

Why I am a Christian:

in a scientific, humanistic and atheistic world

Conclusion: The Shoulds of Faith in a Pluralistic World

We should...

- We should question God and the Bible (God can handle it) and put it to the test: Not all of the heroes of the Bible are worthy of emulation. Those that are not are either negative examples (what NOT to do) or are examples of the power of God's redemption (what God can do even with frail humans with feet of clay). Also, many of the Bible stories are contextually based, which means they may be offensive to our current morality. As God grows us and blesses us, God expects more of us.
- We should question our faith so that it becomes stronger. Have faith, but not blind faith. Explore what can be reasonably explored. God created us in God's image, so use your brain.
- We should hold spiritual leaders accountable
- We should never use the God excuse. If anyone justifies their unusual or immoral behavior with *"I'm just doing what God told me to do,"* do not let them get away with such an excuse. We are always responsible for our behavior. God is often used as a cop out, even for things that have little to do with morality, in churches. For instance, a member who is uncomfortable in a congregation will often use a Christian cop-out, *"Well, I'm leaving because God told me to leave."* That is a cop-out. Be truthful, *"I'm leaving because I want to go somewhere else."*
- We should be hungry to hear what science speaks to us: it is the voice of God. Those who created science believed that learning about the ordering of the universe would give us an insight into God.
- We should live a faith that is a blessing to others and the world. Christianity is not about creating a fortress in which we Christians can blissfully ride into the sunset. That is selfish. As long as we have life in our lungs, we have a purpose to be a blessing and we need to use every opportunity. Church isn't about us and our little core of Christians, but about how our little core can bless those who are NOT Christians. We should never be debtors to the world. Our communities should know we are here, and know that we are a source of blessing.
- We should read and listen to viewpoints that are alternative to our own. We don't have to agree or respect the viewpoint, but we should respect the person enough to listen. That is not a lack of faith, but an expression of respect and love to others
- We should focus on purity in our relationships, and not argue about the minutia of dogma. Nothing is more embarrassing than Christians bickering about such non-essentials as, *"Are you pre or post-millennial in your theology?"*
- We should listen more than we speak to those who are not-Christian, and when we speak, our message should be one of blessing. Jesus NEVER condemned, cajoled, brow-beat, or embarrassed those who weren't followers, only the religious leaders who should have known better and used their position to collect power and wealth. Therefore, *"You're going to hell"* should not be a phrase in our vocabulary when speaking with non-Christians.
- We should treat life with joy and respect. While we do have hope of a new life in Christ in the kingdom to come, this life is a gift of God and should be respected. We should care for our bodies, those around us, and those who struggle to find appropriate food and clothing and shelter. Every life is precious in God's eyes.
- We should love and embrace people as they come to us, and not try to change them. We all have areas in our life that need to be changed, but that is up to the conviction of the Holy Spirit, not the gossipy whims of the members of a congregation. Often, the changes we want people to make in their life is for

our benefit, anyway, not their own and not for Gods. If God wants someone to be transformed, God will transform that person's life in God's own time. If God is incapable of transforming a person's life, then God is not much of a God. We are only responsible to love, and let the Holy Spirit transform. Just remember, when we see the faults of someone else, it's because we are overlooking all of our own to do so. Also, we display our ignorance about how God transforms lives. We see a fault, labeled "Z," in a person's life, and we want that changed. What we forget, or that of which we are ignorant, is that for a person to arrive at "Z," a person must begin with "A" and all the letters in between. It may take a while for a person to be transformed, perhaps even a lifetime. Therefore...

- We should focus on the needed transformation in our own lives rather than what is needed in others.
- We should never roll your eyes at the intolerance of some atheists. Christians have been intolerant, ignorant, rude, and discriminatory to them. This is not becoming of Christ. We should never be the cause of an atheist's despair or the reason for their lack of faith. Our response to atheists, as it should be to everyone, is just to love them.
- We should allow our actions and words speak for themselves. We should never be in the business of collecting political power to create a platform for our message and reforms. Government NEVER has Christ at the center, so we should never use government to accomplish our ends. Love is the only law of the Christian life, and this cannot be legislated or enforced. When we attempt to legislate love, it ceases to be love.
- We should be actively engaged in a community of Christians called the church. The church is necessary to hold us accountable by challenging us to be grateful, give more generously, act in a moral fashion to others, and share what we have been given.
- We should make God a part of our daily life and every relationship, using every opportunity to be a messenger of love and forgiveness.
- We should embrace God's one law: love. The journey of life is the challenge to know how best to love in our own unique situations and context. Therefore, the question we ask when faced with every challenge is, "*How do I best express love, here?*"

Selected Bibliography

These are books that I have collected and read over the last 25 years that have made a significant contribution to my faith journey. Each has had some influence on the information I have communicated in this sermon series. Please be forewarned: not every book is by a Christian author. Some are even anti-Christian, anti-religious and anti-faith.

Christian Books

Devotional

Brennan Manning, "*Lion and Lamb: the relentless tenderness of Jesus*"
"*The Ragamuffin Gospel*"

History

Hugh T. Kerr, "*Readings in Christian Thought*"
Cyril Richardson, "*Early Christian Fathers*"

Theology

F.F. Bruce, "*The Hard Sayings of Jesus*"
Peter C. Craigie, "*The Problem of War in the Old Testament*"

Gerhard Hasel, *"Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the current debate"*

Joachim Jeremias, *"New Testament Theology"*

"The Central Message of the New Testament"

George Eldon Ladd, *"A Theology of the New Testament"*

Claus Westermann, *"Elements of Old Testament Theology"*

Philosophy

David Aikman, *"The Delusion of Disbelief"*

Karen Armstrong, *"The Case for God"*

Karl Barth *"God Here and Now"*

"Church Dogmatics"

"The Call to Discipleship"

N. A. Berdyaev, *"The Worth of Christianity and the Unworthiness of Christians"*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *"Ethics"*

"The Cost of Discipleship"

Rick Herrick, *"The Case Against Evangelical Christianity"*

Martin Heidegger, *"Being and Truth"*

Peter Hitchens, *"The Rage against God"*

Timothy Keller, *"The Reason for God"*

Paul F. Knitter, *"Without Buddha I Could Not Be A Christian"*

CS Lewis *"Mere Christianity"*

"The Screwtape Letters"

"The Abolition of Man"

John Locke, *"The Works of John Locke"*

Brian McClaren, *"A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions That Are Transforming the Faith"*

M. Scott Peck, *"Denial of the Soul"*

"The Road Less Traveled"

"The People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil"

Francis A. Schaeffer, *"A Christian Manifesto"*

Lee Strobel, *"A Case for Christ"*

"The Case for a Creator"

Scientific Books

Mario Beauregard, *"Spiritual Brain"*

Stephen Jay Gould and Rosamond Wolf Purcell, *"Crossing Over: Where Art and Science Meet"*

Stephen Jay Gould, *"Ever Since Darwin: Reflections in Natural History"*

Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow, *"A Brief History of Time"*

Atheistic Books

Bertrand Russell, *"Why I Am Not a Christian"*

Richard Dawkins, *"The God Delusion"*

Greg M. Epstein, *"Good without God: What a Billion Nonreligious People Do Believe"*

Sam Harris, *"Letter to a Christian Nation"*

Christopher Hitchens, *"God is Not Great"*

Samir Selmanovic, *"It's Really All About God: Reflections of a Muslim Atheist Jewish Christian."*

Bruce Sheiman, *"An Atheist Defends Religion: Why Humanity is Better Off with Religion than without It."*

Mythology

"Beowulf"

Rudolph Bultman, *"The New Testament and Mythology"*

"Kerygma and Myth"

Thomas Bulfinch, with Commentary by Richard Martin, *"Bulfinch's Mythology"*

Jacob & Wilhelm Grimm, *"Grimm Fairy Tales"*

Homer, *"The Iliad"*

"The Odyssey"

Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, *"The Power of Myth"*

J.R.R. Tolkien, *"The Lord of the Rings"*

T.H. White, *"The Once and Future King"*

Humanistic and Theistic Philosophy

Gregory Boyd, *"The Myth of a Christian Nation"*

William C. Craig, *"Theories of Development"*

Harold S. Kushner, *"When Bad Things Happen to Good People"*

Damon Linder, *"The Religious Test"*

Plato, *"The Apology of Socrates"*

"The Republic"

Stephen G. Jr. Ray, *"Do No Harm"*

Matt Rossano, *"Supernatural Selection"*

Krista Tippett, *"Einstein's God"*

Robert Wright, *"The Evolution of God"*

Websites

I consulted each of these websites during my research for this sermon series. Please be aware, not all of these are "safe" for those who do not want their faith challenged.

Atheists

TheBlasphemyChallenge.com Where it is cool to hate God. Clearinghouse of religion and faith bashing

rationalresponders.com Website for Secular Humanists and atheists

secularhumanism.org Official website of Secular Humanism

hitchenszon.com Christopher Hitchens, political journalist, New atheist

samharris.org Sam Harris, New Atheist researcher and philosopher

richarddawkins.net Richard Dawkins, New Atheist and paleontologist

samirselmanovic.com Samir Selmanovic, a new NEW atheist who believes that Atheists and people of faith need each other.

atheistnexus.org/ Bruce Sheiman, a new NEW atheist who wants to believe in God

atheistdefendsreligion.blogspot.com/ Blog of Bruce Sheiman

Christians

hitchensblog.mailonsunday.co.uk Peter Hitchens, political journalist, Christian, and brother to atheistic author, Christopher Hitchens

berdyaev.com Nikolai Berdyaev, a Soviet dissident, exiled due to his Christianity

killingthebuddha.com Christian/Buddhist dialogue, seeking a harmony between Christian theology and Buddhist philosophy

sethbarnes.com Radical Living in a Comfortable world

Mythology

mythologicalstudies.org Foundation for Mythological Studies

jcf.org Joseph Campbell Foundation

aras.org The Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism

Theistic and Philosophical

beliefnet.com A resource for ALL faiths

religion-online.org Full texts of influential religious authors

spaceandmotion.com A site dedicated to the Dynamic Unity of Reality, a blending of science a metaphysics

Archeology

isfn.skytech.co.il Israel Finkelstein, Archeologist, professor at Tel Aviv University