

Why Is Christianity True?

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Justifying Our Opinions

Why do people believe Christianity is true — or not true? Answers to these questions depend, of course, on who is trying to answer them.

The person who wants to affirm the truth of the Christian faith is likely to answer the question in one, or more, of several ways:

- “It works for me. My life was a mess till I became a Christian, and Jesus straightened me out.”
- “I accept Christianity by faith. I just believe in my heart that it’s true.”
- “I accept the Bible is the Word of God, so Christianity must be true.”
- “God told me it’s true.”

The person who doesn’t accept the truth of the Christian faith might respond to the believer with something like this:

- “Maybe it works for you, but it doesn’t work for me so it must not be true.”
- “You can’t make something real just by believing it. Anybody can believe anything they want to, but I don’t have to accept their belief as the truth.”
- “The Bible is just the opinion of some people who lived long ago, in a pre-scientific age. We’re smarter today than they were, so we don’t have to take what they wrote seriously — we know better.”
- “I don’t see any evidence that God is real. How could he tell you anything, if he’s not there?”

What characterizes the answers of both the believer and the non-believer is that both are basing their opinion on something about themselves. The first person is saying that Christianity is true because he has faith, and because of what his faith has done for him. The second is saying that from his own experience and outlook he doesn’t see any reason to consider Christian faith a valid option.

Is there a way to anchor the Christian worldview on something other than subjective factors such as one’s personal preference or perspective? Is there a way, in fact, to anchor Christian belief *in reality itself*? Does the Bible offer any guidance here, guidance that might even respond to the objections of a person who accepts only his own authority and not that of Scripture?

Biblical Insights into Cosmology

What, after all, is reality? That question, like that of faith, can be answered in several ways. Most people in contemporary Western culture would probably accept the view that reality is whatever exists; in other words, reality is *the universe*. Is the Christian worldview just fantasy, or does it have a foundation in the structure of the objective universe? Thinking about this, one might wonder why there should even be a universe. There is no logical necessity that anything should exist at all. How did the universe “get here”?

The Bible contains some statements about that; in fact, it begins with such a statement: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” (Genesis 1:1-3). The statement is couched in geocentric terms, from the standpoint of an earthbound observer. But, in its essence, it says this: Once there was nothing — just “dark” nothingness. But then something was brought into being, and that first creation was light. In the same vein, the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews declares that “the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear” (Hebrews 11:3).

Most cosmologists accept the “big bang” theory, which holds that the universe didn’t always exist but had a beginning. This view is reinforced by the observation that the universe is still expanding from the force of that original “explosion” of heat and radiation, an event best imagined as a flash of intense light. Light, itself, is still something of a puzzle to physicists, having the properties of both matter (a particle) and energy (a wave, or vibration). That the Genesis account begins with the appearance of light is in complete accord with the consensus of cosmologists about the earliest stage of the universe.

Creation by Division

The Genesis account goes on, of course, to relate the successive stages of creation, again from a geocentric perspective. In the earliest stages the universe takes shape by a process of division. Light divides from darkness, gaseous matter (called “water”) is separated by more solid substance (“firmament”); then the “water” of the earth separates into the components that make up the surfaces of the globe. Echoing Genesis, the apostle Peter writes that “by the word of God heavens existed long ago, and an earth formed out of water and by means of water” (2 Peter 3:5). It is of interest that this process of division is a breaking down of what is undifferentiated into components that differ from one another, in much the same way that cosmologists regard the formation of heavier elements from the universe’s original simple element, hydrogen — a term derived, incidentally, from *hudor*, the Greek word for “water.”

The creation process, as described in the Bible, is also a process of *analysis*, or the breakdown of things into their component parts. The description makes it clear that the components can be analyzed, and viewed objectively, because they are not sacred in themselves. The universe itself is not God, but is what God has made. Further, the portion of the universe that is accessible to human beings has been placed under their management, as the Creator’s agents. This is the meaning of Genesis’s declaration, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth’” (Genesis 1:26). Without such a perspective that permits analysis and human intervention, what we know as modern science and technology would not be possible.

Additionally, this process of differentiation creates information, since information is the difference between one thing and another. This difference is binary; something is either “on” or “off,” it is either one thing or another — the principle that makes the digital computer and modern information technology possible. This biblical view of the origin of the universe through division is foundational to all information, and therefore knowledge, since there is no information or knowledge in undifferentiated sameness. For human beings, who have the facility of language, information is typically conveyed by *words*, or some equivalent symbol or action that functions as a word. Thus biblical writers speak of the informational, or word-like, aspect of the creative process. Psalm 34:6 summarizes the Genesis account this way: “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth.”

Upholding the Universe

The Gospel of John equates the creative word with Jesus Christ, as the incarnate revelation of God. The Gospel begins, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:1-3). The letter to the Hebrews carries the thought further; the informational aspect of the creative process not only brings it into being, but also keeps it from collapsing back into itself. Thus of Jesus Christ, as the revelation of God, it states, “He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power” (Hebrews 1:3).

Physicists note that the atoms and molecules of physical matter consist of subatomic particles separated from one another by distances that can be compared, on an astronomical scale, with the distances between bodies of the solar system. In other words, even the “solid” matter of the universe is mostly space. What keeps these particles both separated and bound together? Scientists give names to these mysterious forces, but that does not mean they understand how they work. The Scriptural authors identify Jesus Christ, as the Word of God, not only with the creative agency of God at the universal, or macro, level, but also with the operation of these forces at the quantum level to “uphold the universe.”

The cosmos is filled with radiation emanating from various sources that astronomers have been able to identify. However, their instruments also detect a faint background radiation that permeates the universe and comes from no identifiable source. Their general conclusion is that this background radiation is the echo of the “big bang,” an afterglow from the event that brought the universe into being. In this context, it is interesting to recall the words of the writer of Psalm 19: “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world” (Psalm 19:2-4a). Somehow, this writer understood that the universe conveyed a message about its creation that could not be expressed in speech.

How Did They Know?

The non-believer may regard the Bible as the work of benighted writers working with a primitive, pre-scientific picture of the earth. He might call them “flat-earthers.” It is true that the biblical authors describe their universe in geocentric terms; like contemporary weather forecasters they speak of the sun as “rising” and “setting,” as though it revolved about the earth. But apparently some Scriptural writers knew the earth was a globe, not a flat plane. Isaiah wrote, “Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in” (Isaiah 40:21-22a).

Of course, any astute observer of an eclipse of the moon would see the curved shadow of the earth and understand that it is not flat but spherical; ancient thinkers, including the authors of Scripture, had a better understanding of such things than they are often given credit for, despite their lack of modern scientific instrumentation. They were aware of their limitations; Isaiah, himself, had just asked, “Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?” (Isaiah 40:12). Nevertheless, despite the restrictions of their perspective these thinkers had insights into matters affecting the structure of the universe that accord with contemporary understanding of the cosmos.

How did the biblical writers *know* about these things, in an era before the work of modern cosmologists, physicists and other scientists was available for reflection? There is only one answer: their insight came from the Creator himself, through means that transcend our “normal” path to the acquisition of knowledge. The Apostle Peter stated that “men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:12). Paraphrasing the prophet Isaiah, the Apostle Paul wrote, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him, God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God” (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

To return, then, to our earlier question: Can the Christian worldview be based on something other than subjective factors — can it be anchored in reality, or the structure of the universe? These examples from the Bible show that it was not written by people who lived in a fantasy world. These writers had a grip on some basic cosmological realities, even if those realities were largely hidden from people of their time due to the restrictions of a geocentric perspective. When the Apostle Paul wrote that people who refuse to acknowledge God have no excuse, because “since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made,” he wasn’t just making it up. These men were skilled authors, brilliant thinkers, astute observers of life and of the world around them, but beyond this they had insight into foundational truths about reality. Christian faith, which inheres in Jesus Christ who is “upholding the universe with his word of power,” is based on this biblical understanding of the universe. Therefore, Christianity is grounded in reality in a way that competing worldviews, including those of its detractors, are not.

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