

The background of the entire image is a close-up photograph of water droplets on a surface. The droplets are of various sizes and are scattered across the frame. The lighting is soft, creating highlights and shadows on the droplets. The background is split into two vertical panels: the left panel is light gray, and the right panel is dark red. The text is overlaid on these panels.

CHRISTIAN ANSWERS TO HARD QUESTIONS

**SHOULD YOU
BELIEVE
IN GOD?**

K. SCOTT OLIPHINT

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Christian Interpretations of Genesis 1

Christianity and the Role of Philosophy

Creation, Evolution, and Intelligent Design

The Morality of God in the Old Testament

Should You Believe in God?

Was Jesus Really Born of a Virgin?

Peter A. Lillback and Steven T. Huff, Series Editors

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WHAT FOLLOWS is a fictional conversation between a Christian and an unbeliever who offers certain intellectual challenges to the gospel. The conversation is intended to be an *apologetic* conversation—a conversation that includes a presentation of the gospel, but that also answers some of the difficult objections that might be lodged against Christianity. It is, therefore, an attempt to set forth the truth of the gospel in the face of (some of the) intellectual objections that have been given against it. For that reason, the *way* or *mode* of commending the gospel herein is more complex than it might otherwise be, since it is given in the context of those challenges, and by way of a *defense* of Christianity.



I appreciate the opportunity you have given me to speak to you about my own beliefs. You have done this, you say, because you have always been curious about what people believe and why. As you are aware, I am a Christian. But why, you ask, would a particular belief system like Christianity appeal to me, and what exactly does it mean to be a Christian?

I should say at the beginning that this question will be the most important question you will ask in your entire lifetime. If you have any designs on moving from one who is curious to one who is committed, this will be the time. It might not, in God's good providence, be the only time for such a change. But for all we know, it might be. Since neither of us knows the details of our future, we can only say for sure that *this* is the time for you to seriously contemplate such a change.

But why would you want to change at all? You say that your penchant for curiosity has produced little more than confusion.

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You recognize that something has to be true. You are not content simply to gather various “truths” from others. You would like to stand on some truth as you inquire of others. This is all very good. As you have said, however, you can’t see that you have a place to stand at all. Being curious has only brought a plethora of options that others have chosen. It has done nothing but provide more information to you, and none of the options, thus far, has enticed you.

Your desire for truth is a good one. If you had said to me that truth was not important, or that truth was unattainable, then I might have turned our conversation in a different direction. I might have asked you, for example, if it was true that truth was unattainable. But because you believe that there is truth and you’re interested in discovering it, you will likely be interested in what I have to say to you.

If you would allow me to state my conclusion at the beginning of our conversation, I would like you to consider this: The only option available to you that will quell your constant curiosity and give you a place to stand is the Christian option. Every other option you have heard about, or will hear about, will not do for you what you desire. Unless you submit yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ, and stand on his Word, you will never find a real place to stand, or a real place to rest, and your curious search will never end. It is not new or more information you need; it never was. What you need is what I and all other people need—to place ourselves, our trust, our very lives in the hands of the Son of God who came, who lived a perfect life and who died, whose death covered over the sins of many, who was raised from the dead, and whose life is ours when we believe *into* him. What you need, in other words, is to let go of your own hold on life, to repent of your rejection of God, and to trust Christ.

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I know you may think that what I have just espoused is the height of arrogance. Not only have I claimed to have possession of *the* truth, but I have claimed that anyone else—past, present, or future—who does not believe as I do will have no claim on the truth. You think, perhaps, that I am claiming omniscience for myself. You think that I know all options available to all men in any and all ages such that no other option will do but Christianity. You think (and you have likely heard this from others) that I am claiming to know the full range of all that is possible. I have just stated that it is impossible to find, believe, and know the truth apart from Jesus Christ. This surely assumes, you contend, that I know all that is possible or impossible.

Does this simply confirm what you have heard about Christians? Is it a clear indication to you that Christians claim to have a monopoly on the truth? Perhaps my belief in God is nothing more than belief in myself, you think, since I seem to claim omniscience; perhaps Christian belief is nothing more than self-confidence *in excelsis!* We Christians, so it is said, claim to know all, and claim to have the only truth. This is the opposite of your own curious quest for truth; it is offensive to you in the extreme.

And how can it be, you ask, that so many brilliant men have been so terribly wrong through the centuries? Am I claiming to be smarter than they? Am I so much more intelligent than the myriad philosophers and scientists of history that I can sweep away all their erudition in the name of my own personal belief system? Is this, too, not the epitome of pride and boasting?

It would have been a shorter conversation if we could have agreed together that submission to Christ is our only hope. But your curiosity has come to the fore again, and it is incumbent on me to try to address your questions.

Let's begin by comparing notes on our past. Because you have discussed so many options with various other friends of

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yours, you are initially inclined to believe that each of our beliefs, and systems of belief, is mainly a product of our context. Many of those you have talked to, many of the authors you have read and studied, believe what they do because they—through their parents, their education, their surroundings, or a combination of these—have been conditioned to do so.

There can be no question that these contextual factors are a significant part of what we believe and why. My parents, like yours, taught me a multitude of things as I was growing up. They, in effect, chose the environment and context for me. They chose where I would live, where I would go to school, even, in some cases, who my friends would be. So it was for you as well.

Does this mean that what you and I believe is simply a product of our upbringing and environment? Perhaps you've read Joseph LeDoux's *The Synaptic Self* and you agree that we are all products of "nature and nurture." If so, then your own study and questions to others about their beliefs is nothing more than a mere historical quest. Your questions and probing about why certain people believe certain things is a study in contextual anthropology; it has nothing to do with truth at all, and has everything to do with the "accident of birth."

But this constant questioning of others' views has not satisfied you. You have recognized that if we are all simply products of our environments and contexts, then the notion of truth is an artificial one. The best we have, in such cases, are a multitude of autobiographies, none of which tells us anything about "the world" or about "the truth." They tell us only about "this person's world" and "this person's truth." You have learned enough to know that such a view is not practical; it cannot be lived out. It could not provide the foundation for living in this world day to day, or for a family, or a government, or even a meaningful

As society increasingly demonstrates a disbelief in God, what happens when that viewpoint is questioned? In a conversational style Oliphint discusses why belief is a preferable and more coherent position than unbelief and answers objections to common questions about Christianity.

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—John M. Frame, Professor of Systematic Theology and Philosophy, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando

"*Should You Believe in God?* by Scott Oliphint is a very capable and winsome statement of Christian theism. I commend it to you."

—Douglas Wilson, Senior Minister, Christ Church, Moscow, Idaho

Written to equip and strengthen laypeople in their defense of the faith, *Christian Answers to Hard Questions* challenges contemporary opposition to Christianity with concise, practical answers.

Peter A. Lillback and Steven T. Huff, Series Editors

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