

Knowing God Personally

10 God's

Perspective:

God loves you and created you to know Him personally. He has a wonderful plan for your life.

God created you. Not only that, he loves you so much that he wants you to spend eternity with him. Jesus said, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Jesus came so that each of us could know and understand God in a personal way. Jesus alone can bring meaning and purpose to life.

Q What keeps us from knowing God? ...

20 Our

Condition:

People are sinful and separated from God, so we cannot know Him personally or experience His love and plan.

The fact is, we need Jesus. The Bible says, "...all fall short of God's glorious standard" (Romans 3:23). Though God intended for us to have a relationship with him, we naturally want to do things our own way.

Deep down, our attitude may be one of active rebellion toward God or passive indifference, but it's all evidence of what the

Bible calls sin. The Bible tells us that "All of us like sheep have gone astray; each of us has turned to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6).

The result of sin in our lives is death—spiritual separation from God (Romans 6:23). Although we may try to reach God through our own effort, we inevitably fail.

This diagram shows the great gap that exists between us and God. The arrows illustrate that we might try to reach God through our own efforts. We may try to do good things, or earn God's acceptance through a good life or a moral philosophy. But our good efforts are insufficient to cover up our sin.



Q How can we bridge this gulf?..

30 God's

Response:

Jesus Christ is God's only provision for our sin. Through Him alone we can know God personally and experience God's love and plan.

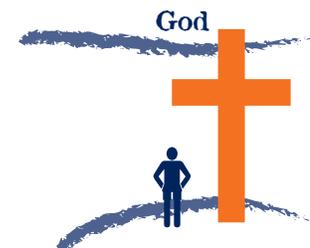
Jesus Christ is God's solution to the problem of human imperfection and evil. Because of Jesus' death on the cross, we don't have to be separated from God any longer. Jesus paid the price for our sin and in so doing, bridged the gap between us and God. "For Christ

also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:8).

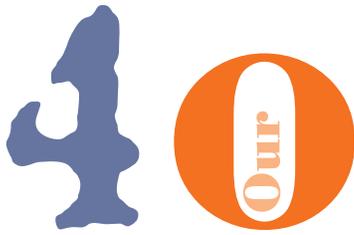
Instead of trying harder to reach God, we simply need to accept Jesus and his sacrifice as the one way to God. "I am the way, the truth and the life," Jesus said. "No one can come to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). He also said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die like everyone else, will live again. They are given eternal life for believing in me and will never perish" (John 11:25-26).

But not only did Jesus die for our sin, he rose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:3-6). When he did, he proved beyond doubt that he can rightfully promise eternal life—that he is the Son of God and the only means by which we can know God. He said, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Yet just having knowledge about God's plans and purposes isn't enough. We need to consciously accept Jesus Christ as the payment for our sin and welcome him into our life.



! It is not enough just to know these three truths....



Response:

We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord; then we can know God personally and experience His love and plan.

The Bible says, “But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12).

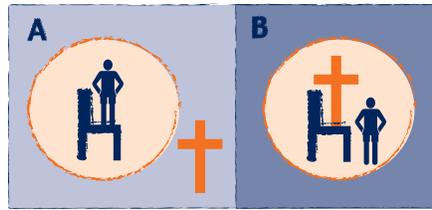
We accept Jesus by faith. The Bible says, “God saved you by his special favour when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it” (Ephesians 2:8,9).

Accepting Jesus means believing that Jesus is the Son of God, who he claimed to be, then inviting him to guide and direct our lives and make us into new people (John 3:1-8).

Jesus said, “I’m standing at the door and I’m knocking. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in” (Revelation 3:20).

How will you respond to God’s invitation? What will you do with the claims of Jesus Christ?

Consider these two circles.



A- Self-Directed Life

- Self is on the throne
- Jesus is outside the life
- Interests are directed by self, often resulting in frustration

B- Christ-Directed Life

- Jesus is in the life and on the throne
- Self is yielding to Jesus
- Interests are directed by Jesus, resulting in harmony with God

Q Which circle best represents your life?

Q Which circle would you like to have represent your life?

Begin a relationship with Jesus...

You can receive Christ right now. Remember that Jesus says, “I’m standing at the door and I’m knocking. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in” (Revelation 3:20). Would you like to respond to his invitation? Here’s how.

The precise words you use to commit yourself to God are not important. He knows the intentions of your heart. If you are unsure of what to pray, this might help you put it into words:

“Jesus, I want to know you. I want you to come into my life. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sin so that I could be fully accepted by you. Only you can give me the power to change and become the person you created me to be. Thank you for forgiving me and giving me eternal life with God. I give my life to you. Please do with it as you wish. Amen.”

If you sincerely asked Jesus into your life just now, then he has come into your life as he promised. You have begun a personal relationship with God.

What follows is a lifelong journey of change and growth as you get to know God better through Bible reading, prayer and interaction with other Christians...

If I asked Jesus into my life, how do I know that He is now really there?

Only you know if you sincerely asked Jesus to come into your life, to forgive you and take up residence as God in your life. However, assuming that you did make that decision and invited Him into your life, then did God hear you? Yes. 1 John 5:14 says, “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.” Jesus promised that He would enter our lives, if we ask Him.

In Revelation 3:20 Jesus makes this offer, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.” Did you open the door of your heart to God? If so, what did He say He would do? Would God mislead you?

In John 6:37, Jesus said, “All that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who comes to me I will not cast out.” And in John 10:27-29 Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.”

Jesus died on the cross for our sins, so that we could be in relationship with Him. He’s not indifferent to the issue. He went to great lengths to bring us into relationship with Him. Jesus took our sins on Himself and covered us with His righteousness, making us fully forgiven and fully accepted by Him. We don’t have to first live good lives, or perform religious rituals, or spend years begging Him. He is the one who made it possible for us to have a relationship with Him. And we come to Him based on what He did for us, rather than what we can do. He paid for our sins, so He now offers to forgive us and come into our lives. 1 Peter 3:18 says, “For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.”

Who Did Jesus Think He Was Anyway?

There are only four options for the identity of Jesus Christ. He was a legend, a liar, a lunatic—or Lord and God.

Legend?

Those who support the legend hypothesis say that the claim to be God was a result of the religious imagination of the early church, and as such, was written back into the mouth of Jesus. The real Jesus, they say, said no such thing.

First of all, this view fails to take into account the fact that it takes more than two full generations for legendary traces to wipe out the hard core of historical fact (A.N. Sherwin White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*, Oxford U. Press, 1963, pp. 189-191). There is good evidence that Matthew, Mark, Luke and Acts were written within one generation after Christ, but even if all the Gospels were written after 70 AD, as proponents of the legend theory suggest, this is still within the two generations that are needed before mystical tendencies can prevail over the historic core.

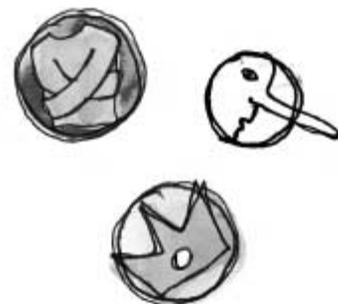
Second there is no question that the earliest Christians believed in and worshipped one of their own countrymen as Lord and God. How does one explain this worship by monotheistic Jews of one of their own countrymen apart from some divine claims or behaviour? If the real Jesus never made any such claims, this early belief in a divine Christ is inexplicable.

C.S. Lewis, one of the great literary experts on ancient myths, says of the Gospel accounts: "I have been reading poems, romances, vision literature, legends, myths all my life. I know what they are like. I know that not one of them is like this" (C.S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, Walter Hooper, ed., Eerdmans, 1967, p. 155).

Claims to be God

Since, therefore, there is little likelihood that Jesus' claim to deity is legend or myth, we should expect to find something in His words and actions that suggest He thought of Himself as divine. Jesus' self-perception as God is clearly seen in the various Gospel accounts.

- He believed He had the power to perform miracles and cast out demons (Matthew 11:2-5, Luke 11:20).
- Jesus claimed to determine people's eternal destiny (Luke 12:8-9).
- Jesus placed His personal authority over the Law of God (Matthew 5).
- In Mark 2:5-7, Jesus shows He believed He had the power to forgive sins. The scribes reacted by saying, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?"
- Jesus thought himself to be the Son of God in a unique and absolute sense in his use of the term 'ABBA' (daddy) to refer to God (Matt 11:27; Luke 10:22; Luke 20:9-18).
- Jesus claimed to be "The Son of Man" – a divine figure (Daniel 7:13-14).
- Jesus claimed to be the "I AM" of the Old Testament (Matt 14:22-23; Mark 6:45-52; Exodus 3:14).
- Jesus formed the 'Twelve', but was distinct from them.



How Could

- The most explicit claims to deity are found in John's gospel where Jesus claims, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30); "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9); "Before Abraham was born, I AM" (John 8:58); and Jesus accepts worship as God (John 20:23). There is no good reason to hold that these passages are merely the result of the over-developed imagination of John, since Jesus' self-conception as God is already evident in the earlier three gospels.

Liar or Lunatic?

Therefore, since Jesus claimed to be God, His claims are either true or false. If false, He must have been a liar, deliberately misleading the multitudes. Or, He was a lunatic, sincerely believing Himself to be God, when in reality He was just a man.

Jesus' brilliant moral character and His willingness to die for His claim to be God have convinced most people that He was not lying. Jesus' humility, warmth and unselfish love, His quick and skilful thinking in dealing with His opponents, His intelligent communication with the multitudes, and His amazing self-control and composure in the midst of the tremendous physical and emotional stress of His betrayal and crucifixion, all point to His contact with reality. Jesus was no lunatic.

At the root of this question is a confusion between the admirable quality of tolerance for different views and the absurd position of the equal validity of all views. One can be tolerant by respecting the rights of others to hold alternative views without threat of violence, yet still be firmly committed to one point of view as true. The great value of tolerance in no way absolves us from resolving conflicting claims to truth.

Sincerity of belief does not guarantee truth. One can be sincerely wrong. I may believe sincerely that a glass of liquid is water and drink it. If in fact it is hydrochloric acid, my sincere belief would have devastating consequences!

Contradictions

Second, the assumption by many that all religions are basically the same just doesn't square with the facts. Although there are similarities, the differences are very significant.

Eastern religions teach "monism" (all is one), that each person is a part of everything, including God, and that ultimately one needs to lose oneself in "the all" like a drop of water losing itself in the ocean. Christianity, however, affirms that each person is a unique individual and will remain such after death. Christianity teaches that God loves us; an impersonal, eastern god cannot love us. Obviously all religions are not the same; they contradict one another. Therefore they cannot all be true.



Lord

If Jesus was not a legend and He claimed to be God, then, as we've said, His claim is either true or false. If it is false, He must have been a liar or a lunatic. Since the evidence shows He is neither a liar nor a lunatic, then the only other alternative left is that His claim is true. Jesus is Lord and God.

Jesus Be The Only Way To God?

Moral Gap

Third, there is a moral gap between each of us and God which we cannot bridge in our own power. It is like trying to swim from the West Coast of North America to Hawaii. Some of us may get farther than others, but all of us will drown far short of Hawaii.

Let's say, though, someone in a boat comes along and says he has good news—claims he can help us. “No real problem; evil is illusion,” he says, “mind over matter—if you don't mind it won't matter. Just meditate and you'll experience peace and tranquillity and oneness with the water.” Would this be a message of good news? The last time I checked ‘oneness with the water’ is how we define drowning.

Or maybe he remembers he has some pamphlets on board entitled, “Ten Easy Steps on How to Swim.” Tossing them to us he tells us to merely read the pamphlet and do what it says. That's not good news either, is it? We still won't make it to Hawaii.

Perhaps he decides on the more personal touch and jumps in the water to show us how to swim. “Just cup your hands, kick your feet and breathe like this,” he says. Again, this message is not good news. It still won't get us to Hawaii.

Maybe then, getting smart, he tells us to get into the boat! But part way there he throws us back into the ocean to do the rest ourselves.

In none of these four situations would the person in the boat truly be a messenger of good news! And it is exactly the same with religion if all that it offers us is:

1. A denial that there is any moral gap between us and God—telling us to just turn inward and meditate and we will become one with the universe. When we are honest with ourselves, we know we fall short of our Creator's standards.

2. A book of rules to follow (even if that book is the Bible). Our problem is not that we don't know what we ought to do; our problem is we don't do what we know we ought to do. We need both forgiveness and help.

3. An example, a model of some religious person's life for us to emulate (even if that person is Jesus). Again, we know what we ought to do, but we just can't seem to do it. A religion must offer us more than an example to follow if it is going to be real good news.

4. Help part of the way but insist it is our responsibility to work for and earn the majority of the merit on our own.

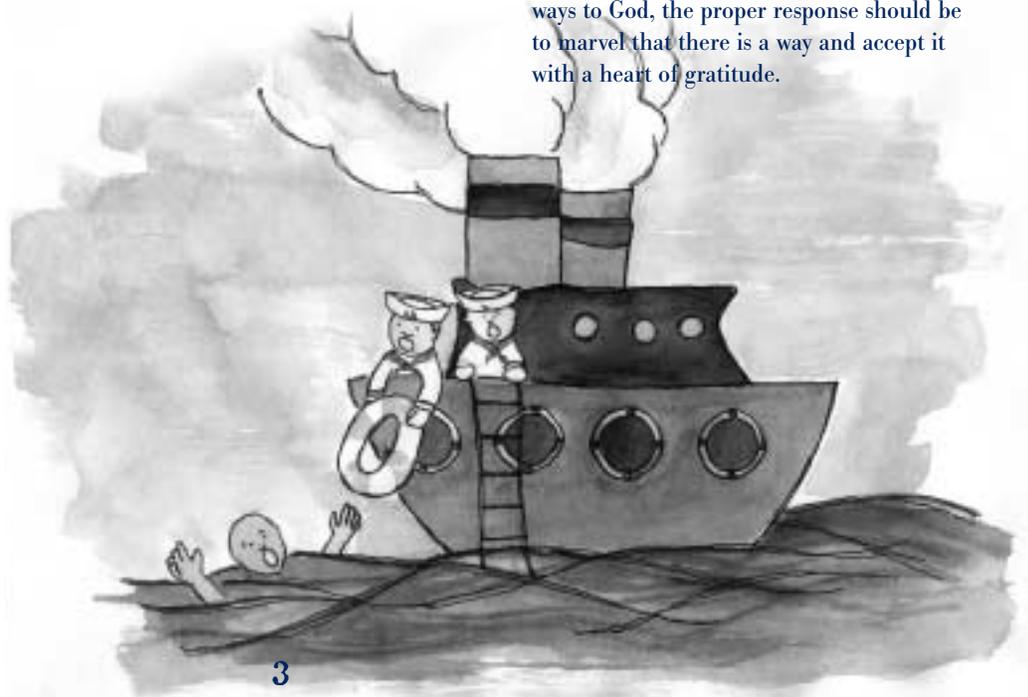
Good News

The only good news he could bring us is “Come on board. I'll take you all the way to Hawaii.” Now this is exactly the uniqueness of the Christian message. All other religions say “Do, Do, Do.” Christianity says, “Done!”

Jesus Christ, through His death on the cross as a substitute for you and me, has paid the penalty for our moral failure that is a result of our attitude of independence towards God. He has cleared away what was separating us from God. “For Christ died for your sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to God” (I Peter 3:18a).

Some think God is being “narrow-minded” if Jesus is the only way. But the issue is: “Why is there *any* way to God?” God has been gracious and merciful to provide us with a way back to a personal relationship with Him even though we have rebelled against Him. If humankind could have reached God by any other way, God would not have sacrificed His only Son.

Rather than complain that there aren't more ways to God, the proper response should be to marvel that there is a way and accept it with a heart of gratitude.



Does a Loving God Condemn Those Who Never Heard About Christ?

Although the Bible does not give us the complete answer to this question, it does tell us that God "...will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity (or fairness)" (Psalm 98:9). God will not condemn a person for rejecting a Christ they never heard about. We all stand condemned for something far more basic.

Suppressing the Knowledge of God

We are under the mistaken impression that most people in the world are innocent. But there are no innocent people. We have all suppressed the knowledge of God.

God has revealed himself to everyone through the creation around us and the sense of right and wrong inside us (Romans 1:18-20; 2:15). Each person knows enough about God that He says that the "truth is plain" and we are all "without excuse." It is for this suppression, distortion and rejection of the true knowledge of God and for the accompanying violation of God's laws that we stand condemned.

God takes the Initiative

Even though "no one seeks for God" (Romans 3:11) on his own initiative, God continues to take the initiative. He does not want any to perish (2 Peter 3:9). If anyone does begin to respond to God and seek Him, God progressively reveals more truth. "You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

Scripture also indicates that no one will be saved apart from Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). It is clear that someone who

knows about Christ's saving death on the cross, yet rejects it, will spend eternity away from God as a result of his/her free choice. However, what about someone who is sincerely responding to the light God is revealing but dies before the Gospel of Jesus Christ can be brought to them?

Trust Only In God's Mercy

If a person who never heard about Christ, throws herself totally upon the mercy of God, not trusting in her own good deeds or any religious practices to give her merit before God, then it may be possible that the work of Christ on the cross would be applied to that person.

It is very important to notice that this does not mean that the devout person in any religion is therefore saved. Man-made religion does not represent our search for God, but rather our flight from the true knowledge of God.

Only by casting oneself completely upon the mercy of God, and not counting on one's deeds—religious or otherwise—for right standing with God, can anyone possibly be saved.

C.S. Lewis pointedly identifies the attitude that each of us should have on this question: "We do know that no man can be saved except through Christ," but in the meantime, "if you are worried about the people outside, the most unreasonable thing you can do is remain outside yourself."

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C.S. Lewis



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