what was the need for Lord Jesus Christ's Incarnation and death on the cross?

The Bible portrays purging as an act of mercy and grace that takes place on Earth through the cleansing power of the water of baptism, not through tormenting flames of fire after death. Passages such as Ephesians 5:25-27 and Titus 3:5 emphasize the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in believers' lives, transforming them into the image of Christ.

Hell: Levels

In the realm of the afterlife, the concept of levels within hell holds profound significance. It suggests that the severity of punishment in the afterlife is not uniform but varies based on the actions and deeds of individuals during their earthly existence. This notion is rooted in the belief that divine judgment is just and equitable, considering the nuances and degrees of sin.

Scriptural evidence supports the existence of levels in hell. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus Christ speaks of the servant who knew his master's will but failed to act accordingly. "That servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few." (Lk 12:47; Lev 5:17) This servant will receive "many stripes" as punishment, implying a more severe consequence compared to someone who acted ignorantly or committed lesser offenses.

Similarly, in the Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of Luke, Jesus warns of "greater condemnation" for those who exploit widows and take advantage of the vulnerable. "Who devour widows' houses ... those will receive greater condemnation." (Mk 12:40; Lk 20:47) This differentiation in punishment suggests that certain sins are considered more heinous and warrant more severe retribution.

The Epistle of James highlights the responsibility of teachers and leaders, emphasizing that they will face a stricter judgment. "Let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a

stricter judgment.” (Jam 3:1) This underscores the idea that those who hold positions of influence and authority are held to a higher standard and will be accountable for their actions accordingly.

The Gospel of Matthew Chapter 10 provides further evidence of levels in hell by contrasting the fate of Tyre and Sidon with that of Capernaum. Jesus indicates that it will be "more tolerable" for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment compared to Capernaum, which had rejected his teachings and miracles. This comparison implies that the severity of punishment in hell is influenced by the extent to which individuals have embraced or rejected divine revelation.

Understanding the concept of levels in hell serves several purposes. It instills a sense of accountability and encourages individuals to reflect on their actions and strive for righteousness. It also provides a framework for understanding divine justice and the consequences of sin. Additionally, it emphasizes the need for repentance and transformation, as individuals can seek forgiveness and strive to align their lives with divine principles. By contemplating the existence of levels in hell, we gain a deeper appreciation for the intricate workings of divine judgment. It reminds us that every action and decision has consequences, and that true justice will ultimately prevail in the afterlife.

Hell: Absence of God’s Grace

It seems somewhat weird when we say God is in hell right? But God is everywhere. He is omnipresent, let’s read those verses.

- If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. (Psalm 139:8)
- Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. (Revelation 14:9-10)

While He is there, it’s going to be the lack of communication with Him that will be in Hell. Right now God is everywhere too, but do we ALL enjoy his joy, His peace, His grace the same way? Do some people not enjoy it at all? Are you living in the darkness of sin? They are. Same with hell.

How can a “Loving” God allow Hell?

In the parable of the unmerciful servant, we witness a profound interplay of justice and mercy. The servant begs his master for patience and forgiveness, promising to repay the debt he owes. Moved by compassion, the master releases and forgives the servant, demonstrating boundless mercy. “The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, ‘Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.” Matthew 18:26–27

However, when the same servant refuses to show compassion to his fellow servant, despite having received such mercy himself, the master's anger is kindled. He hands the unmerciful servant over to

the torturers until he can repay all that is due. This act of justice serves as a reminder of the consequences of unforgiveness and the need for reciprocal mercy.

‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’ And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.” Mt 18:32–35

Jesus concludes the parable with a sobering warning, emphasizing that our heavenly Father will treat us in the same way that we treat others. If we fail to forgive our brothers and sisters from our hearts, we risk incurring God's judgment and experiencing the full weight of justice. The parable invites us to consider the profound nature of God's love. Love is not merely a sentiment; it is an active force that manifests itself in both justice and mercy. Justice ensures that there are consequences for wrongdoing, while mercy offers the possibility of redemption and a fresh start.

Far from being incompatible, justice and mercy are two sides of the same coin. They are both essential expressions of God's love, working together to create a harmonious and just world. CS Lewis expresses: “What are you asking God to do? To wipe out their past sins and, at all costs, to give them a fresh start, smoothing every difficulty and offering every miraculous help? But He has done so, on Calvary.” Love is God's essence, justice is one of its works, and mercy is another. We think of mercy as the relaxation and compromising of justice, and justice as prior. Justice is simply a form that love takes, and on the cross, he expresses justice on Himself on behalf of His love for mankind.

In the book of Sirach, scripture puts forth clearly the wrath of God: “Even if there were only one stiff-necked person, it would be a wonder if he remained unpunished. For mercy and wrath are with the Lord; he is mighty to forgive—but he also pours out wrath. Great as is his mercy, so also is his chastisement; he judges a person according to his or her deeds. The sinner will not escape with plunder, and the patience of the godly will not be frustrated.” Sirach 16:11–13. God is a Just Perfect Judge. If someone has chosen to be evil, and God has been very patient with him, but the person still refuses to come back, God must put an end to that evil because He does not want others to suffer because of this person. This may not be out of utmost desire, He desires all men to be saved, but out of necessity - just like during Noah's flood. He thus puts an end to it. God is all knowing and knows if this person will repent or not. If given a million more years, will they change their way or not?

Forgiveness appeals to freedom; it must be freely given and freely accepted, like any gift. If we do not repent and ask for God's forgiveness, we do not receive it, not because God holds it back but because we hold ourselves back.

An Unfair “Punishment”

The word "punishment" carries a complex meaning, embracing two distinct interpretations. Positive law punishments are those chosen by

***“God is merciful
in his justice and
just in His
mercy.”***

HH Pope Shenouda III

the punisher, rather than being inherently necessary. They may be just and reasonable, but they are subject to change and are not absolute. For example, if you steal a cookie, the punisher might slap your hand, or if you drive at ninety miles per hour, your license might be taken away. These punishments are imposed externally and are intended to deter certain behaviors.

On the other hand, natural law punishments are intrinsic and stem from the natural consequences of one's actions. They are necessary and unavoidable, and they are not subject to the whims of the punisher. For instance, if you eat a cookie before supper, you may spoil your appetite. If you drive at ninety miles per hour, you will endanger your life. And if you jump off a cliff, you will likely die. These punishments are inherent to the actions themselves and serve as a natural deterrent to harmful or dangerous behaviors.

Positive law punishments are often imposed by authority figures, such as parents, teachers, or the government, to maintain order and enforce rules. They can be subjective, as the punisher has the discretion to choose the appropriate punishment. However, natural law punishments are objective and universal, as they are embedded in the laws of nature. They are not subject to human interpretation or manipulation.

Understanding the distinction between positive law and natural law punishments is important within the dialogue of mercy and justice. First, it helps individuals to recognize the different types of consequences that their actions may have. When looking at the fall, God instilled a natural law: “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 17 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) He defined and described a natural consequence to the action. If we eat the forbidden fruit of disobedience to God's will, divorcing our will and spirit from God's, then the inevitable result will be disaster and death, for God is the source of all joy and life.

A “Punishment” not fitting for the crime

Those who object to hell's over severity do not see what sin really is. They probably look at sin externally, sociologically, legalistically, as "behaving badly." They fail to see the real horror of sin and the real greatness and goodness and joy of the God who is refused in every sin. We all fail to appreciate this.

Eternity is not more time, or even endless time. It is another dimension than time, just as time is another dimension than space. The relation between earthly choices and eternal rewards or punishments is not like the relation between crimes and prison sentences, but like the relation between a foundation and a building. Hell's punishment fits sin's crime because sin is divorce from God. The punishment fits the crime because the punishment is the crime. Saying no to God means no God.

Some have objected saying that a “short-lived” sin should not be punished with eternal punishment. In this case, neither should the reward of the righteous be eternal, for the same analogy and relationship exists between this joy and the worthiness of the deeds. There is no opportunity for repentance in the afterlife, sins will remain with the person eternally and thus the torments will also continue forever.

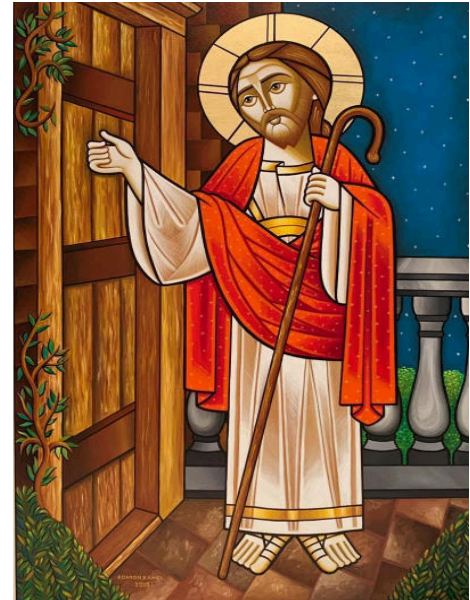
Let's look at an example of Civil Law. Let's say someone murdered a person and it took them 15 minutes, does this mean you get to stay in prison for only 15 minutes? We hear of many cases when someone, due to the sins he/she has committed at one point or another, received a punishment which lasted many years or even until the end of his/her life. The duration of time in which the evil act itself was committed does not necessarily commensurate with the duration of the imposed punishment. Someone may spend years in prison for a fifteen-minute crime.

Contrary to Human Freedom

We do, and therefore can, freely choose hell over heaven. We do this in principle in every sin. We do not want or explicitly choose sin's "wages," sin's inevitable punishment-banishment from the paradise of God's presence-but we do choose the sin and falsely hope to escape the punishment.

If you look at the icon of Jesus knocking on the door, you'll notice something....what is it? There's no door knob. The door can only be opened on the inside.

C.S Lewis has a nice quote....the doors of hell are locked from the inside. Not literally of course, but meaning that we choose that willingly chose it and will not leave. They have gotten the freedom they asked for and are enslaved to themselves.



Does the fear of hell remove free choice? Does fry contradict free? No more than the fear of falling off a cliff removes the free choice to skate close to the edge or to avoid it. If the threat "repent or you'll fry" removed free will, then all would repent. The threat does not remove free choice.

"In all our discussions of hell we should keep steadily before our eyes the possible damnation, not of our enemies nor our friends ... but of ourselves. This chapter is not about your wife or son, nor about Nero or Judas Iscariot; it is about you and me." - C.S. Lewis The Problem of Pain

Contrary to Omnipotence

The question of why God, with his limitless power, does not destroy hell or ensure that no one goes there raises profound theological and philosophical issues. Three primary options emerge: destroying hell, annihilating the souls in hell, or preventing the conception of hell-bound persons.

1. Destroying Hell:

Destroying hell would mean eliminating one of the two options available to individuals through free choice: choosing God or rejecting Him. If hell does not exist and there is no separation from God, then all individuals would be compelled to choose God. However, this would essentially destroy free will, as individuals would no longer have the ability to make meaningful choices.

2. Annihilating the Souls in Hell:

Annihilating the souls in hell would involve destroying something God created. Even though these souls have made choices that led them to hell, God created them with the potential for salvation. Annihilating them would be akin to erasing a part of God's creation, which goes against the notion of God's love and mercy.

3. Preventing the Conception of Hell-Bound Persons:

Preventing the conception of hell-bound persons would effectively be another way of destroying free choice. By predetermining who will and will not exist, God would be eliminating the possibility of individuals making their own choices and shaping their destinies. This would undermine the purpose of human existence and reduce individuals to mere pawns in a predetermined game.

The objection assumes that a world without hell is possible and questions why God did not create such a world. However, the response is that God did indeed create a world without separation from Himself. God did not create hell; it is a consequence of the choices made by individuals who freely reject His love and grace.



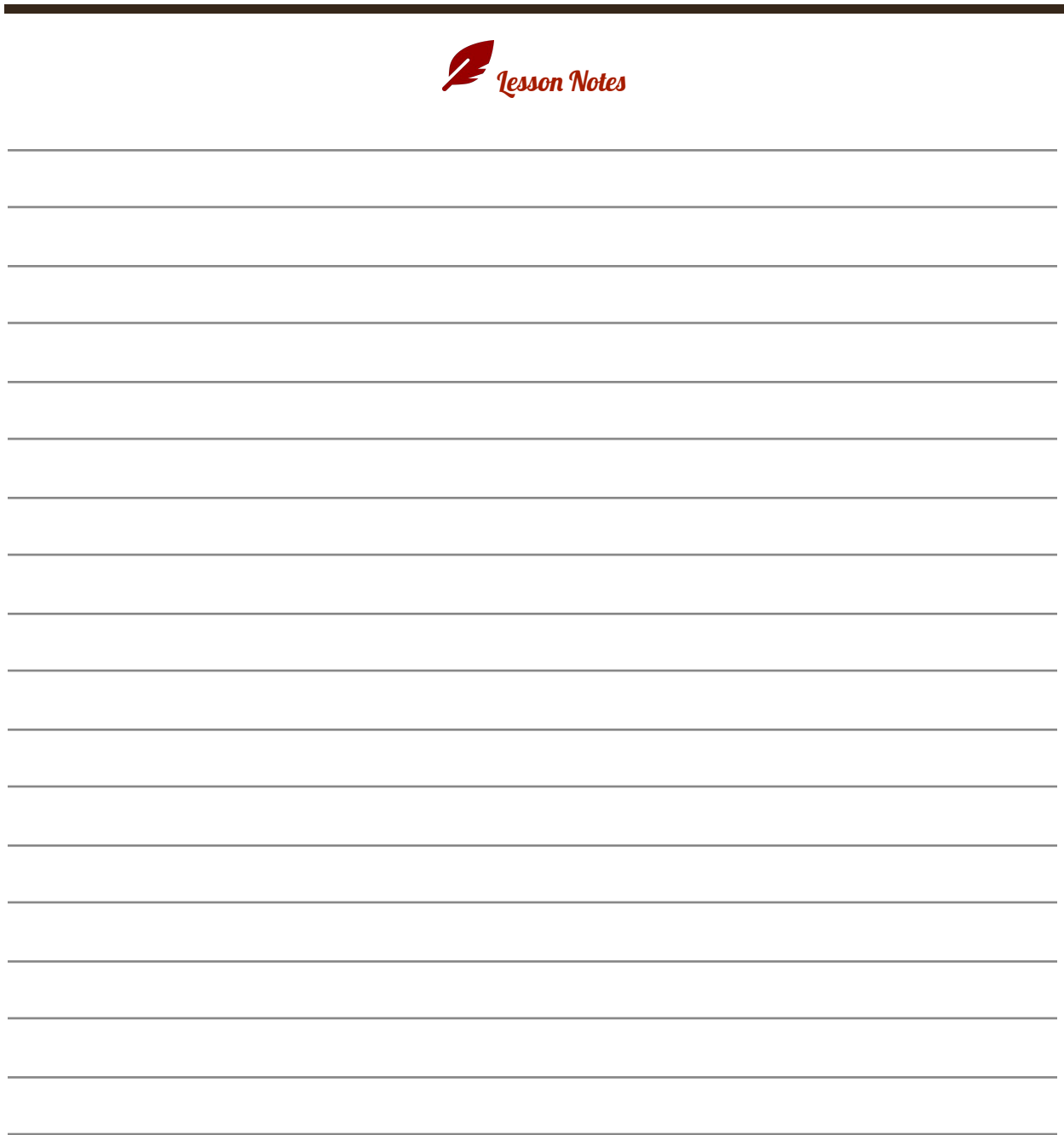
Review Questions

1. Who said, "God is merciful in his justice and just in His mercy."? (A: Pope Shenouda III)
2. Provide an example of God's justice. (A: The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant)
3. A God of love cannot *make* or even tolerate such a chamber. True or false? (A: False)
4. God wants everyone to be saved. True or false?. (A: True)
5. If God's power has no limit, why does He not destroy hell or arrange for no one to go there? (A: God did not create separation from himself. God did not create hell. We did)



Books & References

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Plurism & Post-Modernism: Do we all believe in the Same God?

APOLOGETICS

The Only Way

At the core of every church, transcending various activities, events, and services, lies an unwavering purpose: the salvation of souls. This fundamental mission is rooted in the belief that Jesus Christ is the sole path to eternal life. It is a conviction that propelled the Disciples and Apostles to embark on a lifelong journey of preaching and sacrifice after Christ's death and resurrection. Their unwavering dedication stemmed from the understanding that if salvation could be found through other means, their mission would have been rendered unnecessary. St. Paul evoked this very message when speaking to the Corinthians: *"For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable."* (1 Corinthians 15:16-19).

The gospel message, encapsulated in John 3:16, emphasizes the profound love of God in sending His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, as a sacrificial offering for the world: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life"(John 3:16). Through faith in Christ, individuals can escape eternal condemnation and embrace everlasting life. This central tenet of Christianity underscores the belief that salvation is not a mere philosophical concept but a transformative reality accessible only through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

The Disciples and Apostles spent the rest of their lives after Christ's death and Resurrection, traveling, suffering, and preaching. Salvation is only found in Jesus Christ and it is for this reason that the disciples accepted all these circumstances and mustered the courage to preach to Jews and Gentiles. Our mantra as servants is: "Christ is the only way to heaven". As servants of Christ, it becomes our sacred duty to faithfully proclaim this message to the world and to those we serve. It is not simply a matter of adhering to religious rituals or engaging in charitable works, but rather, it is about extending the invitation of salvation to all who are lost and in need of hope. Our words and actions should consistently reflect the love and grace of Christ, drawing others to experience the transformative power of His sacrifice.

Furthermore, as we engage in various ministries and outreach programs, it is essential to remember that our ultimate goal is to lead people to a saving faith in Jesus Christ. While providing practical assistance and addressing temporal needs is important, it should never overshadow the spiritual

dimension of our service. It is through the proclamation of the gospel and the guidance of the Holy Spirit that individuals can truly find lasting peace and purpose in their lives.

In a world often characterized by uncertainty and despair, the message of salvation through Jesus Christ offers a beacon of hope and eternal life. Let us, as servants of Christ, embrace our sacred calling with unwavering commitment, boldly proclaiming the gospel and leading others to the saving grace found only in Jesus Christ.

Pluralism & Relativism

The concepts of pluralism and relativism have, for a long time, served as obstacles to the apprehension of Truth in our society. These ideas, often intertwined and deeply ingrained in contemporary thought, pose a significant challenge to the foundational principles of Christianity and the notion of absolute truth.

Pluralism, characterized by the coexistence of multiple principles and sources of authority, suggests that there is no single, objective truth but rather a mosaic of truths that vary depending on individual perspectives and cultural contexts. This mindset undermines the idea of universal truths and promotes the notion that all beliefs are equally valid. In the realm of religion, pluralism leads to the belief that all religions are essentially the same and that there is no one true path to salvation.

Relativism, on the other hand, posits that knowledge, truth, and morality are relative to cultural, societal, and historical contexts. It asserts that there is no absolute or objective standard of truth but rather a spectrum of truths that are contingent upon the subjective experiences and beliefs of individuals. In the context of religion, relativism implies that all religious beliefs and interpretations are equally valid and that there is no inherent superiority or inferiority among them.

The combination of pluralism and relativism has had a profound impact on the religious landscape of our society. It has fostered an environment in which truth is seen as subjective and provisional, rather than objective and immutable. This has led to a widespread skepticism toward religious doctrines and a reluctance to embrace any particular faith as the ultimate source of truth.

For Christianity, the implications of pluralism and relativism are significant. The Christian faith is predicated on the belief in the existence of an objective Truth revealed through the teachings of Jesus Christ. It asserts that Christianity is not merely one among many equally valid religions but rather the exclusive way to salvation. The relativist and pluralist mindset, however, challenges this exclusivity and opens the door to a more fluid and inclusive understanding of religious truth.

The tension between Christianity and the prevailing cultural ethos of pluralism and relativism raises profound questions about the nature of truth, the role of faith, and the foundations of human existence. As Christians, we are called to uphold the truth of the Gospel in a world that increasingly embraces a relativistic and pluralistic worldview. This requires a thoughtful and compassionate engagement with those who hold different beliefs, a willingness to listen and learn, and a steadfast commitment to the truth as revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Practical Questions and Application

Morality transcends individual perspectives and societal norms. It is not something that can be determined solely by personal beliefs or political correctness. Just because a person is sincere in their beliefs does not make those beliefs factually correct or ethically sound. Consider the following examples:

1. **Chemistry:** If a person sincerely believes that the Earth is flat, it does not make their belief scientifically accurate. Chemistry is a well-established scientific discipline with extensive evidence and experimentation supporting its principles. It is not a matter of personal opinion but a body of knowledge based on empirical data.
2. **Slavery:** Historically, many individuals held sincere beliefs that slavery was morally acceptable. However, the abolition of slavery was a major moral breakthrough, and it is now widely recognized as a heinous institution that violates fundamental human rights. Morality is not determined by the prevalence of a belief but by its alignment with universal principles of justice and equality.
3. **Holocaust:** The Holocaust stands as one of the darkest chapters in human history, characterized by the systematic genocide of millions of Jews and other marginalized groups. Denying or minimizing the Holocaust is not only factually incorrect but also morally reprehensible. It trivializes the suffering of victims and perpetuates harmful historical revisionism.

Being politically correct with our Christian faith does not mean we are factually correct. In all three of these examples you would not see someone able to say any of the following.

- "It doesn't matter what you believe about Chemistry as long as you are sincere in what you believe"
- "It doesn't matter what you believe about Slavery as long as you are true in what you believe"
- "It doesn't matter what you believe to be true about the Holocaust as long as you are true in what you believe"

This concept fits nowhere else, so why should we apply it to matters of life and death? Why take a gamble on our eternity? It is crucial to engage in thoughtful and informed discussions based on evidence, ethical principles, and respect. However, taking a gamble on our eternity by adhering to blindly held beliefs without critical reflection is a dangerous and potentially harmful approach.

Morality requires us to strive for truth, compassion, and justice. It demands that we challenge our assumptions, question prevailing narratives, and seek a deeper understanding of the world around us. "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." (1 Kings 18:21). Relying solely on personal beliefs or political correctness, without regard for objective truth can lead us astray and undermine the very foundation of a just and humane society. "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other." (Matthew 6:24) "He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad." (Matthew 12:30)

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- Something cannot be one thing and another thing at the same time and in the same way.
 - An object cannot be a sphere and a rectangle at the same time.
 - Can something be true and false at the same time and in the same way?
 - “For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.” – 1 Corinthians 14:33
 - Can the Eucharist be the true body and blood of Christ and also be a symbol at the same time?
 - If the Words in the Bible were ambiguous, there would be a valid argument to be made.
 - The words of God in scripture however do not falter; He is clear about Truth and Non-Truth.

The Concept of Two Roads

From the mundane choices we make each day to the profound decisions that shape our destiny, we are constantly faced with a myriad of options. And just as in life, where we are presented with binary choices like right or wrong, left or right, good or bad, the concept of religion also presents us with two distinct paths: heaven or hell. Religion, in its various forms, elaborates on this duality, much like other institutions in society. In the same way that a company establishes guiding principles and "best practices" to dictate the preferred way of conducting business, religion provides a framework of beliefs and moral codes that guide individuals' thoughts and actions. The "right" way, as defined by the company or religious doctrine, becomes the standard by which everything else is deemed "wrong."

It is intriguing to consider why religion and God cannot function in a similar manner to successful individuals in the world, who have found the "right" path or the optimal way of doing things. In the realm of business, companies strive to achieve efficiency, profitability, and growth by implementing well-defined processes and strategies. Similarly, successful people often attribute their achievements to their ability to make sound decisions, develop effective habits, and cultivate a positive mindset. If we were to apply this logic to religion and God, it implies that there is a "right" way to believe, worship, and live in accordance with divine principles. This would imply the existence of a singular, universally accepted path to salvation or enlightenment.

In the profound words of St. Augustine, found in his seminal work "City of God," two distinct loves shape individuals and societies: the love of self and the love of God. The love of self, driven by selfish desires and worldly pursuits, leads to the creation of an earthly city. This love is characterized by division, conflict, and a focus on material possessions. In contrast, the love of God, guided by divine grace and a desire for spiritual fulfillment, gives rise to a heavenly city. This love cultivates unity, compassion, and a longing for transcendence. St. Augustine invites us to examine our hearts and reflect on what we love, for it reveals the city we truly belong to: “Two loves have formed two cities. The love of self has formed the earthly city; the love of God has formed the heavenly one. Let us examine ourselves to what we love and we’ll find which city we belong to” – St. Augustine: City of God

In C.S. Lewis's poignant work "The Great Divorce," the author presents a similar dichotomy in the human experience: “There are 2 kinds of people in the world: those who say to God ‘Thy will be done’ and those that God will say to in the end ‘Thy will be done.’” The former group embraces God's

sovereignty and finds fulfillment in aligning their desires with the divine plan. They recognize the limitations of their own understanding and trust in the wisdom of a higher power. The latter group, however, clings to their own will, driven by pride and a desire for control. They fail to recognize the true source of joy and fulfillment, and ultimately experience the consequences of their choices.

These two perspectives offer a profound reflection on the nature of human existence. Our choices, both consciously and unconsciously made, determine the trajectory of our lives and shape our ultimate destiny. By examining what we love and to whom we surrender our will, we can gain a deeper understanding of our identity and purpose in the world. The choice between self-love and love of God, between our own will and the will of a higher power, is a fundamental decision that has profound implications for our present and eternal existence.

What is the Christian Goal?

The Christian goal is to achieve unity with Jesus Christ. This journey begins with salvation through Christ and culminates in perfection when we join Him in Heaven. Heaven represents the ultimate realization of being one with Christ. Every aspect of religious practice is designed to facilitate this unity.

At the core of service in the church, the goal is to teach the requirements for being worthy of Communion, which symbolizes oneness with Christ. This process involves repentance, prayer, confession, baptism, following the Canon, and ultimately receiving Communion. As the Nicene Creed states, "We confess one baptism for the remission of sins." Being one with Christ involves a transformation of our hearts and minds. It is a process of becoming more like Christ in our thoughts, words, and actions. We strive to embody His love, compassion, and forgiveness in our daily lives.

Achieving unity with Christ requires a commitment to spiritual growth and discipleship. We engage in prayer, Bible study, and fellowship with other believers to deepen our understanding of His teachings. Through these practices, we grow in faith and develop a closer relationship with Him. The Christian goal is not merely a destination but an ongoing journey. It is a life lived in pursuit of Christ, seeking to know Him more deeply and to reflect His character in all that we do. By surrendering our lives to Him and following His guidance, we experience the joy and peace that come from being one with Christ.

Is Christ the Only Way to Heaven?

The Bible proclaims that the path to salvation lies exclusively through Jesus Christ. In John 14:6, Jesus unequivocally declares, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." This profound statement affirms that Jesus is not simply one among many ways to salvation but the sole and unique way. No individual, regardless of their stature, accomplishments, knowledge, or personal righteousness, can reach God the Father except through Jesus.

The exclusivity of Jesus' role in salvation is rooted in His unique nature and accomplishments. He is the only One who has descended from heaven and returned there, signifying His divine origin and authority (John 3:13). Furthermore, Jesus stands alone as the only person in human history to have lived a perfect life, free from sin (Hebrews 4:15). His sinless life serves as the perfect sacrifice that atones for the sins of humanity (1 John 2:2; Hebrews 10:26). In addition, Jesus uniquely fulfilled the

prophecies and requirements of the Old Testament Law and the Prophets, leaving no doubt about His divine mission (Matthew 5:17).

But Jesus' significance extends beyond His sinless life and sacrificial death. He is the only one to have conquered death forever, shattering the chains of mortality and paving the way for eternal life for those who believe in Him (Hebrews 2:14-15). Jesus is also the sole Mediator between God and humanity, acting as the bridge that connects us with the divine (1 Timothy 2:5). And it is Jesus alone whom God has exalted to the highest place of honor and authority in the universe (Philippians 2:9). The exclusivity of Jesus as the way to salvation is further emphasized through His prayer in John 17:3, where He implores, "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." This prayer reveals that eternal life in heaven is made possible solely through Christ.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus faced moments when even His followers were tempted to abandon Him, seeking alternative sources of salvation. In John 6:67, Jesus confronts the Twelve with a pointed question: "Do you also want to go away?" Peter's response encapsulates the understanding of Jesus' unique role: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (John 6:68-69).

In a world of diverse beliefs and claims of spiritual truth, the Bible's emphatic declaration of Jesus as the exclusive way to salvation stands as a firm foundation for Christian faith. It is through Jesus Christ alone that individuals can find forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, and the promise of eternal life.

- "For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him," – Hebrews 2:2-3
- "...without shedding of blood there is no remission...so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation." – Hebrews 9:22,28
- "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?" Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day...He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him....Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, "Does this offend you? From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more." – John 6:51-54,56,60,66

Nineveh's Example

In the realm of divine providence, the story of Jonah and the city of Nineveh serves as a profound testament to God's compassion and His desire for all people to find salvation. It challenges the notion

that only those who know and believe in God are eligible for His grace and mercy. Nineveh, a bustling metropolis renowned for its grandeur and opulence, was a hub of pagan worship and moral depravity. Its inhabitants had turned away from the true God and embraced a life of idolatry and wickedness. Yet, despite their spiritual blindness, God's heart yearned for their redemption.

In an unexpected twist, God commissioned the prophet Jonah to undertake a challenging mission—to travel to Nineveh and deliver a message of impending judgment unless the people repented of their evil ways. Jonah, initially reluctant and filled with prejudice against the gentiles, reluctantly embarked on his journey. As Jonah approached the gates of Nineveh, a profound transformation took place. The people of the city, from the king to the common folk, were gripped by a wave of genuine repentance. They humbled themselves, fasted, and cried out to God for mercy. Their heartfelt contrition and willingness to turn away from their sinful ways moved the heart of God, and He spared them from destruction.

The story of Jonah and Nineveh highlights several important truths. First, it underscores God's universal love and compassion for all people, regardless of their religious beliefs or ethnic background. God desires the salvation of all humanity and longs for every individual to come to a saving knowledge of Him. Second, the narrative challenges the idea that God is a vengeful and capricious deity who delights in punishing His creation. Instead, it portrays Him as a patient and merciful Father who is slow to anger and eager to forgive those who repent of their sins. Third, the story emphasizes the power of repentance and the transformative impact it can have on individuals and communities. When people genuinely turn away from their sinful ways and seek God's forgiveness, He is faithful to cleanse them, restore them, and grant them a new beginning.

If people could stumble their way into heaven without knowing and believing in God, Jonah would not have been sent. Nineveh was a gentile country, but God cared for them as much as He cared for the Jews. “Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.” “But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.” (Matthew 12:38-41). Jesus came to do for the Jews, what Jonah came to do for the gentiles. Why would God destroy a city if it didn't know better?

Moreover, the account of Jonah and Nineveh foreshadows the coming of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. Jesus, the "greater than Jonah," came to offer salvation not just to the Jews but to people of all nations and backgrounds. Through His sacrificial death and resurrection, He opened the door for all who believe in Him to receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life. The story of Jonah and Nineveh serves as a timeless reminder of God's boundless love, His desire for the salvation of all people, and the transformative power of genuine repentance. It invites us to embrace God's grace and mercy, turn away from our sinful ways, and experience the abundant life He offers to all who come to Him in faith.

Revelation

In the realm of Revelation, a profound vision unfolds, unveiling the ultimate destiny of humanity. An angel soars through the heavens, bearing the eternal gospel, a message that reverberates across the earth, reaching every nation, tribe, tongue, and people. With a voice that shakes the foundations of the world, the angel proclaims, "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come. Worship the Creator of heaven and earth, the seas, and the springs of water."

The angel's message carries a solemn warning, heralding the imminent judgment of God. Yet, amidst the impending doom, a beacon of hope shines forth. In Revelation 3:10, a promise is given to those who have faithfully persevered in their faith. They shall be spared from the hour of trial that will engulf the world, a time of testing that will separate the true believers from the pretenders. The revelation continues, revealing the triumphant return of Jesus Christ, accompanied by clouds and visible to every eye. Even those who pierced Him will witness His glorious advent, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn. The day of reckoning has arrived, and the ultimate judgment will be pronounced.

In the chilling climax of Revelation, those whose names are not found written in the Book of Life are cast into the lake of fire: "And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire." (Revelation 20:15) This irreversible fate serves as a stark reminder of the consequences of rejecting God's grace and mercy. The revelation underscores the urgent need for repentance and a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ, the only way to escape eternal condemnation.

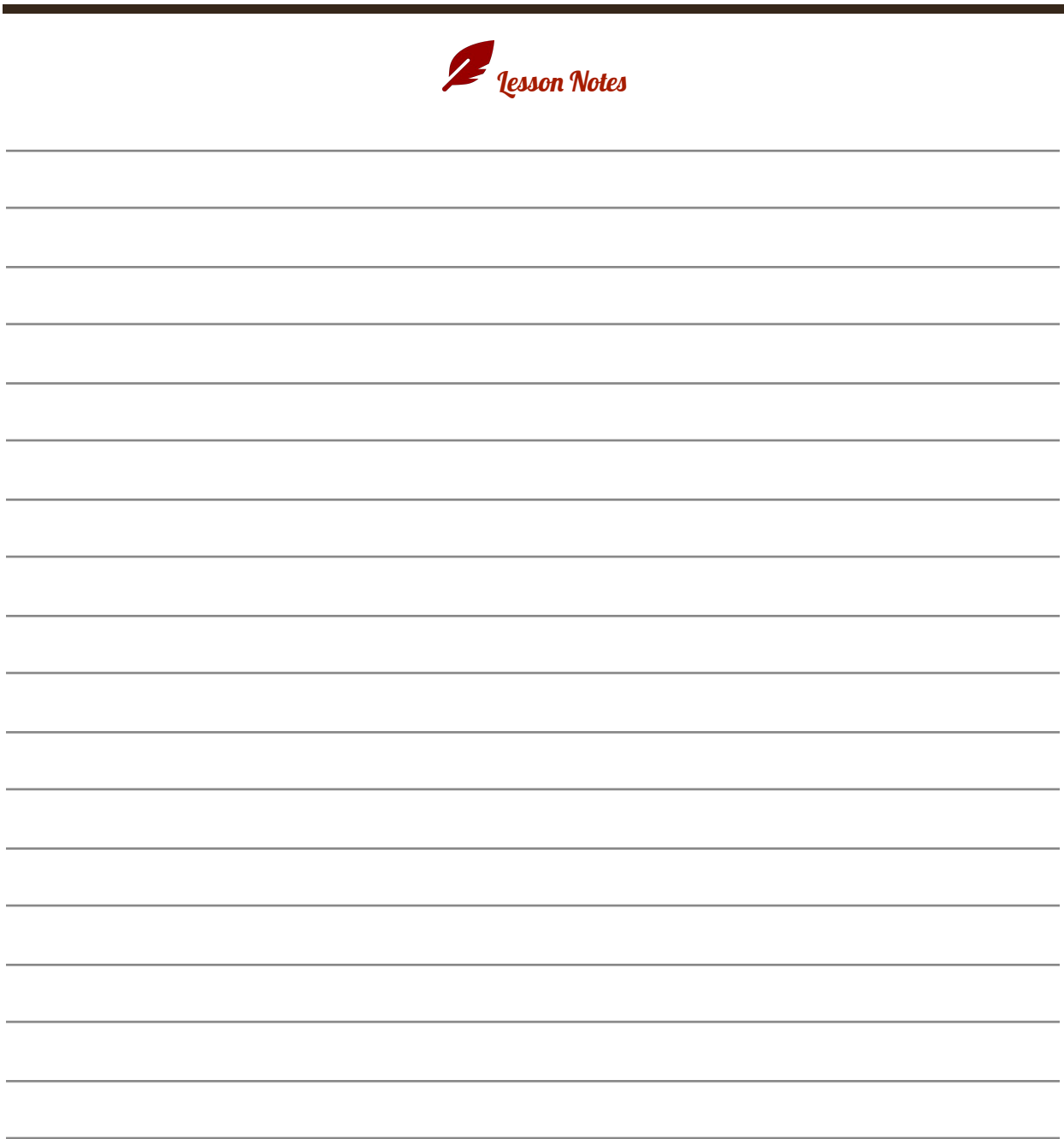
Throughout history, the message of Jesus has transformed millions of lives. Countless individuals have experienced radical change through their encounter with Jesus Christ. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, they have devoted their lives to serving Him, sharing the good news of salvation with others, and standing firm in their faith even in the face of adversity and persecution.

The revelation of Jesus culminates in a glorious vision of the new heaven and the new earth, a realm where righteousness dwells and God's presence is eternally experienced. In this eternal paradise, pain, sorrow, and death are no more, as God wipes away every tear from every eye. The faithful, having overcome the trials and tribulations of this world, will inherit eternal life and dwell in the presence of God forever. As we navigate the complexities and challenges of life, let us find comfort and strength in the revelation of Jesus Christ. By aligning our lives with His teachings, seeking His forgiveness, and living in accordance with His will, we can experience the transformative power of His love and the promise of eternal life that awaits us. The revelation of Jesus is a timeless treasure, a source of hope and guidance for all who embrace it.



Review Questions

1. What is the purpose of the church? (A: saving souls)
2. All religions are the same. True or false? (A: False)
3. Morality is relative to the person. True or false? (A: False)
4. Provide two references that show Christ as the only way to heaven. (A: John 14:6; Hebrews 4:15)
5. God cared for the gentiles as much as He cared for the Jews. True or false? (A: True)



Creation and Evolution

APOLOGETICS

Human-first ideologies

Charles Darwin lived from 1809 to 1882, during a period when the concept of evolution was relatively new. Even today, evolution continues to be a subject of debate and controversy. In the context of human history, the development of evolutionary theory coincides with a gradual shift away from theocentric ideologies, particularly Christianity. As humanity progressed and gained a deeper understanding of the natural world, various heresies emerged, challenging traditional religious beliefs.

Examining the proponents of evolutionary theory reveals a pattern of individuals who embraced ideologies that prioritized human self-interest over divine guidance. For example, leaders like Lenin, Stalin, and Marx, who advocated for communist ideologies, espoused a human-centric worldview that often led to the suppression of religious beliefs. Similarly, Adolf Hitler, with his twisted ideology of racial superiority, exemplified the dangers of ideologies that place humanity at the center of existence. These ideologies stand in direct opposition to the core tenets of Christianity and theistic theology. Relativism, pluralism, communism, and atheism all challenge the notion of a transcendent divine being and emphasize the importance of human autonomy and worldly concerns.

It is important to note that many scientists and thinkers who contributed to the development of evolutionary theory were also devout believers, seeking to reconcile scientific knowledge with their religious convictions. The complex relationship between evolution and Christianity has been a subject of ongoing discussion and debate, with various perspectives and interpretations emerging over time.

Darwin's theory of Evolution

Darwin's theory of evolution put forth the idea that all life shares a common ancestry and has transformed over time through gradual, incremental changes. At the heart of this theory is the principle of natural selection, which proposes that in a competitive environment, organisms better adapted to their surroundings are more likely to survive, reproduce, and pass on their advantageous traits to their offspring. Over vast spans of time, this process of natural selection leads to the accumulation of beneficial adaptations and the gradual divergence of species. In the case of human evolution, Darwin suggested that our species, *Homo sapiens*, descended from a series of ancestral primates through a gradual process of natural selection. This evolutionary journey began with early primates like monkeys, progressed to primitive humans such as *Homo erectus*, and ultimately led to the emergence of modern humans.

Similarly, Darwin's theory extends to the evolution of fish. According to his theory, fish evolved from simpler aquatic creatures, such as amphibians and reptiles, over long periods of time. This

evolutionary process involved the development of various adaptations, such as fins, scales, and gills, which facilitated survival in aquatic environments.

The Father of Lies

In the tapestry of human history, the figure of Satan has often been intertwined with notions of deception and falsehood. It is believed that Satan played a pivotal role in humanity's downfall, tempting Eve with the forbidden fruit and leading her and Adam astray. In a similar vein, the theory of evolution, which serves as the cornerstone of our understanding of the natural world, has also faced scrutiny due to instances of deceptive claims and misinterpretations. The realm of scientific research, which is often viewed as a bastion of truth and objectivity, is not immune to such instances of misinformation and deceit. Throughout history, there have been notable cases of scientific fraud that have cast a shadow on the integrity of the field. One striking example is the infamous "Nebraska Man" incident.

In the early 1900s, scientists working in Nebraska discovered a single tooth embedded in a rock formation. Eager to make a significant contribution to the field of paleoanthropology, they hastily extrapolated an entire narrative based on this limited evidence. They envisioned a majestic prehistoric human species, dubbed "Nebraska Man," and even speculated on the appearance of both the male and female members of this supposed species. However, as DNA testing technology advanced, scientists were able to determine that the tooth actually belonged to an extinct pig, exposing the erroneous claims made by the original researchers.

Another instance of alleged scientific fraud involves the Piltdown Man, a combination of a human skull and an ape's jaw. For over four decades, this fraudulent reconstruction was presented in textbooks as evidence of early human evolution. It was only in 1953 that this chimera was exposed as a hoax, shattering the illusions it had created.

A more enduring and consequential case of scientific deception dates back to 1856. In that year, bones belonging to a human with arthritis were presented as evidence of a new species, named "Australopithecus africanus." This "discovery," made in 1924, was hailed as the missing link between apes and humans. However, in 1973, an African geologist named Ronald Clarke demonstrated that the bones had been incorrectly attributed and had no connection to early human evolution. Despite this revelation, "Australopithecus africanus" remains listed as a valid species in some science books today, perpetuating an inaccurate narrative about human origins.

It is important to emphasize that these instances of misinformation were not merely the result of honest mistakes. Rather, they involved the deliberate manipulation of evidence and the creation of narratives that were not supported by the available facts.

The Homo-sapiens Lie

There is not enough evidence to answer the basic science questions of when, where, and how homo sapiens "evolved." The bones being found are sometimes a mile apart, and yet for the sake of a narrative being combined to say we found a new intermediary species. Sin started with Satan's lie and has not changed ever since; it has just been adjusted to our modern society. Because of these lies,

there are holes in the arguments, such as where is the proof then that chimpanzees evolved? Where are their preliminary ancestors and bones?

Evolution is still a theory, but its proponents still claim it as fact although even if it were true would be very hard to prove. They say that instead of being created in the image of God we evolved from the descendents of monkeys. Satan is always trying to bring down humanity to the lowest possible point because He knows how much God loves us: “every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.” (Matthew 7:17) So if we judge this theory by its fruit, we are left to conclude that this tree should be cut down as Christ says “every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” (Matthew 7:19)

Contra Evolution

The fundamental laws of science, such as the law of conservation of energy, unequivocally state that something cannot arise from nothing. This principle implies that the creation of anything, including life, requires a source or a creator. Science has yet to provide evidence supporting the spontaneous generation of life from non-living matter. For example, dirt in a backyard, despite being composed of various chemical elements, does not transform into trees and flowers on its own. Plants originate from seeds, cuttings, or grafts derived from existing plants, underscoring the need for a source of life. While it is conceivable that humans may one day synthesize a living cell in a laboratory using raw chemicals, such an achievement would merely reinforce the notion that intelligence is a prerequisite for creating life. It would not, however, provide evidence for the theory of evolution.

Charles Darwin's theory of evolution posits that all life forms on Earth share a common ancestry and have undergone gradual changes over millions of years. However, the timeframe proposed by Darwin is too vast to be observed within a human lifetime. If evolution were true, one would expect to find fossil evidence demonstrating the gradual transition from one species to another. Yet, the fossil record predominantly reveals the sudden appearance of distinct species, rather than intermediate forms. Instead of unlimited transitional forms, nature exhibits well-defined and distinct species.

The theory of natural selection, a key component of evolutionary theory, fails to provide a plausible explanation for how one type of creature can evolve into an entirely different kind. Genetic coding plays a crucial role in determining the characteristics of an organism, and without the necessary genetic information, the transformation of one species into another becomes highly improbable.

Mutations destroy genetic information and produce creatures more handicapped than the original, with the exception of bacteria, since the purpose of their mutation makes them more resilient but even in this regard, they remain bacterium. “To suppose that the eye with all its inimitable contrivances for adjusting the focus to different distances, for admitting different amounts of light, and for the correction of spherical and chromatic aberration, could have been formed by natural selection, seems, I freely confess, absurd in the highest degree.” (Goldschmidt: Material Basis of Evolution, Yale University Press)

Due to a lack of evidence of how the first living creature evolved, and with the lack of current proof of all the transitory species over the years, evolution is at best still ‘a theory,’ not a proven fact, as it lacks a body of supporting evidence. Despite this, most people believe evolution to be true. Faith, rather

than facts, then holds the theory of evolution. Regarding Darwin's theory, Fred Hoyle states that the evolution of nothing to something is laughable, as, "that is about as ridiculous and improbable as the proposition that a tornado, blowing through a junkyard, could assemble a Boeing 747." If we look at the evidence presented to us, we see that the belief in evolution as an explanation for our origin, requires far more faith than the belief in a creator because of all the evidence around us that there is truly a 'designer.' "The heavens declare the glory of God. And the firmament shows His handiwork." (Psalm 19:1)

What Does the Bible Say?

The Bible explicitly tells us that God is the creator: "then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good." (Genesis 1:31) He is the Alpha and the Omega: "you are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created." (Revelation 4:11)

"By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible." (Hebrews 11:3) The science community still states there are many things not fully understood about the origins of life. However, there is no excuse, "for since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse." (Romans 1:20)

God's concept of time is different from our own. The word 'day' used in Genesis does not mean '24 hours,' but instead a time frame that could be millions of years. The solar system was not created until the fourth "day", so time, as we now know it, did not exist until then.

The Bible also uses the word 'day' to mean different things: "the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and notable day of the Lord," (Acts 2:20) where 'day' here means eternity. We are also reminded that "with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." (2 Peter 3:8)

Day seven of creation did not end with 'so the evening and the morning were the seventh day;' this seventh "day" goes from the creation of man until today. St. John Chrysostom explains by saying, "you see, in saying at this point that God rested from his works, Scripture teaches us that he ceased creating and bringing from nonbeing into being on the seventh day, whereas Christ, in saying that "my father is at work up until now and I am at work," reveals his unceasing care for us: he calls "work" the maintenance of created things, bestowal of permanence on them and governance of them through all time. If this wasn't so, after all, how would everything have subsisted, without the guiding hand above directing all visible things and the human race as well?"

Creation Through Evolution?

God could have used evolution to create...but He didn't. Although the creation could have taken millions of years, the Bible says: "then God said, "Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth"; and it was so...So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded, according to their kind, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that *it*

was good.” (Genesis 1:11,21) This means God created mature animals and plants ready to reproduce more of their own kind. The Bible also tells us that the first man was created from dust not from an ape or monkey-like creature. Those who try to marry the theory of evolution with the story of Creation, in the end, satisfy neither.



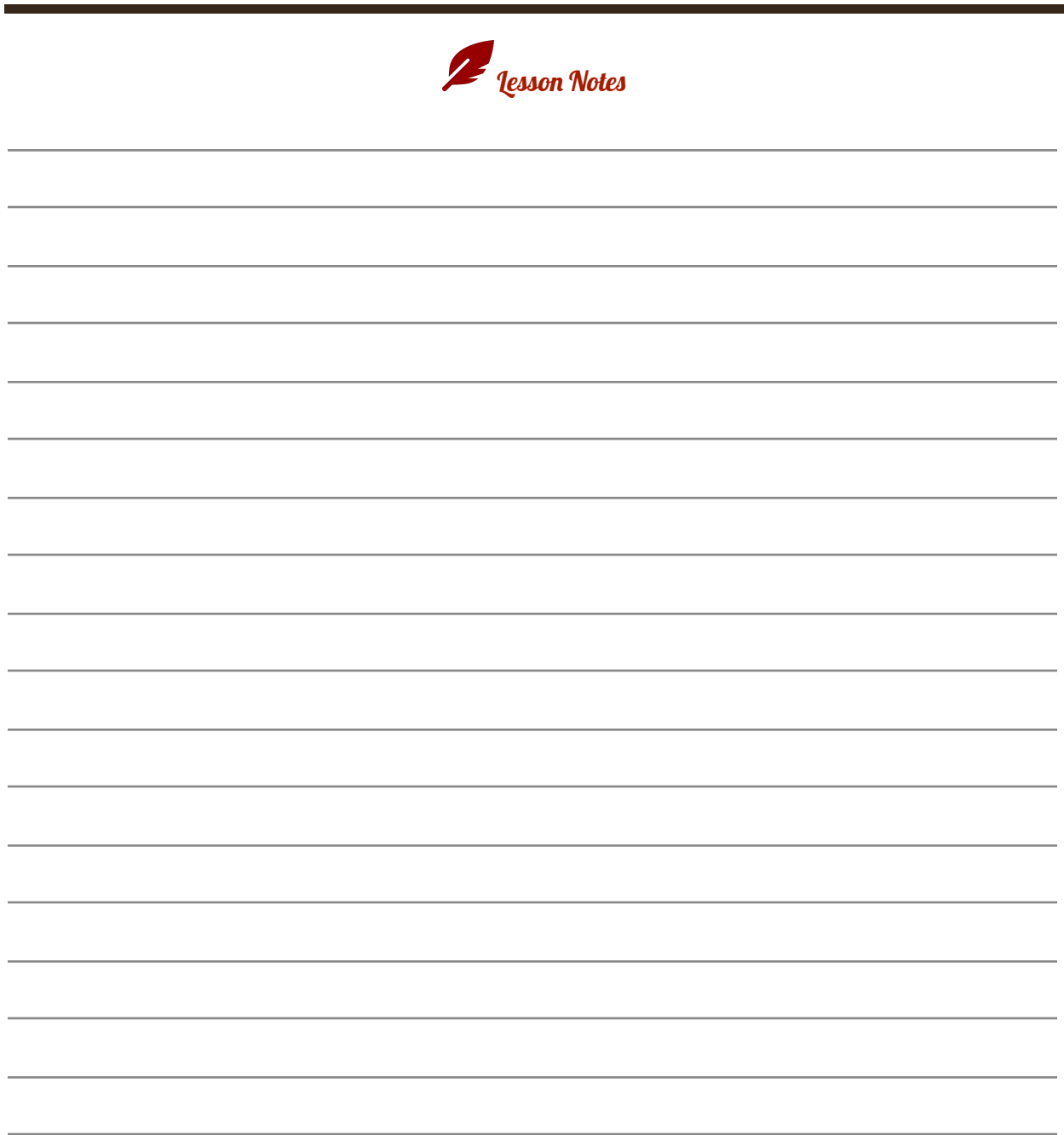
Review Questions

1. True or false? The word ‘day’ used in Genesis means ‘24 hours’ to our creator. (A: False)
2. True or false? EVolution is one of Satan’s many modern-day traps. (A: True)
3. True or false? God chose not to use evolution for our creation at the beginning. (A: True)
4. True or false? The ‘Neanderthal man’ information is still in textbooks today. (A: True)
5. Who said evolution “is about as ridiculous and improbable as the proposition that a tornado, blowing through a junkyard, could assemble a Boeing 747?” (A: Fred Hoyle.)
6. What concept did Darwin base evolution on? (A: Natural selection.)
7. Why can something not evolve from nothing? (A: It is due to the Law of conservation of energy.)
8. Explain the situation of the Piltdown man. (A: Scientists took a human skull, and an ape’s jaw, and said this is what preliminary humanity looked like.)
9. Explain the situation of the Nebraska man. (A: Scientists found a tooth, and created a narrative showing what he looked like, even though it was a pig’s tooth.)



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Miracles

APOLOGETICS

Perception of Miracles

The renowned British novelist, essayist, poet, and Christian apologist, C.S. Lewis, astutely observed that if one begins by ruling out the existence of the supernatural, they will consequently perceive no miracles. "If you begin by ruling out the supernatural, you will perceive no miracles." (CS Lewis) This sentiment underscores the fundamental connection between Christianity and the belief in miracles.

The life of Jesus Christ stands as the central tenet of Christianity, and it is replete with supernatural events from His miraculous birth to His death and resurrection. Christ's birth itself was a miraculous event, as He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary. His life was marked by numerous miracles, including healing the sick, raising the dead, walking on water, and multiplying food to feed the multitudes. The culmination of His earthly ministry was His sacrificial death on the cross, followed by His glorious resurrection three days later. These events form the bedrock of the Christian faith, providing irrefutable evidence of Christ's divinity and His triumph over death.

The Old Testament is replete with accounts of God's supernatural interventions throughout history. From the very beginning, the creation of the world is presented as a miraculous act, with God speaking the universe into existence. The story of Noah and the flood stands as a testament to God's judgment and His preservation of the righteous. The life of Samson, with his God-given strength, showcases God's empowerment of individuals for specific purposes. The prophet Elijah, through his miraculous works, demonstrated the power of God over nature and false prophets. The story of Jonah, who was swallowed by a large fish and later vomited out alive, serves as a reminder of God's ability to deliver from seemingly impossible situations. These and numerous other miracles recorded in the Old Testament require faith in the supernatural to be fully understood and appreciated.

The acceptance of miracles is not merely a matter of blind faith but is supported by compelling evidence. The historical evidence for the life and times of Jesus Christ is substantial, with numerous non-Christian sources corroborating the existence of a Jewish teacher named Jesus who performed miracles and was crucified. The fact that Christianity spread rapidly throughout the Roman Empire in the face of intense persecution is a testament to the compelling nature of the eyewitness accounts of Christ's miracles.

While the belief in miracles may challenge the prevailing naturalistic worldview, it finds resonance in the human experience. People from all walks of life have reported miraculous occurrences, such as inexplicable healings, answered prayers, and profound spiritual experiences. These personal testimonies, coupled with the historical evidence and the teachings of Christianity, provide a compelling case for the reality of miracles.

C.S. Lewis's observation highlights the inextricable link between Christianity and belief in miracles. The life of Christ, from His miraculous birth to His resurrection, forms the cornerstone of the Christian faith. The Old Testament abounds with accounts of God's supernatural interventions in human history. The acceptance of miracles is not only supported by evidence but also resonates with the human experience. Embracing the reality of miracles enriches our understanding of the world and opens us up to the awe-inspiring power of the divine.

Faith Leading to Miracles

The Bible calls upon us to embrace faith in the extraordinary works of God, assuring us that we can personally experience His supernatural power in our lives. The Gospel of Mark emphasizes that "all things are possible to him who believes," reminding us that what may seem unachievable to humans is within reach with God's intervention. The passage from Mark 10:27 further reinforces this concept, stating that "with men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible."

In the New Testament, believers are encouraged to have faith as small as a mustard seed, which, despite its size, possesses the strength to accomplish the improbable. As illustrated in Matthew 17:20, with such faith, believers can command mountains to move and overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles: "if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you." (Matthew 17:20) This passage serves as a testament to the transformative power of faith, empowering individuals to embrace the impossible and witness the extraordinary workings of God in their lives.

The Bible's emphasis on faith in the supernatural is a testament to the boundless love and grace of God. It invites us to trust in His ability to intervene in our lives, to heal us, to provide for us, and to guide us through life's challenges. By embracing faith, we open ourselves up to the limitless possibilities that come from relying on a power greater than ourselves.

Arguments Against Miracles

Science is a powerful tool that has helped us understand the world around us in extraordinary ways. It has allowed us to make incredible progress in fields medicine, technology, and many others. However, there are still many things that science cannot explain. For example, some people believe that certain events in the past, present, and future are not explainable without the knowledge of science and that as science evolves, it will debunk what was once considered miracles.

While science has indeed debunked some events, like lightning and thunder, it has not been able to explain all supernatural healings or miracles attributed to God. For instance, the Virgin Birth, the resurrection, and the feeding of the 5,000 remain unexplained by science. As philosopher Peter Kreeft rightly points out, "what science will do tomorrow, no one knows today, and we cannot argue scientifically from what is not known."

It's important to recognize that science does not tell us what always happens or what is possible or impossible. Scientific laws are merely generalizations based on our observations of how nature usually

works. They do not rule out the possibility of exceptions. In fact, exceptions are simply additions to the natural process, and they do not diminish the validity of science or nature.

Myth and Symbols

Individuals' interpretation of the Bible is often influenced by their personal beliefs. If a person does not believe in miracles, they may interpret biblical accounts of miraculous events as myths or symbols rather than as literal truths. This approach allows them to reconcile their beliefs with the biblical text without rejecting it outright as false. However, it is important to distinguish between interpretation and belief. Interpretation involves seeking to understand the meaning of a text within its historical and cultural context, taking into account the author's intent and the intended audience. Belief, on the other hand, is a subjective acceptance of a proposition as true regardless of evidence or logical reasoning.

Confusing interpretation with belief can lead to the imposition of one's personal views on the text. This is a common mistake made by many modern-day biblical scholars who approach the Bible with a predetermined set of beliefs and then interpret the text in a way that confirms those beliefs. Arrogance plays a role in this mistake as it reflects a belief that one's own understanding of the Bible is superior to that of the author or the intended audience. It is important to recognize the limitations of one's own perspective and to be open to the possibility that the text may have multiple meanings and interpretations.

A more humble and open-minded approach to biblical interpretation involves seeking to understand the text on its own terms, without imposing external beliefs or assumptions. This requires a willingness to set aside one's personal biases and to engage with the text in a respectful and critical manner.

Religion Requires Miracles

The significance of miracles in religion can vary greatly depending on the specific faith. While some religions may not require a belief in miracles as a fundamental tenet, Christianity stands apart in this regard. For Christians, faith in miracles is essential to their religious beliefs.

Christianity's core teachings revolve around the Incarnation, Atonement, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. These events are considered to be miraculous in nature, as they involve divine intervention and supernatural occurrences. The Incarnation, for instance, refers to the belief that God became human in the form of Jesus Christ. The Atonement encompasses Jesus' sacrifice on the cross to redeem humanity from sin. And the Resurrection signifies Jesus' victory over death and his subsequent bodily resurrection. These miraculous events hold profound theological significance for Christians. They serve as the foundation for the Christian faith and provide believers with hope and assurance of salvation. Without faith in these miracles, the central tenets of Christianity would be undermined, and the religion would lose its unique identity.

It is worth noting that not all religions view miracles in the same way as Christianity. In some faiths, miracles may be considered rare or extraordinary occurrences that are not essential to religious practice. In religions like Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, this is true. In contrast,

Christianity emphasizes the importance of miracles as integral to its teachings and as evidence of God's power and grace. Ultimately, the necessity of belief in miracles depends on the specific religion and its theological beliefs. For us Christians, miracles are not merely optional or peripheral elements; they are fundamental to the very core of their faith.

Why Do Miracles Happen?

Throughout history, there have been numerous accounts of miracles that have left people in awe and wonder. But why do miracles happen?

One reason why miracles happen is to display the glory of God. In the Bible, we see many instances where miracles are performed to demonstrate God's power and majesty. For example, in the Old Testament, God parted the Red Sea to allow the Israelites to escape from Egypt. This miraculous event showed God's sovereignty over nature and His ability to intervene in human affairs. Similarly, in the New Testament, Jesus performed many miracles, such as healing the sick and raising the dead. These miracles revealed Jesus' divine nature and His authority over life and death. It brings mankind to a point where it proclaims with King David saying: "I will praise You, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will tell of all Your marvelous works." (Psalm 9:1)

Another reason why miracles happen is to provide comfort and reassurance to believers. In times of trouble or distress, miracles can serve as a reminder of God's presence and His love for His people. For example, in the book of Exodus, God led their way through the wilderness: "and the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night from before the people." (Exodus 13:21-22) He also provided the Israelites with manna and quail in the desert to sustain them during their journey. These miracles show God's faithfulness and His provision for His people. Similarly, in the book of Acts, the apostles performed many miracles, such as healing the sick and casting out demons. These miracles brought comfort and hope to the early church and helped to spread the gospel message.

Miracles can also be used to answer the prayers of those who have faith. In the Bible, we see many instances where people's prayers are answered in miraculous ways. For example, in the book of 1 Kings, Elijah prayed for rain, and God sent a torrential downpour that ended a severe drought. Similarly, in the New Testament, Jesus healed the centurion's son in response to the man's faith: "then Jesus said to the centurion, 'Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you.'" And his servant was healed that same hour." (Matthew 8:13) These miracles demonstrate God's willingness to answer the prayers of those who trust in Him.

While miracles do not seem like a common occurrence, they do happen. When they do, they serve as a reminder of God's power, His love, and His faithfulness. Miracles can bring comfort to believers, strengthen faith, and even lead people to salvation.

Belief

In the realm of miracles, faith stands as a pivotal element. Without it, the very essence of divine intervention remains elusive. It was a deficiency in faith that prompted Christ to perform extraordinary

signs and wonders. Conversely, it is the absence of faith that often hinders believers from witnessing the miraculous. The gospels provide numerous instances where Jesus emphasized the significance of faith in receiving healing and experiencing the power of God.

In the case of the blind man in Luke 18:42, Jesus declared, "Receive your sight; your faith has made you well." This statement underscores the transformative power of faith in initiating the healing process. Similarly, in Luke 17:19, Jesus instructed the ten lepers who were cleansed of their disease, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well." Here again, faith is presented as a catalyst for miraculous healing. Furthermore, in Matthew 9:22, Jesus addressed a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years, saying, "Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well." These words illustrate how faith can bring about healing and restoration even in seemingly hopeless situations.

On the other hand, Matthew 13:58 reveals the sobering truth that a lack of faith can hinder the outpouring of God's miraculous power. In this passage, Jesus laments, "Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief." This verse highlights the crucial role of faith as a conduit through which God's miraculous intervention flows. In Mark 9:23-24, the father of a demon-possessed boy approached Jesus with a plea for help. Recognizing the interplay between faith and miracles, Jesus responded, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." The father's immediate response, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" poignantly captures the human struggle with faith and the desire to overcome it.

It is worth noting that God's miraculous works can serve both as a response to faith and as a means to foster faith. While many miracles require faith as a prerequisite, there are instances where God performs miracles to inspire faith and draw people closer to Him. In both cases, faith is an integral part of the miracle experience, either preceding it or resulting from it.

Faith and miracles are inextricably linked. Faith acts as a bridge between the human realm and the realm of the miraculous. It opens the door for God's intervention and transforms the impossible into the possible. As believers, we are invited to embrace faith, not only as a means to receive miracles but also as a way to deepen our relationship with the God who performs them.

Faith and Humility

In our spiritual journey, humility plays a vital role alongside faith. While intellect can guide us toward faith, it is faith that transcends our understanding and opens the door to the supernatural realm. If we rely solely on our intellect and neglect the significance of faith, we may find ourselves questioning and doubting the existence of the divine. The world around us presents countless phenomena that defy easy explanation. Space travel, for instance, is a testament to humanity's ingenuity and our ability to venture beyond the boundaries of our planet. Despite our limited understanding of the vastness of the universe, we embrace the reality of space exploration. Similarly, faith invites us to accept truths that may not be fully comprehensible to our finite minds.

The apostle Paul reminds us in Romans 12:3 that we should not think more highly of ourselves than we ought but rather cultivate a mindset of humility: "for I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as

God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.” (Romans 12:3) Arrogance and self-importance can hinder our spiritual growth and make us resistant to the working of the supernatural. A humble heart, on the contrary, is receptive to the wonders of God's grace and the mysteries of faith.

Jesus, in Matthew 11:25, speaks of how God reveals hidden truths to the "babes." Here, "babes" symbolizes those who are simple in understanding and pure in heart. It is not intellectual prowess or worldly wisdom that grants access to the profound mysteries of faith but rather a humble and receptive spirit. In our quest for spiritual understanding, it is essential to strike a balance between faith and intellect. While our intellect can provide a foundation for belief, it is faith that takes us into the realm of the supernatural and allows us to experience the transformative power of God's love and grace. May we embrace humility, surrender our pride, and open our hearts to the wonders that faith reveals.

The Ultimate Faith

Faith is a personal and profound connection between an individual and God. It is a journey of trust built on the belief in things that transcend the limitations of our physical senses. The biblical verse from Hebrews 11:1 provides a powerful definition of faith: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." It highlights that faith is not merely a passive acceptance of beliefs but a dynamic force that gives substance to our hopes and provides evidence for the unseen. It is not something anyone else can provide or teach.

In the account of Thomas, as described in John 20:29, we witness the struggle of a disciple who could not believe in Christ's presence until he saw physical proof. Jesus' response to Thomas offers a profound insight into the nature of faith: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." This verse emphasizes that true faith does not rely solely on visible evidence but on a deeper connection with the divine. The Kingdom of Heaven is an embodiment of this principle. It cannot be perceived by the naked eye, yet millions of believers around the world have faith in its existence. Similarly, miracles are not confined to the realm of the visible as described in 2 Corinthians 4:18: "while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:18). Miracles require a belief in things that are unseen and eternal.

In Christianity, faith and miracles are inextricably linked. They go hand in hand, reinforcing each other in a virtuous cycle. Faith provides the foundation for our belief in miracles, while miracles, in turn, strengthen our faith. To cultivate a strong faith, we must embrace simplicity of heart, mind, and soul. This means shedding preconceptions, biases, and distractions that may hinder our spiritual growth. A simple heart is open to the possibility of the unseen, allowing faith to take root and flourish.

Faith is not a static state but a continuous journey of exploration and discovery. It evolves and deepens as we navigate life's challenges and blessings, always seeking a deeper understanding of our connection with God.



Review Questions

1. True or false? We must learn to believe without a miracle in our lifetime. (A: True)
2. Why do miracles happen? (A: For comfort to believers, as answers to prayers, as well as to show the glory of God to the unbelieving.)
3. True or false? Thomas had faith in Christ wholeheartedly, and therefore we should be more like him. (A: False)
4. True or false? We must not interpret the Bible in light of our own beliefs, but in light of the author's beliefs. (A: True)
5. True or false? Belief in Christianity does not require belief in miracles. (A: False)

