

DOUBTERS WELCOME

ALL CHRISTIANS ARE IDIOTS, RIGHT?

by David Stiles



All Christians are idiots, right?

A Doubters Welcome resource
for spiritual discussion

by

David Stiles

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About

Doublers Welcome provides free resources for Christian discussion.

Each resource guide is broken into four discussion sections (with twenty questions in each section) to help facilitate spiritual discussion.

For More Information

For more information visit our website:
www.dstyles.com

Resources in this Series

All Christians are idiots, right?

Why doesn't God act like I think He should?

Why are Christians so judgmental?

Isn't Christianity just a crutch to get through life?

About the Author

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Discussion One

Getting Started

Introduction

Thanks for joining this *Doubters Welcome* discussion. We hope you'll enjoy your time discussing matters of life and faith with others!

Why are we doing this?

Doubters Welcome was started in 2012 to help facilitate discussion and dialog about life and spiritual matters. By providing free resources, such as this one, our hope is to foster inspiring discussions about the Christian faith.

Discussion Guidelines

In discussions such as this, we desire to genuinely understand the perspectives of all participants while also providing a clear presentation of Christian teaching.

The purpose of this resource is not to encourage division or to attack different religious views but rather to clarify Christian beliefs¹ and foster discussion. We encourage discussions to:

- be respectful of other backgrounds and perspectives
- allow people to “pass” on answering questions if they feel uncomfortable
- be a safe place to ask questions
- stay on track with time and subject, not diverting into tangents too far off topic

Question 1.1 :: All Christians are idiots, right?

You've seen the title of this resource, "All Christians are idiots, right?" Spend a moment reflecting on the phrase then select the response below that best identifies your view.

All Christians are idiots, right?

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

What response did you select? Why?

Assumptions and Presuppositions

To understand why Christians act the way that they do, it will be important to understand the basic ideas that they hold.

Philosophers sometimes use the word *presupposition* to identify the assumptions and beliefs that guide a person's life.

Definition:

Presuppositions are attitudes and assumptions about life that shape and govern our thoughts and actions.

A Proverb explained, “for as (a man) thinketh in his heart, so is he.” (Proverbs 23:7, King James Version)

Christians, for example believe (or presuppose) that the Bible is God's revealed truth.

Presuppositions are not just for Christians. No one has a completely empty mind when approaching a topic. All people hold certain assumptions about life and matters of faith. Our presuppositions will affect our views and thoughts about:

- our world
- ourselves
- our faith

Questions 1.2 through 1.12 that follow will help you identify some of your presuppositions. After reading the statement that follows the question, simply select the answer that best describes your answer.

Discussion One

How would you answer these statements about life?

Question 1.2 :: Life is...?

Life is good.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 1.3 :: Life is...?

Life is difficult.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 1.4 :: Life is...?

Life is confusing.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 1.5 :: Life's purpose is...?

How would you answer this statement about the ultimate purpose in life?

The ultimate purpose in life is clear.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 1.6 :: What has your life shown?

How would you answer this statement about your life?

My life has shown that I'm basically a good person.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 1.7 :: What will contribute to your salvation?

How would you answer this statement about the “after life”?

My actions in life will contribute to my salvation.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

How would you answer the following statements about God?

Question 1.8 :: Is God real?

There is a God.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 1.9 :: Is God holy?

God is holy and will judge me.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 1.10 :: Is God loving?

God is loving and kind to me.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 1.11 :: Can you know God's will?

How would you answer this statement about God's purposes?

I can know God's will.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 1.12 :: Can you know God personally?

Finally, how would you answer this statement about God and His nature?

I can know God personally.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 1.13 :: What are some of your views on life?

You probably noticed that Questions 1.2 through 1.5 in this section were questions about your presuppositions about *life* - asking if you viewed life as:

- good
- difficult
- or
- confusing

You were also asked about your view of the “ultimate purpose in life.”

Take a look at your responses to Questions 1.2 through 1.5 and if you feel comfortable, share your responses with others in the *Doubters Welcome* discussion.

How were your responses to Questions 1.2 through 1.5 similar or different to the responses of others?

Question 1.14 :: What is your view of your life?

You also probably noticed that Questions 1.6 and 1.7 were questions regarding your ideas about *your life*.

The first question asked if you viewed yourself as “basically a good person.”

The next question asked about “salvation” (a term you might not be familiar with) and your ideas about your life’s actions contributing to your salvation.

Spend a moment reviewing your responses to Questions 1.6 and 1.7. If you feel comfortable, share your responses with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion.

Question 1.15 :: What are your views about God?

The next set of questions (1.8 through 1.10) were questions about your ideas and assumptions about *God* and *God's character*, asking if you believed that God exists and if you believed God is:

- holy and will judge me
and/or
- loving and kind

Look at your responses to questions 1.10 through 1.12 and if you feel comfortable, share those responses with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion.

Question 1.16 :: What is your view of God's will?

Questions 1.11 and 1.12 were questions about God's will, asking if you believed you could:

- know God's will
and/or
- know God personally

Review your responses to questions 1.11 and 1.12 and if you feel comfortable, share your responses with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion.

Question 1.17 :: Is it easy to identify our assumptions about life and faith?

Answers to the questions in this section were designed to help you and others in your group identify your *presuppositions* – those attitudes, assumptions and fundamental ideas that shape and govern our thoughts and actions.

After reflecting on the questions you have answered, spend a moment considering the assumptions that you have. How would you respond to the statement below?

It is easy to identify our assumptions about life and faith that shape and govern our thoughts and actions.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

How did you respond to the statement? Was your response similar to others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion?

Assumptions and Presuppositions in the Bible

Assumptions and presuppositions can be seen not just in your group, but also in the Bible – the book Christians use to govern their life and faith.

The Bible assumes (or presupposes) God’s existence.

From its very first sentence, the Bible assumes God’s reality and existence as it describes God’s actions:

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”
(Genesis 1:1)

Question 1.18 :: The Bible’s view of God’s reality

I can see how the Bible could assume God’s existence.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

The Bible's Assumptions about People

The Bible's authors maintain that not only is God real, but that He has made Himself plainly known to people. Paul explained that God's

- "invisible attributes...have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world." (Romans 1:20)

Thus, because of these assumptions, the Bible views people who do not believe in God as *foolish*. As the author of a psalm explained,

- "the fool says in His heart there is no God" (Psalm 14:1)

This statement is echoed again in Psalm chapter 53 and later by the Apostle Paul in Romans 1:22.

Question 1.19 :: The Bible's view of people who do not believe in God

I can see how the Bible would call people foolish for not assuming God's existence.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 1.20 :: Is it helpful to learn about the ideas that others hold?

Lastly, as we conclude our first discussion, consider the following questions:

- What things have you learned about others (and their presuppositions) in our first discussion?
- How would you answer the statement below?

It is helpful to learn about ideas regarding life and faith that others hold.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

How did you respond to the statement about learning from others? Why? How was your response similar or different to others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion?

2

Discussion Two

Our Moral Compass

Introduction

Welcome to our second *Doubters Welcome* discussion where we will continue discussing matters of life and faith.

Moral and Ethical Issues

In this section we will continue looking at our assumptions and presuppositions – this time turning our attention to our thoughts and feelings about moral and ethical issues.

Our modern age has been filled with a great deal of controversy concerning moral and ethical issues. Our hope in this discussion, however, is not to rehash politically charged issues but rather to examine thoughts and feelings about ethics and morality.

Questions 2.1 through 2.10 will help you examine your thoughts and feelings about ethical issues that are important to you.

Our Moral Compass

How would you answer these statements about your thoughts on ethical issues?

Question 2.1 :: Is it clear to you what is right and what is wrong?

I have a clear sense of what is right or wrong.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 2.2 :: Do others know what is right and what is wrong?

Many people are confused about what is right and what is wrong.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Discussion Two

Think for a moment about times when others have been unkind or cruel to you. How would you answer the following questions?

Question 2.3 :: How have people treated you?

Many people have acted in unkind ways to me.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 2.4 :: How do you feel when people are unkind to you?

I have very strong feelings when people are unkind to me.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

What specific feelings have you felt when others are unkind?

Question 2.5 :: How do you characterize things when people are unkind?

I usually feel like I deserve it when people act in cruel and unkind ways towards me.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 2.6 :: What words do you use to describe unkind actions?

As you think about the situations when others have been unkind, what are the most common words that you use to describe the situation or the person?

- Immoral
- Mean
- Unethical
- Unfair
- Unjust
- Wrong
- Other:

Discussion Two

Reflect now about times when you have seen others being mistreated. How would you answer the following questions?

Question 2.7 :: How do you feel when others are mistreated?

I have very strong feelings when people are mistreated.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 2.8 :: What do you do when others are mistreated?

I usually intervene if I see someone being mistreated.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 2.9 :: What do you do when a creature is being mistreated?

I usually intervene if an animal is being mistreated.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 2.10 :: What do you do about injustice in the world?

I sometimes give my resources when I hear about injustice and oppression in the world.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 2.11 :: What are your views about knowing what is right and wrong?

You probably noticed that Questions 2.1 and 2.2 in this section were about your initial views about being able to identify what is right and wrong – as well as your thoughts about others being able to identify what is right and wrong.

How did you feel about your ability to know what is right and wrong (Question 2.1)? How did you feel about other people’s ability (in Question 2.2)? Are others clear what is right and what is wrong? Why or why not?

If you feel comfortable, share your responses to Questions 2.1 and 2.2 with others in the *Doubters Welcome* discussion.

How were your responses to Questions 2.1 and 2.2 similar or different to the responses of others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion?

Question 2.12 :: What have been your experiences in life?

You also probably noticed that Questions 2.3 through 2.6 were questions regarding experiences from *your life*.

Question 2.3 asked if many people had been unkind to you, while the next question (Question 2.4) asked about how you felt when people were unkind.

The next question (Question 2.5) asked how you usually characterize the circumstance and if you felt like you “deserved it” when people acted in unkind or cruel ways to you, while Question 2.6 asked which words you commonly used to describe the situation or person.

Spend a moment reviewing your responses to Questions 2.3 through 2.6.

What situations or circumstances came to mind as you answered these questions?

If you feel comfortable, share your responses with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion. How were your responses to the questions similar or different than the responses of others?

Question 2.13 :: What happens when you see others mistreated?

Questions 2.7 through 2.10 were questions about your responses to seeing others treated in unkind ways.

Questions 2.7 and 2.8 asked about how you felt and what you did when others were mistreated. Question 2.9 asked about what you did if an animal were mistreated. While Question 2.10 asked about your response to injustice or oppression in the world.

What examples did you think of when you were responding to the questions?

Look at your responses to questions 2.7 through 2.10, and if you feel comfortable, share those responses with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion.

What about your examples and responses were similar or different than the responses of others?

Next, we'll explore our views on *standards* for ethics and morality.

Our Moral Compass

How would you answer these statements about morality and ethics?

Question 2.14 :: Is there an objective standard of right and wrong?

There is no objective standard for what is right or wrong.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 2.15 :: Is it up to each person?

Morality and ethics are relative to each person and their feelings.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 2.16 :: Is there a way to know what is right or wrong?

There is no way to really know what is right and what is wrong.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 2.17 :: What is the cause of our feelings?

Disapproving feelings about what others do is only a product of evolution.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 2.18 :: What are your views about standards?

Questions 2.14 through 2.16 touched upon your views about ethical and moral standards.

Questions 2.14 through 2.16 asked if you believed:

- if there is an objective standard for right and wrong
- if morality and ethics are relative to each person
- if there is a way to know what is right and what is wrong

If you feel comfortable, share your responses with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion. How were your responses to the questions similar or different than the responses of others?

Question 2.19 :: Are you consistent with your views?

If you agreed with the statements in Questions 2.14 through 2.16 that there are no objective standards (so matters of ethics and morality are relative to each individual – which is a very common view), it might be helpful to ask how you explain your thoughts and feelings regarding cruelty toward:

- yourself
- other people
- and to creatures

...that we discussed earlier in Questions 2.1 through 2.10?

Discussion Two

In reflecting upon unkindness, cruelty and oppression directed at you or at others, did you believe that there were standards that were violated?

If so, is that consistent with a view that there are “no objective standards” and that ethics is relative to each person?

As you think about your views, you might try to answer this question:

How are your views consistent or inconsistent with your experiences?

One explanation that some have given (if universal standards are rejected) is that our feelings of disapproval about another person’s actions are simply a product of evolution. Review your response to Question 2.17. Do you believe your feelings about cruelty are simply a product of evolution?

If not, what might be the cause of your feelings when others act in unkind ways toward you?

If you feel comfortable, share your responses with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion. How were your responses to the questions similar or different than the responses of others?

Question 2.20 :: What is your moral compass?

For Christians, we believe that God has given objective and absolute moral standards. These standards are sometimes called “God’s law” or “God’s moral law.” These standards are to serve as our “moral compass” in life.

Christians hold that commands such as “do not murder”, “do not steal”, etc., have been established by God and are binding to all people, regardless of an individual’s feelings or opinions supporting or disapproving of these standards.

We believe that these objective moral standards are not hidden, but known by all people. They are objective rules that God has written upon the hearts and minds and all people.

In the Bible the Apostle Paul explained in the letter to the Romans that all people know God’s righteous decrees (even though we do not always put them into practice). See Romans 1:32 for more on this topic.

In considering this, you might have even wondered:

It is interesting that all cultures and religions have similar moral standards, why is that?

Christians believe that God gave this understanding about His standards first to Adam and Eve, our “first parents” (who are described in the book of Genesis in the Bible). And just as God gave this understanding to Adam and Eve, we believe that God has written His moral law onto the hearts and minds of all people ever since.

Discussion Two

Later God's moral law was physically written (codified) in the Ten Commandments (which can be found in the book of Exodus in the Bible).

The relationship that Adam and Eve had with God is sometimes referred to as a "covenant of works", which means that Adam and Eve's relationship with God was dependent upon their obedience to Him. God had given them a promise of eternal life with Him if they kept His commands and promised punishment to them if they disobeyed.

What we find in Genesis chapter 3, however, is that even though Adam and Eve knew God's commands they failed to keep them. We call this event *The Fall* – when Adam and Eve sinned and were expelled from the Garden of Eden.

The Bible declares that none of humanity that came after Adam and Eve has ever perfectly followed God's moral law. All have fallen short of God's commands, which the Bible describes as *sin*.

Paul explained that "sin entered the world through one person" (Adam) and now "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 5:12 and 3:23).

In the New Testament, however, we learn about Jesus Christ who was different from everyone that followed Adam and Eve. Jesus, we learn, was both fully God and fully man. The Bible also asserts that Jesus perfectly fulfilled all of God's requirements and commands:

- Peter, in his first letter, explained that Jesus *committed no sin* (I Peter 1:19, 2:22)

Our Moral Compass

- Likewise, Paul in his letter to the Romans reiterated that Christ *perfectly obeyed all of God's commands* (Romans 5:18-19)
- Similarly, the writer of Hebrews explained that Jesus was tempted in every way, yet was *without sin* (Hebrews 4:15)
- And Jesus himself asked if anyone could find him guilty of sin (John 8:46)

“Why is this important?” you might be wondering. We’ll learn more about that in the discussions that follow this series.

So, here are a few final questions for you, as we conclude this second discussion:

How would you describe your “moral compass”?

How have you viewed your relationship with God similar to the relationship that Adam and Eve had with God – expecting that if you do good God will bring His blessing to your life and if you don’t God will bring His punishment?

In what ways have you experienced falling short of God’s standards?

If you feel comfortable, share your responses with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion. How were your responses to the questions similar or different than the responses of others?

3

Discussion Three

Sources and Standards

Introduction

Welcome to our third *Doubter's Welcome* discussion where we will continue discussing matters of life and faith.

Sources, Standards and Authority

In this section we'll continue looking at our assumptions and presuppositions – this time turning our attention to the sources and standards that we rely on.

In our previous discussions we spent some time reflecting upon our *presuppositions* – those attitudes and assumptions about life and faith that shape and govern our thoughts and actions.

As we continue this discussion, one important element to consider will be to identify the people who have influenced us to hold these views. Another way of thinking about this is to use the word *authority*, in asking, “On whose authority have we based our beliefs and assumptions?”

Questions 3.1 through 3.5 will help you examine the sources that have been important to you.

Sources and Standards

How would you answer these statements about those who have influenced you? For your response, place a checkmark in the table that follows the question.

Question 3.1 :: Who were the influencers in your youth?

In your youth, who were the people that influenced you?

Potential Source	Unsure	Not influential	Somewhat Influential	Very Influential
Parent(s)				
Grandparent(s)				
Friend(s)				
Teacher(s)				
Media				
Other: _____ _____ _____				

Question 3.2 :: Who has recently influenced you?

In recent years, who are the people that influence your life?

Potential Source	Unsure	Not influential	Somewhat Influential	Very Influential
Parent(s)				
Grandparent(s)				
Friend(s)				
Teacher(s)				
Media				
Other: _____ _____ _____				

Question 3.3 :: Who were your influencers?

Questions 3.1 and 3.2 touched on your views about those who have influenced you and are influencers in your life.

In reflecting on your *youth* (in Question 3.1):

- What person or sources were the most influential during this time?
- How were they influential?

In reflecting on life more *recently* (in Question 3.2):

- What person or sources have been the most influential during this time?
- How were they influential?

If you feel comfortable, share your responses with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion. How were your responses to the questions similar or different than the responses of others?

Question 3.4 :: How do you evaluate ideas?

Similarly, other people sometimes help us evaluate *truth claims* – those ideas we hear and read (or might even think) that claim to be true.

Think for a moment about times when you have had to evaluate what was true and what was false. How would you finish this statement?

When evaluating ideas, I am likely to listen to ...	Unsure	Not likely	Somewhat likely	Very likely
My parent(s) opinions				
Other family member's opinions				
Opinions of my friend(s)				
Opinions of my teacher(s)				
Media experts				
My feelings				
Scientific experts				
Other: _____ _____				

Question 3.5 :: How do you evaluate claims of truth?

Questions 3.4 touched on your views about how you evaluate “truth claims” – those ideas we hear and read (or might even think) that claim to be true.

Some people will rely on family relationships (such as a parent or other family member) to help them evaluate what is true and what is false.

Other people might rely on people who hold positions of authority (such as teachers, media experts or scientific experts) to help with their evaluation.

Still others might “go with their gut” and trust their own feelings about what is true and what is false. While others still might rely on other sources.

In reflecting on your responses (from Question 3.4):

- What truth claim (or situation) came to mind as you were answering the question?
- What person (or persons) were you most likely to listen to in evaluating what was true or false? Were they similar or different than your answers to Question 3.2?
- Why would you likely to listen to that source?

If you feel comfortable, share your responses with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion. How were your responses to the questions similar or different than the responses of others?

The Bible

Like all individuals, Christians are influenced by other people, our culture and our society. However, as our ultimate standard, Christians believe that the Bible is the authoritative source for guiding our lives.

The Bible (also called “Holy Scripture” or “God’s Word”) consists of two parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The Old Testament, primarily written in Hebrew, has 39 books. Some of the books are histories, some are prophetic books, while another is poetry and another is a book of wisdom literature.

The New Testament, written in Greek, has 27 books. The first four books of the New Testament are called *The Gospels* – descriptions of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Other books of the New Testament contain a history of the Early Church, letters to the Early Church and a revelation about end times.

Because the original texts of the Bible were written in ancient Hebrew and Greek, there have been a number of translations into other languages, such as the:

- Septuagint (the translation of the Old Testament into Greek in approximately 200 B.C.)
- Vulgate (the translation of the Bible into Latin in 380 A.D.)
- King James Version (translated in 1611)
- Revised Standard Version
- English Standard Version

Questions 3.6 through 3.15 that follow will help you identify some of your views regarding the Bible. After reading the statement that follows each question, simply select the answer that best describes your answer.

Sources and Standards

How would you answer these statements about the Bible?

Question 3.6 :: Have you read much of the Bible?

I have read a lot of the Bible.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 3.7 :: What has been your experience in reading the Bible?

I have found comfort in reading the Bible.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Discussion Three

How would you answer these statements about the clarity of the Bible?

Question 3.8 :: Is the Bible clear?

The Bible is easy to understand.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 3.9 :: Is the Bible difficult to read?

There are a number of difficult passages in the Bible.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Sources and Standards

How would you answer these statements about your interest in reading more of the Bible?

Question 3.10 :: Would you like to read more?

I am interested in reading more of the Bible.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 3.11 :: Would you like to read the Bible daily?

Daily reading of the Bible would be helpful.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Discussion Three

How would you answer these statements about the authority and accuracy of the Bible?

Question 3.12 :: Is the Bible our authority?

The Bible is authoritative.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 3.13 :: Is the Bible accurate?

The Bible accurately serves as a witness to the life of Jesus.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 3.14 :: Is the Bible the Word of God?

The Bible is God's Word.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 3.15 :: Is the Bible trustworthy?

The Bible is fully trustworthy and true.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 3.16 :: What has been your experience in reading the Bible?

Questions 3.6 and 3.7 touched upon your experiences with reading the Bible.

Question 3.6 asked if you had read a lot of the Bible, while Question 3.7 asked if you had found comfort in reading the Bible.

If you feel comfortable, share your responses with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion. How were your responses to the questions similar or different than the responses of others?

Question 3.17 :: What is your view on the clarity of the Bible?

Next, Questions 3.8 and 3.9 asked about your views of the clarity of the Bible.

Question 3.8 asked if thought that the Bible was clear.

- What examples came to mind?

Question 3.9 asked if you felt there were a number of difficult passages in the Bible.

- What examples came to mind?

If you feel comfortable, share your responses with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion. How were your responses to the questions similar or different than the responses of others?

Question 3.18 :: What are your views about reading more of the Bible?

Questions 3.10 and 3.11 touched upon your views about reading more of the Bible.

Question 3.10 asked if you were interested in reading more of the Bible, while Question 3.11 asked if you felt reading the Bible daily would be helpful.

If you feel comfortable, share your responses with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion. How were your responses to the questions similar or different than the responses of others?

Question 3.19 :: How do you view the trustworthiness of the Bible?

Next, Questions 3.12 through 3.15 looked at your views on the authority of the Bible, asking if you believed if the Bible is:

- authoritative
- an accurate witness to the life of Jesus
- God's Word
- fully trustworthy and true

After reflecting on your answers, try to answer this additional question:

What were the reasons for your responses?

Discussion Three

If you feel comfortable, share your responses with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion. How were your responses to the questions similar or different than the responses of others?

Question 3.20 :: Why do Christians believe the Bible?

Christians believe the Bible to be:

- God's Word
- authoritative
- an accurate witness to the life of Christ
- fully trustworthy

In viewing the truth of Scripture, Christians sometimes use the word *inerrant* – meaning that the Bible is accurate, trustworthy, divinely inspired and our authority for matters of life and faith.

In reflecting on these views of the Bible, you might have wondered,

“Why do Christians hold a view that the Bible is God’s Word?”

Here are seven common reasons:

1. The first reason we might point to is that *the Bible itself reveals that it is God’s Word*. Passages like the following make it clear that the Bible is from God:

- “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of *Scripture*, to exhortation, to teaching” (1 Timothy 4:13)

Sources and Standards

- "...you have been acquainted with the *sacred writings*, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15)
- "*All Scripture is breathed out by God* and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
- "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and *through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*" (Romans 15:4)

2. A second reason is *that the Holy Spirit has revealed the Bible to be God's Word*. If you are not a Christian, this may seem like a strange assumption, but as Christians we are told that we will truly recognize God's Word – like sheep knowing the voice of their shepherd (see John 10:5). Thus, when we read the Bible, it is clear to us that the words on the page are the very words of God. As Jesus explained,

- "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come" (John 16:13)

3. Similarly, another reason why we believe that the Bible is from God is because of the Bible's *majesty*. As one author explained, "we feel that the undoubted power of his divine majesty lives and breathes there."²

Discussion Three

4. Likewise, the clear *invitation of Scripture* for people to fear and trust God rings true with many Christians.

5. Still another reason why Christians believe that the Bible is God's Word is because of the Bible's *unity*. Written over several centuries the sixty-six books of the Bible have a consistent theme in telling of God's redemptive purposes for His people. As J.I. Packer has written,

“...everything the Father and the Son say to us in and through Scripture relates, one way or another, to the person, place, and purpose of Christ, to the realities of God's kingdom, and to faithful following of Christ through...the wilderness of this world.”³

Dr. Packer continues,

“in light of the fact that these books were written over a period of something like 1,500 years in a number of different cultures, the unity of their presentation of God and his ways is simply stunning. In terms of basic principles about God's person, power, and plan, humankind's dignity and destiny, and the realities of God's saving grace, everything in the 66 books converges. Amazing? Yes, but demonstrably true.”⁴

6. Still another reason Christians believe that the Bible is God's Word is Jesus' consistent view that the Bible (the Old Testament during His time on earth) was in fact God's Word.

7. While another reason Christians have pointed to is that the Bible is supported by archeological evidence.

Sources and Standards

Thus, Christians believe that God is the author of Scripture. We believe that when we read the Bible or when we listen to Scripture being read or taught in a sermon, it is God speaking.

As a final question, think for a moment about the reasons you have heard for believing that the Bible is God's Word. Individually, or as a group, list the most convincing reasons for believing that the Bible is God's Word.

What are the most convincing reasons for believing that the Bible is God's Word?

a.

b.

c.

4

Discussion Four

Knowing and Learning

Introduction

Welcome to our fourth *Doubters Welcome* discussion where we will continue discussing matters of life and faith.

Knowing and Learning

In this section we will continue looking at our assumptions and presuppositions – this time turning our attention to our ideas about knowledge and learning.

As you likely know, there are a number of different theories about knowledge and learning. In recent years, for example, researchers have tried to explain how people learn in different ways, by identifying *learning styles*, such as *auditory learners* (who learn through listening), *visual learners* (who learn by seeing images) and *kinesthetic* or *tactile learners* (who learn by doing).

Instead of focusing on the actual processes of how we learn, this discussion will focus on areas we like to learn about and our beliefs about knowing and learning.

Questions 4.1 through 4.8 will help you examine your thoughts and feelings about knowledge and learning.

Knowing and Learning

How would you answer these statements about your preferences for learning?

Question 4.1 :: How do you like to learn?

I like to know a few things really well.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 4.2 :: How do you like to learn?

I like to know about many things somewhat well.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 4.3 :: What do you enjoy learning about?

Consider this question:

What do you like learning about?

Think for a moment about things that you like to learn about and list them below.

Things I like to learn about:

1.

2.

3.

Next, we'll explore our views on *knowing* people and things.

Knowing and Learning

How would you answer these statements about how others know you?

Question 4.4 :: How would you describe how others know you?

There are a few people who know me well.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 4.5 :: How would you describe how others know you?

There are many people who know me somewhat well.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

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How would you answer these statements about your thoughts on knowing things?

Question 4.6 :: Can you really know things?

Life is an illusion; there is no way to know anything.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 4.7 :: Can thinking be logical?

Thinking and reasoning can be logical.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 4.8 :: What are your views on knowledge and learning?

The previous questions all touched on your views about learning and knowing.

How did you respond to your preferences about knowing a *few* things well (in Question 4.1) or knowing *many things* somewhat well (in Question 4.2)? What examples came to mind when asked about what you like to learn about (in Question 4.3)?

If you feel comfortable, share your responses to Questions 4.1 through 4.3 with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion. How were your responses to the questions similar or different than the responses of others?

How did you respond to the questions regarding your thoughts on if *a few people* know you well (in Question 4.4), or if *many people* know you somewhat well (in Question 4.5)? What examples came to mind?

If you feel comfortable, share those responses with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion. How were your responses to the questions similar or different than the responses of others?

Knowledge and Learning

Christians believe that God has created people with the capacity to know persons, places and things.

We also believe that one cannot think, live, learn or even reason without presupposing (or making assumptions about) God.

“Why is that?” you might ask.

The reason is that all created things reveal God (their creator):

- The writer of Psalms explained, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.” (Psalm 19:1)
- As we read earlier, Paul explained in Romans 1:20, that God’s “invisible attributes...have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world.”

Thus, every fact of creation reveals God. As Professor John Frame has explained, “No fact makes sense apart from God.”⁵

We live in God’s world, and as people who live in God’s world, Christians and non-Christians alike make daily assumptions that presuppose (or assume) that God exists.

For example, people assume that the laws of mathematics and logic apply not just in a specific place and time, but *universally*. We assume that $2 + 2 = 4$ is true not just where we live, but is true universally.

Knowing and Learning

This assumption, Christians would argue, presupposes an ordered world designed and created by the *God of the universe*, who Himself is the author of logic and reason and one who transcends space and time. As the writer of the book of Hebrews explained:

- “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”(Hebrews 11:3)

Similarly, even though some would say that life is *impersonal* (governed by things such as matter, motion, time and chance) - people live life assuming that they can relate to people and life in a *personal, relational way*.

As Professor Frame has pointed out, people typically assume that,

- there is an external world beyond our own mind
- other people have minds like ours
- the future will resemble the past⁶

Rather than assuming a world that is out-of-control, illogical and governed by chance, the above assumptions all presuppose a created world, one that is generally rational and logical, one that has creatures who are similar in nature to ourselves and a world that exists within time.

This type of thinking, Christians would argue, presupposes and assumes a world created by a *personal and relational God* – a God who has made it possible for people to think and reason together. These assumptions that people make in their thinking clearly negate the popular opinion that life is simply a consequence of chance.

Question 4.9 :: What are your views about reason and thinking?

Questions 4.6 and 4.7 touched upon your views about knowledge.

Question 4.6 asked if you viewed life as an illusion, with no way of knowing anything. If you answered that you *could* really know things, do you feel like this evidence points to an ordered creation, where *personal, relational* knowledge is made possible by a personal, relational God?

Likewise, Question 4.7 asked if you believed if thinking and reason could be logical. If you answered that reason and thinking could be logical, would you consider this as evidence pointing to a God who created reason and logic and made it possible for people to think and reason together?

If you feel comfortable, share your responses with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion. How were your responses to the questions similar or different than the responses of others?

If we know about God why don't we believe?

In reflecting on this discussion you might have wondered,

**“So, if all of creation reflects God’s glory and points to God,
why don’t people believe in Him?”**

That is a good question. What we learn in the Bible is that even though people live in God’s world – surrounded by evidence of His existence – we *suppress* our knowledge of God.

In the letter to the Romans, for example, Paul explained that unbelievers “suppress the truth” and make their hearts “darkened” (Romans 1:18, 21).

You might wonder,

**“Why would people do that? Why would people willingly
repress or suppress their knowledge of God?”**

For the answer, we’ll look again to Paul’s letter to the Romans. In the letter Paul explained that people have “exchanged the truth about God for a lie” because they “did not see fit to acknowledge God” (Romans 1:15, 28).

Paul explained that the essence of this issue was about who to *worship*. God, as presented in the Bible is *Lord* of all creation – and as Lord, He demands our worship. But instead of giving worship to God, people choose to give their worship to other things.

Discussion Four

Thus, we learn in the Bible, that people “suppress” or “repress” their knowledge of God because they do not want to worship God. As Paul noted, people chose to worship and serve “the creature rather than the Creator” (Romans 1:25).

What are the consequences?

Suppression of the knowledge of God and His Lordship creates a *contradiction* and tension in the thoughts and lives of those who suppress that knowledge. As Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones explained,

- “Man is in a state of internal conflict...he wants to do certain things, but something within him says it’s wrong to do those things and therefore he quarrels with himself. He’s got something that he can’t get rid of – which we call the conscience.”⁷

Dr. Lloyd-Jones continued,

- “There is a state of internal warfare, there is a tension...In the Scriptures and the Gospel we know exactly why it is: man was made by God in such a way that he can only be at peace within himself when he is at peace with God.”⁸

Life experiences and thoughts can be very confusing while a tension exists within people who live in God’s world, yet deny His Lordship.

Questions 4.10 through 4.12 that follow will help you reflect on the Christian view of repressing knowledge of God.

How would you answer these statements?

Question 4.10 :: What has been your experience....?

I can see how I might have suppressed the truth about God.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 4.11 :: What has been your experience....?

I can remember a time when I have felt a sense of internal conflict about God's reality and His Lordship.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 4.12 :: What has been confusing about viewing God as the Lord?

Consider this question:

What has been challenging or confusing about viewing God as Lord of life?

Think for a moment about things that have been confusing or challenging, and list them below.

Challenging things about God's Lordship:

1.

2.

3.

Question 4.13 :: What are your views?

Questions 4.10 through 4.12 focused on the Christian view of repressing knowledge of God.

How did you respond (in Question 4.10) to being able to see how you could have suppressed knowledge of God?

How did you respond to Question 4.11, that asked if you could remember a time when you felt internal conflict about God's reality and God's Lordship?

Lastly, how did you respond to Question 4.12? What examples came to mind when asked about what is challenging about God being Lord of life?

If you feel comfortable, share your responses to Questions 4.10 through 4.12 with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion. How were your responses to the questions similar or different than the responses of others?

We'll conclude our discussion with questions about knowing things with *certainty*.

Knowing things with a high amount of *certainty* is an important part of knowing and learning about people, places and things. Questions 4.14 through 4.19 will help identify your views about knowing things with *certainty*.

Discussion Four

How would you answer these questions about certainty?

Question 4.14 :: How sure are you?

I am _____ that $2 + 2 = 4$.

Very Uncertain | Uncertain | Certain | Very Certain

Question 4.15 :: How sure are you?

I am _____ that the earth is the third planet from the sun.

Very Uncertain | Uncertain | Certain | Very Certain

Question 4.16 :: How sure are you?

I am _____ that all cars use gas.

Very Uncertain | Uncertain | Certain | Very Certain

Question 4.17 :: How sure are you?

I am _____ that all swans are white.

Very Uncertain | Uncertain | Certain | Very Certain

Discussion Four

How would you answer these statements about absolute certainty?

Question 4.18 :: Do you have the ability to know with absolute certainty?

I have the ability to know something with absolute certainty.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Question 4.19 :: Can you imagine the possibility of knowing with certainty?

I can imagine myself knowing something with absolute certainty.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly Agree

Certainty and Knowledge

When reflecting on our knowledge of facts, you might have noticed a few things.

The first is that in our knowledge of facts there are usually *degrees* of certainty. For example, you might be very certain that a mathematical equation is correct or that the earth is the third planet from the sun but not as certain about other statements that claim to be true.

In addition much of our sense of being certain about a fact is based on the *available evidence*. For example, if we were to answer a question about cars using gasoline our answers given in the 1950s would be different than answers today because of the evidence available to us in more contemporary times.

In another example, if we were told: “All swans are white”, we would likely believe this claim until we were told about black swans that were discovered in Australia.

In reflecting on the earlier section about God and His Lordship, you might have wondered,

“Can I really be certain about the reality of God?”

That is a good question. What we learn in the Bible is that knowledge of God and His ways are different than the knowledge of other things. While our knowledge of things might change over time as new evidence appears, we are promised in the Bible that we can *truly know* an unchanging God and His purposes:

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Jesus explained:

- “To you it has been given to *know* the secrets of the kingdom of heaven...” (Matthew 13:11)
- “If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will *know* whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority” (John 7:17)
- “you will *know* the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32)
- “And this is eternal life, that they *know* you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent (John 17:3)

Similarly, Paul used the Greek word that meant “complete confidence” and “full assurance” to describe our certainty in God:

- “I want...their hearts (to) be encouraged...to reach all the riches of *full assurance of understanding and knowledge* of God's mystery...” (Colossians 2:2)
- “...he grew strong in his faith...*fully convinced* that God was able to what he had promised.” (Romans 4:20-21)
- “Each one should be *fully convinced in his own mind*.” (Romans 14:5)

These passages all point to knowledge of God as something that is not tentative but something that we can be certain of.

Question 4.20 :: What have you learned?

As we conclude, you might feel like this discussion has brought up even more questions, such as:

- How can I have peace with God?
- How can I have certainty about God's reality?
- How can I stop suppressing the reality of God?

....these are all good questions, which we will look to address in later discussions.

As we conclude this discussion, however, let's consider the following questions:

- What have you learned in this *Doubters Welcome* discussion?
- What would you like to learn more about?
- Have you grown more certain or less certain in your beliefs?
How?
- What could be improved, changed or clarified in this *Doubters Welcome* discussion?

Discussion Four

If you feel comfortable, share your responses with others in your *Doubters Welcome* discussion. How were your responses to the questions similar or different than the responses of others?

Conclusion

Thank you for joining this *Doubters Welcome* discussion. Our hope is that you found the discussions helpful in thinking about life and faith. We also hope that you found it to be a helpful overview of some elements of the Christian faith.

Thanks again for participating!

More resources are available at:
www.dstiles.com

References

¹ Phrases such as “Christian beliefs” and “what Christians believe” are referenced throughout this booklet. While people who profess to be Christian may hold many different beliefs than those documented here, the beliefs described in this resource might commonly be classified as *orthodox* (or common to a traditional understanding of Christianity). Others might describe the views presented in this booklet as evangelical or reformed.

² John Calvin, “Institutes” I, VII, 5.

³ J.I. Packer, “Truth and Power”, 193.

⁴ *ibid*, 200.

⁵ John Frame. “Five Views on Apologetics” Steven B. Cowan, Ed. .Zondervan, 2000, 133.

⁶ *ibid*, 215.

⁷ Martin Lloyd-Jones. Sermon preached in 1954 entitled: “Grace, Peace, Glory” (From the MLJ Archive)

⁸ *ibid*.