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Is Christianity Divisive? | Tim Keller

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The Veritas Forum

Some say that claiming to know God or truth is too exclusive in a pluralistic society and too divisive in a free democratic one. People who hold such exclusive beliefs, they say, tend to impose them on others and oppress those who disagree. How can Christians, then, justify their faith that says Jesus is the one true way to God? Can they fit in and operate in a free society? Tim Keller dives into these questions on the stage at UC Berkeley. Please like, share, subscribe to, and review this podcast. Thank you!

Transcript

Welcome to the Veritas Forum. This is the Veritas Forum Podcast. A place where ideas and beliefs converge.

What I'm really going to be watching is which one has the resources in their worldview to be tolerant, respectful, and humble toward the people they disagree with. How do we know whether the lives that we're living are meaningful? If energy, light, gravity, and consciousness are a mystery, don't be surprised if you're going to get an element of this involved. Some say that claiming to know God or truth is too exclusive in a pluralistic society and too divisive in a free democratic one.

People who hold such exclusive beliefs, they say, tend to impose them on others and oppress those who disagree. How can Christians, then, justify their faith that says Jesus is the one true way to God? Can they fit in and operate in a free society? Tim Keller dives into these questions on the stage at UC Berkeley. And a talk titled, "Is Christianity Divisive?" The topic is belief in an age of skepticism.

And I'd like to, in my address to you, which is only going to take half the time we're here together tonight, I'd like to drill down into one of those main reasons why people are skeptical about belief in God in general. Christianity in particular tonight. And if it's not maybe the question that you most wanted to hear about, half the time we'll have questions and answers and you can come and pose your question.

But the one I'd like to specially tackle is that people today are particularly skeptical about belief in God because they feel that, to say, "I know God and I have the truth," is too exclusive a way of speaking in a pluralistic society filled with all kinds of views and religions. And it's also too divisive in a democratic society, a free democratic society, because people, it is said, that believe they know God and they have the truth. They feel impaled, made they can't help themselves, to impose those beliefs on us at least legislatively by law.

And in some cases, to really oppress and marginalize people, in fact, very often belief in God seems to lead to violence and to war itself. Now, how do you justify then belief in God? And especially the most, perhaps, exclusive of all religious claims, which is Orthodox Christianity that says Jesus Christ is the one true way to God. How do you justify that kind of claim? And how do people with those kinds of exclusive beliefs actually fit and operate in a free democratic society? Now, you know, a lot of the new atheist books by Mr. Dawkins, Mr. Hitchens, Mr. Harris, and others say it doesn't fit at all.

In fact, religious belief, unless it diminishes or even goes away, until that happens, we're really not going to have a peaceful world. I don't agree with that at all. And I'd like to share with you the five ways people are trying to deal with exclusive truth claims.

Five ways people are trying to deal with the divisiveness of religion. I'd like to show why all five of them fail, and I'd like to show in conclusion a way forward. Not one of those five, but a way forward.

But let me start off by saying something you might surprise you. I do think religion is part of the problem with the world. I do think religion has a fair, to a great degree, contributes to division and conflict and war in the world.

And I'll tell you how it works. You know, being a believer in God, an Orthodox Christian, I know how it works. The first stage is, it's actually, I call it a slippery slope in the heart.

Religion, first of all, starts with, gives you a kind of sense of superiority because you have the truth, and you're living a good life, and these people over here are not. They don't have the truth, and they're not living a good life. So you feel superior to them.

That's stage one. Stage two is separation. You just don't hang out with them.

You know, you don't spend time with them. They're kind of impure. Stage three is because you don't know them, you caricature them.

They become one dimensional. Everything cartoons, big ears, big nose, a cartoonish view you have of these other people over here. So from superiority to separation to caricaturing, and that leads to passive and then active oppression.

Because those are the kind of people you can push away. Those are the kind of people

you can ignore. Those are the kind of people you can do.

Maybe not actively oppress at first, but sort of passively just not give them the same kind of regard that you should. And that slippery slope leads from religion, belief of the truth, to oppression. It really does.

So now that we all agree, the religion is a big problem in the world, and does not lead, generally speaking, to peace on earth. What are we going to do about it? Now right now there's five things that people are suggesting, and five strategies that people are trying to use to address the exclusive truth claims of religion and Christianity in particular. And here's what the five are.

None of them are going to work. None of them do work. I'm going to try to give you another approach.

But the five are, what do you do about exclusive religion? Hope it away, outlaw it away, explain it away, argue it away, privatize it away. None of them are going to work. Let me show you why.

Okay, first, hope it away. Now I am older than a lot of you, and when I was your age, boy, don't you hate sentences and start like that? When I was your age, everybody thought that modern societies, technologically advanced societies would become less and less religious as time went on. The idea was that thick, robust, orthodox religious belief was going to thin out the more developed countries got, economically developed, and more technologically developed they got.

The more people became educated and came to know something about what the whole world was like. It was understood that when human beings became more mature, that religion was slowly die out. It would thin out at first.

There's robust religion that believes in miracles and believes in absolute truth and believes in scriptures that are authoritative. And then there's the thinner kind of religion that says, "Well, we take those creeds and the stories sort of metaphorically, and we don't really believe that literally happened. We just think it's a symbol." And that's what you might call thinner religion.

And it was expected that the robust kind of religion would start to die out, then things would get thinner, and eventually things would get secular. And the more modern society got, the less religious it would be. And it was believed that Europe, because it was the most secular of all the continents, was ahead of the curve, and that's where we were all going to go.

None of that's happened. Between the time I was your age and the time that I'm my age, none of that's happened. In fact, this is shocking to everybody.

For example, North America. You know, Mark Lilla has written a book called "The Stillborn God." And you know what that book's about? The title? It's about the death of mainline liberal religion. What's happening in this country is, yes, on the one hand, there are more secular people.

There's more people who say, "I don't believe in God or I don't know what I believe in God or have no religious affiliation." But on the other hand, there's more orthodoxy. There's more robust supernatural religion than it has ever been. And what's actually happened is the middle has atrophied.

The moderate middle has atrophied. So for example, Pew Foundation just came out with this huge religious survey of the religious state of the country. And if you notice, evangelical Pentecostal Christians are the biggest category in the country, bigger than mainline Protestants by far bigger than the Catholics.

That just was not true when I was growing up. Now, there's what's happened is, you've got more orthodox religion and actually more secularism. And so we're more polarized than we ever were.

And that's just America. If you go to Latin America, Asia, and Africa, religion, Islam, and Christianity is growing like crazy. And it's refuting this idea that the more modern a country gets, the more secular it will get.

For example, Korea went from about 1% to about 40% Christian in about 100 years, as it was getting more modern. And right now, the same thing's happening in China. And today, there's probably more Christians in China than there are in America.

And in Africa right now, as some of you know these statistics, there's 2 million Episcopalians in America. There's 17 million in Nigeria alone. 8 million in Uganda alone.

How did that happen, you say? Well, because Africa went from 9% to 60% or 50% Christian in about 90 years. What's going on? The only place in the world in which, say, Christianity isn't growing like crazy is Europe. And now people are not looking at Europe as the forerunner.

They're saying, "What happened? Why is it the exception?" And the answer is, it's not modernity. It was state churches. And that's another subject.

If you want to ask me about it, I'm not sure it's the most fruitful use of our time tonight. But the fact of the matter is, orthodox religion is not going away. Robust, crunchy.

I believe in miracles. I believe in the truth. I believe in the Scriptures.

That religion is here indefinitely. There's something in the human heart that is so inexorably religious that you can really say it's a permanent condition. And one of the

most amazing things, I've known about this for years, but one of the most amazing things, some time last year, the New York Times magazine, ran a survey of the fact that scientists, evolutionary scientists, are now trying to study, the evolutionary roots, I'm going to get back to this in a second, of religion, because they are finding that basically human beings in general are very prone to believe in God.

In fact, the studies have shown that children, when they're introduced, it's almost like children, are almost, they're wired to, they're prepared to believe in God. They find the idea of God incredibly credible. And so what they're trying to do now is they're trying to say, "Why aren't people so religious?" Because they're recognizing this is not going away.

What are the evolutionary roots of it? I'll get back to it in a second. But the idea that you can hope it away, the idea that hopefully, I mean, one of the idea that if we could just get rid of this kind of orthodox religion, then we could really swing in this country, it's not going to happen. We're going to have to learn to get along.

We're going to have to learn to talk. We're going to have to learn how to do civil discourse and talk about these issues. You can't hope it away.

Secondly, and this is going to take like one minute. The second strategy, which by and large is going away, I think. The second strategy for dealing with the divisiveness and the exclusiveness of religion is outlawed.

Now, that has not worked very well. A perfect example of this is the two biggest projects of it was Russia and China under communism, in which they basically said, "Religion undermines the state, it undermines the authority of the state." Many of these religions were outlawed or highly controlled, but one of the great ironies of history, and I think 500 years from now everybody's going to see this. The best thing that communism ever did for the growth of Christianity in China was to kick all the missionaries out in 1945.

When they said, "We're clamping down, we're getting rid of all the Western missionaries," and they kicked them all out, and they said, "That's that." What happened was it turned Chinese Christianity indigenous, and it became far, far more powerful and far more potent, and it began to grow like wildfire. Outlying religion does not help. For the most silly of the five strategies, hope it away, to the most futile of the strategies outlawed away, we move to a third strategy.

I said, "Explain it away." Now, explain it away and argue it away. This is what a lot of intellectual folks and a lot of scholars are trying to do, hoping to sort of decrunchify religion. The first way is to explain it away.

One of the ways to diminish its impact, one of the ways to say, "We need to tame religious people." I'm not trying to be pejorative about it. I know that this is one of the

ways it's done, is we're going to explain it. The New York Times magazine I mentioned was a survey of the last ten years in which evolutionary scientists have been working on this question.

Why are human beings so religious? And if you grant there's no God, if you say there's no God, and everything has to have a natural cause, and if you say, "Therefore, everything, every feature of your brain and my brain, everything about its belief-forming faculties is the product of natural selection." Every single thing about my brain is there because it helped my ancestors survive somehow. Then you have to ask this question, "Why are people so religious?" and you have to give it an evolutionary answer. And the answer, now right now nobody quite knows, that's what the debate's about.

The evolutionary scientists that are being reported on all agree that there must be some way in which belief in God was something that helped our ancestors survive. Otherwise it wouldn't be in our brain. And everybody's trying to decide how it happened.

There are people like Richard Dawkins who actually says it was a misfiring of evolution. He doesn't even want to grant that it helped our ancestors survive. He just thinks it's a byproduct of some other trait that helped our ancestors survive.

He won't even grant this. And on the other hand, there are other folks who saw it different. I don't go into that.

Here's what I want to point out. I have been absolutely amazed at the negative reviews by secular people of the New Atheist books. The New Republic gave a very learned and very devastating negative critique of Daniel Dennett's book.

So many Thomas Nagel of NYU as a philosopher did a tremendously negative review of Dawkins' book. And you know what they said, these men were not writing as Christians. And this is absolutely right.

We have a problem with saying, "Yeah, most people believe in morality. They believe that there are moral absolutes. And most people believe in God.

But it's because our genetic... It's because we're programmed by evolution to feel that way. Our belief forming faculties that there is a God and there are moral absolutes do not tell us that there really is a God. If you have belief forming faculties that tell you there's a God, it doesn't mean there is a God.

It just means that that feeling helped your ancestors survive. So the belief forming faculties being a product of evolution only helped survival. They don't necessarily tell you what's really there.

Your belief forming faculties. They don't tell you what's there. They just help you survive.

And all these reviews said, "But wait a minute. The problem is that evolutionary scientists use that scalpel on everything else when... I think there's a God. Well, you were just programmed for that.

I believe in morality. We are just programmed for that. I believe in evolution." And here's the question.

If your belief forming faculties don't tell you the truth but only what you need to survive, why believe them? Why believe that when you actually observe the environment? They're telling you what's actually out there. Or that when you decide, "I believe in evolution. Why should you believe that? Why put the scalpel on everything else?" Alvin Plantinga, who's a philosophy professor at Notre Dame, has argued this at a very high level, much higher than I could possibly get across to you.

But he's pointed out, and a lot of other philosophers have pointed out, that mild paranoia is going to be much more helpful for survival than an accurate assessment of your environment. And therefore, if you believe, if you have a theory of evolution, I'm not saying I'm against all understanding of evolution, but if you have a theory of evolution that says, "You can't trust what your brain tells you. You can't trust what your brain's belief forming faculties tell you." Including what they tell you about evolution, then you can't trust your theory of evolution.

C.S. Lewis put it like this some years ago. He wasn't talking about this directly, but it applies. He says, "You can't go on explaining everything away forever." He's really talking about people who deconstructed everything.

"Oh, everything, that's just that. That's just that." He says, "You cannot go on explaining away forever, or you will find that you have explained explanation itself away." For example, you cannot go on seeing through things forever. The whole point of seeing through something is to see something else through it.

It is good that you can see through a window because the garden beyond is opaque. But if you could see through everything, then everything would be transparent, and a holy transparent world would be an invisible world. You can see through everything is the same as not to see at all.

How does that apply? Like this. If, as Nietzsche says, "All truth claims are really just power grabs," then so is his, so I listened to him. If, as Freud says, "All views of God are really just psychological projections to deal with our guilt and insecurity," then so is his view of God, so why listen to him.

If, as the evolutionary scientists say, that what my brain tells me about morality in God is not real, it's just chemical reactions designed to pass on my genetic code, then so is what their brains tell them about the world. So why listen to them? In the end to see

through everything is not to see. So, you know, if you try to explain away religion, you'll explain away explanation.

You'll explain away what you believe to. It doesn't work. Now, a little bit less esoteric.

Strategy four. People want to say you mustn't make exclusive truth claims. They're trying to argue religious people into saying, "I shouldn't do that." In other words, when people say who are Christians, Jesus is the one true way to God.

Christianity is the truth. Well, the strategy goes like this. You mustn't say that.

It's wrong to say that. It's illegitimate to say that. It's divisive to say that.

It's exclusive. It's now to say that. I don't think those arguments hold up.

Let me give you three versions of them that I can almost guarantee, since I'm a father to people your age, that most of you believe. The first one is if somebody says, if I say, for example to you, Jesus is the one way to God. The only way to get to heaven, the only way to get to God is through Jesus.

One reason you'll come back and say, "No, no, no. All religions are equally right." Don't say that to me, mister. All religions are equally right.

So my comeback to you on this is that's impossible. It's impossible that all religions be equally right. And when you say that, it just shows you're not listening to any of the religions at all.

You're a bad listener. I'm really not trying to make fun of you. But, well... [laughter] I was once on a panel with a rabbi and a mom and myself, you know, Protestant clergyman.

And we agreed about this statement. I'm about to... Let me give you the lead up to the statement. Jesus Christ claimed to be the Son of God from heaven.

He made unbelievable claims. You know, you have in John chapter 8, he said, "Before Abraham existed, I am." I saw Abraham. In fact, before Abraham existed, I am.

There's a place for Jesus says, "I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning." I'm sure the people around him were saying, "When was that?" [laughter] And where were you standing? [laughter] And who are you? See, there's a place where Jesus actually says to his critics, "I've been sending you prophets and wise men for years and you keep killing them." [laughter] What? Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. The founders of all other religions said basically this, "I am a prophet, come to help you find God." Jesus is the only one who came and said, "I'm God, come to find you." Now, either what Jesus said is a fact or not, and I'm not even going to argue for it now. I'm just dealing with what you just said, which is all religions are equally okay.

They're all right. Don't say that yours is better than any other. Jesus said that, and therefore if it's a fact, if he actually is the Son of God, he'd have to be a better way to get to God.

He is God. If he's not, if he's not right, if it's not a fact, then he's deranged or he's fraudulent and it's an inferior way. And you know, the rabbi and the imam were perfectly happy to say, "That's exactly right."

Either Christianity is better than other religions or it's worse, but it's not the same. It couldn't be the same." And for you to say, "They're all the same shows you just haven't listened." You see, a fact isn't narrow. I wish very often that I wouldn't have to, I wish I wouldn't have, you know, sometimes you get really busy, "Gosh, I wish I didn't have to eat."

I did wish I didn't have to sleep. I've got so much work to do." It's a fact. You're going to wither and die if you don't eat.

It's not narrow. It's just a fact. And if Jesus Christ is the Son of God, your soul will shrivel without him and you'll die.

If it's a, and that's not narrow, just a fact or it's not a fact, but it's not narrow either way. It's right or it's wrong. Well, some people say, "No, no, no, no."

You can't say Jesus is the only way." Not because all religions are equally right. That's not what Dawkins, Harris, Hitchens and Company would say. They would say, "No, because all religion is equally wrong." And what they would say is, "All religions just have little bits of wisdom, but nobody sees the whole picture." It's very, very typical of folks to say, "Don't you dare say that your religion is the right religion because no religion is the right religion." All religions only have a little piece of the pie.

They only see a little bit of the whole. And the traditional illustration of this is the blind men and the elephant, right? Have you heard this illustration? Imagine five blind men and they come upon an elephant. And each one grabs the elephant at a different place.

And one says, "Ah, the elephant is grabbing the trunk." Sort of long and flexible. But another guy has hold of their legs and say, "He's not flexible at all. It's kind of stumpy." And so every one of the blind men tends to think they sense the whole elephant, but they only see a little part of the elephant.

And none of them really can see the whole elephant. And no religion ought to say it sees the whole thing because all religions have a little part of it and nobody sees it all. However, Leslie Newbinger pointed out something very important some years ago in which he said this, "In the famous story of the blind men and the elephant, so often quoted in the interest of religious agnosticism, the real point of the story is constantly overlooked."

The story cannot be told except by someone who is not blind but can see what the blind men are unable to fully grasp, which is the whole elephant. The story is constantly told to neutralize and the affirmations of the great religions to suggest that they learn humility and recognize that none of them can know the whole truth. But the story is told by one who claims to see and know the full truth, otherwise you wouldn't know the men were blind.

And the only way you can know that these men are blind is if you say you're not. And the only way you can say no religion sees all the truth is if you believe you see more of the truth than they do, or actually all the truth. In other words, you are claiming the very thing you say no religion must claim.

Superior knowledge. And that's the reason why New Begin says there is an appearance of humility in the protestation that the truth is much greater than any one of us can grasp. But if this is used to validate all claims to discern the truth, it is in fact an arrogant claim to the very kind of knowledge which it says no one can have.

See, if you say I don't know which religion is true, that can be a statement of humility. But if you say no one can know which religion is right, you are being dogmatic and presuming you have a far better view of ultimate reality than any of the other religions, and that's the very claim you're criticizing. In fact, I've even had somebody, listen, I've had this conversation several times.

I'm talking to somebody about Jesus, and suddenly somebody says, what are you doing? And I say, I'm evangelizing you? [LAUGHTER] You mean you want me to adopt your view as better than my view? You're trying to say your view of spirituality is right and I'm wrong and you want me to convert? Yeah, I say. That's arrogant. How dare you say that your view of spirituality is better than anybody else's and try to convert? Wait a minute.

What are you suggesting? And the person says, well, I think that everybody, you ought to keep your religion private. If it's good for you, it's good for you, but you need to honor what other people think and not try to convert them. I say, wait a minute.

You're saying your take on spiritual reality is better than mine. And you're trying to evangelize me right now because you're saying I need to adopt yours. And you think the world would be a much better place if everybody adopted your take on spiritual reality rather than mine.

And of course, I believe that the world would be a better place if everybody adopted my view of spiritual reality than yours rather than yours. Who's being more narrow here? Nobody's being more narrow. As soon as you say, no way should make exclusive truth claims.

That's a universal claim. See? It's a universal claim. You're just laying down on

everybody.

You can't avoid exclusive truth claims. Let me tell you what real narrowness is, not the content of what you say because as soon as you start to say, you shouldn't be drawing lines here. What did you just do? There's good people like me who don't draw lines and there's bad people like you who do.

You just drew a line by saying nobody should draw lines. Look, everybody's exclusive. Well, then who's open and who's narrow? I'll tell you.

Narrowness is distaining and sneering at and belittling people who've got a different exclusive truth claim than yours because you've got an exclusive truth claim. I'll tell you what you really need in this world. Let me tell you what you really need in this world.

What you need is people who've got an exclusive truth that humbles them. That's what you need. Look, I have to be quick here because I want you to be able to ask me questions.

The fifth strategy is privatize it. There's a huge problem with this. That is to say, look, do not go out into the public realm and ever argue from a religious point of view.

If you're going to try to pass a law, you should have a secular reason for it, never a religious reason for it. Richard Rorty says the problem with religion when you talk about it in public discourse is other people, if you're speaking out of your religious convictions, other people don't have access to that. So what we need to do is put your religion in the back.

Let's agree on practical solutions to the problems that we're really facing, like AIDS and poverty and education and things like that. Let's work together. Just keep your religious views behind you.

That won't work and I'll tell you why. As soon as Richard Rorty says, let's all agree to work together on the problems that we have. You can't begin to work on those problems unless you have underlying commitments to what human flourishing is.

And those underlying commitments to human is are based on views of human flourishing that are based on views of human nature and spiritual reality that cannot be proven in a test tube. It cannot be proven scientifically. They're not self-evident to everybody.

Everybody's got moral commitments that are not accessible to everyone else. So a quick example and I have to be quick. Look at divorce laws for a second.

Okay, let's try. Let's try to come up with divorce laws that really work for everybody, that really help human flourishing. And let's leave our worldview commitments and our, let's just use scientific reasoning.

You can't do it. I'll tell you why. If you come from a traditional culture, Confucianism, Hinduism, if you come from Christianity, Catholicism, Protestantism, Orthodoxy, traditional cultures have always said human beings flourish best when the individual right is supplemented to the community.

The family is more important than the individual. The clan is more important than the individual. Community values and traditions are more important than the individual.

But the Western Enlightenment said no. The individual is more important than the community. Individual rights have to be, you know, are more important than the community.

So people from a background in, with a more traditional worldview, a view of human flourishing is different. It says let's make divorce laws hard. It should be very hard to get a divorce because the most important thing is to keep people together so you have a stable environment for raising children.

But if you come out of an Enlightenment view of human flourishing, what you're saying there is, well, no, the whole purpose of marriage is to fulfill the individual needs of the two adults that get into it. Okay, now how are we going to come to agreement? So in other words, that group wants to make divorce laws easier. How are we going to get to agreement? Well, let's find these neutral, universal, scientific principles we all can agree on.

They're not there because your belief about what will be a good divorce law is to depend on certain commitments and views of human nature and human flourishing that are based on things like the dignity of the individual, know the importance of the community, and those things cannot be proven. They're either formally or semi-formal religious commitments. And therefore, again, what you need is to be able to go out into the public square and talk about your religious commitments or your semi-religious commitments that admit what you're doing, but with humility.

Let me show you what I think is the way through. Now, at this point, if you don't mind, I'm just going to quickly talk to Christians. We are, we Christians, are the biggest faith group in the world.

We're still twice, Christianity's still twice the size of the next religion at this point in the world. And the only way that we're going to break this is not to say, what's wrong with you secular people? Why are you being so mean to us? Christians have to recognize, number one, that you're a big part of the problem, and number two, that we also can be at the heart of the solution. Okay? Two minutes, and I'm done.

There are two basic ways of thinking about your self-image. One is what I'm going to call a moral performance narrative. A moral performance narrative says, I'm okay, I'm a good

person, I feel significant, and I have worth because I'm achieving something.

So if you are a liberal person, and you feel like I'm a good person because I'm working for the poor, and I'm working for human rights, and I'm open-minded, you can't help in a moral performance narrative, your self-image is based on your performance as a generous liberal activist person, you can't help, but look down your nose at bigots. You can't help but feel superior to bigots. On the other hand, what if you are a traditional religious person, and you go to church and you read your Bible, or you go to synagogue and you read your Bible, or you go to the mosque and read your Quran, and you're working really hard to be good and to serve God, et cetera.

Now in that case, you have to look down your nose at people who don't believe your religion, and they're not being as good as you are. And maybe you're just a secular person and you're a hard-working, decent chap. You can't help.

If your self-image is based on the idea that you're a hard-working, decent chap, you can't help, but look down your nose at people who you consider lazy. But the gospel, the gospel is something different. The gospel says Jesus Christ comes and saves you.

The gospel says you're a sinner. The gospel says you don't live up to your own standards. The gospel says there's no way you're ever going to be able to live up to your own standards.

The gospel says that you have failed. Your moral failure and salvation only belongs to people who admit their moral failures. And Jesus came in weakness and died on the cross.

And he says, "My salvation is only to weak people. It only is there for people who admit that you're not better than anyone else that you just need mercy. If you have a grace narrative, if you say the reason I can look myself in the mirror, the reason I know I have significance is because Jesus died for me.

Though I'm a sinner saved by grace, you can't feel superior to anybody. I've got a Hindu neighbor in my apartment building. And I think he's wrong about the Trinity.

I think he's wrong about a lot of things. But he probably is a better father than me. He could be a much better man.

Why? Why aren't you a Christian? He's a Hindu. Don't you think you have the truth? Yeah, but here's the truth. The truth is I'm a sinner and I'm saved by grace.

So why in the world? I'm not saved because I'm a better man. I'm saved because I'm a worse man than I really. And so what happens is the grace narrative takes away the kind of superiority and removes that slippery slope that I mentioned in the very beginning that leads from superiority to separation to caricature and to passive and then active

oppression.

It just takes it away. Now Christians have got to admit to a great degree we operate out of the moral performance narrative and we don't have to because we got the gospel. And yet to a great degree we do.

To a great degree we do. But let me tell you what happens when the grace narrative is really ascendant. You go back to the earliest days of the church.

Here's the Roman Empire, the Greco-Roman Empire, and they believed in pluralism. They didn't believe there was anyone God. Everybody had their own God, right? Open minded.

Along come the Christians and they say Jesus is the true God. Very, very rigid. And yet the lives of the pagans and the Christians were different.

The pagans look down the nose at the poor. Christians love the poor. The pagans were very stratified.

They never mixed different classes and social-strata. Christians got everybody together. Races together.

Classes together. The pagans were extremely oppressive to women. Christians were much more open to the leadership of women.

By the way you can all see this in Rodney Stark's book Rise of Christianity. Why would what looks like an open minded philosophy lead to so much oppressiveness and what over here the Christian looks like a rigid philosophy lead to so much justice. The philosophy lead to so much peacemaking and so much generosity.

I'll tell you why. I remember not long after 9/11 I was reading an editor-ol to my wife out of the Sunday morning paper that says, "You know what the problem with the world is? Fundamentalism. If you're a fundamentalist it's going to lead to violence." And of course I just try to show you we're all fundamentalist actually.

But what my wife sat there and she says, "That's ridiculous. It all depends on what the fundamental is." She says, "Have you ever seen an Amish terrorist?" She says, "If I'm a Shahan fundamentalist there ain't no such thing." But here's what their fundamental is. A man dying on the cross for his enemies.

A man praying for the forgiveness of his enemies as he's dying. If that's at the very center of your life that destroys the slippery slope. If Christians are willing to say, "We're going to start." We're going to start.

If we start acting that way, we start acting. You know Martin Luther King Jr. when he saw racism in the south. And he looked at all those white people churchgoers.

What did he say to them? He says, "You know your problem is you guys are too religious? You guys are too conservative. You guys read your Bible. You know we've got to get more relativistic and then things will get better in the south." Is that what he said? No.

What did he say? He said, "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream." That's the book of Amos. He didn't say, "Let's get less religious." What he said was, "Get true to the religion you got. You don't need less Christianity.

You need real Christianity." That's what I'm saying to you. Time is up and Clint's going to come back up here. I know that sounded more like a sermon than a lecture, but I'm a minister and I kind of got carried away at the end.

Okay, great. As Dr. Keller said, we're going to move into a Q&A. I'm just going to go back and forth.

Over here. Thank you for your talk. Dr. Keller, I really appreciate it.

I really liked the suggestion of the Grace Narrative. What I want to talk about, which really resonated with me, is explain it away, legalize it away, argue it away. What that doesn't leave room in my mind for is religious legislation.

Just like anti-religious legislation is enforcing a point of view, so would religious legislation in my understanding. I want to ask you how you might justify illegal gay marriage from that point of view, from the narrative of Grace, from anti-explaining it away? Well, now I thought you were going to... Actually, at the very end, you made it a lot easier for me. I thought you were going to ask me something bigger.

[laughter] I really did. No, this is actually very... It's a simple answer because it's a complex issue. There are plenty of people who see nothing morally wrong with homosexuality who think same-sex marriage is a very bad idea.

And there are numbers of people who think that homosexuality is morally wrong, but think the government shouldn't make that pronouncement at all, and therefore same-sex marriage is a good idea. And then you have people who think homosexuality is wrong, therefore same-sex marriage is a bad idea. So there's at least four groups.

And I hate to say it. This is a democracy, and you're going to make arguments. The arguments have got to appeal to... If your arguments appeal to the broadest possible number of constituents, you're going to win your policy.

So I don't think, if you're going to ask me this, I don't think at all that... I don't think the grace narrative at this point makes a great deal of difference except how you argue. See, so for example, what if I'm a Christian, and I think that though there's two possibilities. Here you could have a classic Christian traditional view, which is

homosexuality is wrong.

That's the vast majority of Christians over the years. And you could have two people who both believe it's wrong and argue them on different sides of this issue. What the grace narrative will do is not necessarily determine which of those sides you're going to be on.

Because you see, you've got people who say you've got a more Anabaptist tradition of Christianity, which is relating Christ and culture that says it is not the job of the church in any way to try to get the government to be kind of a big mama church. In other words, the Anabaptist tradition has always said, let the government be absolutely neutral, and we don't in any way want it to try. It always... Well, Anabaptists are the people looking at Europe and are saying that's what you want in America.

Just go ahead, try to legislate Christian morality. But then you've got a more reformed and Catholic, to some degree, view of how you relate Christianity and culture. And they would probably say, no, we do want the marriage laws to reflect Christian morality.

The grace narrative will not necessarily determine whether you're an Anabaptist or a Catholic. That's going to come from different things, different issues. The grace narrative will determine how you treat people on the other side.

It'll... How you treat gay people in the debate. But it won't necessarily... I don't think it's going to necessarily determine whether you think it's a... It's a good idea or a bad idea. That will come from other concerns and other issues.

Then I might have misunderstood what you're trying to do. It sounds to me like what you're trying to say is defend everyone's right to an exclusive idea, an exclusive point of view to a belief you are a religionifying atheist thought as also very exclusive. That's right.

I totally appreciate that. Right, right. So where in that comes in the rightness or the right of legalizing and empowering one point of view that way? From... This is my... It seems controversial.

This will be my last time because I don't... I mean, actually, this is the problem. This is a very important question. And I don't want to take up too much time on it because other people might have a question.

From a Christian point of view, I have to decide what I think from a Christian point of view. I have to decide what I think the role of the state is. And Christians differ on that.

Now, are you... you're not asking that, are you? Come again? Is that what you're asking? See, the... my gospel, net grace narrative identity, is not going to necessarily determine that. It's going to determine how I argue and how I treat people and how civil I am. But I, as a Christian man, going into politics, trying to decide whether same-sex marriage

should be legal or not, will be determined by my understanding of my own scriptural texts on what the role of government is.

Some people would say the government ought to reflect the... the mores of the Christian church. Others would say no, that that's a great way to corrupt both the church and the government. And those are long-standing historical debates, intramural debates inside the Christian church.

It's not what I'm asking. I don't want to take it more time. Okay.

Without asking anymore, response from you all just say, it seems contradictory to me to say, everyone's entitled to a point of view, no matter how exclusive it is. And then to say also, I'm entitled to enforcing one form of reality, behavior, legality on a group of people because of my exclusive belief. No, in a democracy, nothing's supported.

Wait a minute. Okay. No, I don't want to lose you here.

I really don't want to lose you. Okay. If you believe racism is wrong and you think it's bad for human flourishing, and you pass a law against it, you're imposing your view of human flourishing on everybody, are you not? I don't mind other people thinking in a racist way.

I think everyone does. Right. I don't think they should tell me whether I should behave in this way or that way in my home.

No, no, but I'm talking, well, same thing with same sex marriage is public. We're not talking about homosexuality in private. We're talking about public.

Right. So you do understand, do you not, that if we decide racism is bad for human flourishing and we pass laws against racist behavior, that we are imposing our view of human flourishing on everybody in society. Yes.

Right. So what's the problem with that? In other words, everybody is arguing for laws on the basis of their view of human flourishing, and if they get enough votes, that's the one that we have to do. I wouldn't call that imposing your view.

Does that help a little bit? Yeah. Okay. Thanks.

I'm sorry. That's okay. It's my age.

And I promise not to be so loquacious and I'll try to get to your meaning faster. Okay. Sorry.

Thank you. I'm going to talk about 80 of your sermons and how many? About 80, maybe 90, roughly. Roughly.

And I, you know, I probably don't remember any of them. Well, please don't ask. Oh, go

ahead.

This question's a lot lighter than that last one, by the way. Well, it was my fault. I made it worse than it had to be.

Go ahead. And you're a, your series on Abraham? You, um... This is what I was afraid of. Go ahead.

You, you... Thank you. Completely don't address Melchizedek. Even though Paul refers to him in the New Testament.

And I'm just wondering, you know, in the Orthodox Christian tradition, Melchizedek is greatly addressed. They kind of revere him. Yeah.

And I'm just wondering why you choose to completely not even address and ignore him. Now, you said this was not a hard question. (Laughter) You... Okay.

Well, listen, I'll, I'll, let me confess it. I'm Protestant. And, and as a result, I am not used to giving Melchizedek that much eric time.

And... (Laughter) No, look... But what about the fact that Paul addresses him in the New Testament? Where? In Hebrews? I think so. Yeah, Paul didn't write Hebrews. (Laughter) Look... (Laughter) (Applause) I'm really, I'm really honestly truly willing to, to think about how little, how little emphasis and thought I've given to him as a character.

Honestly, I... But, you know, it's the same reason why Catholics will give a whole lot more emphasis to Mary than either the Orthodox or the, or the Protestants do. It's the tradition. And I think that we probably can learn from each other.

So I'm quite willing to learn from the Eastern tradition and not, I have not, you're right. I haven't given a whole lot of thought to it. So, there we go.

That's all. (Laughter) Oh, next. I appreciate it too, honest.

I really do, actually. I will. I wasn't kidding.

I will. (Laughter) Probably tonight I'm going to go read those two chapters in Hebrews and say, "What have I been missing?" And I will. Go ahead.

I was interested in what you had to say, I guess, about people. Something that I hear a lot too is that people might sort of say that all religions must be okay and that like everyone has... I guess your interpretation of that thought is that all people think that all religion must have part of a, part of a greater truth or something. But at least from my point of view, when I hear people justify religion like that, I think that they're trying to make God seem benevolent in the fact that God would not send people to hell for what people would... Most people would say it's a geographical accident.

Okay. So, the last part of the question was... Oh, like, I think a lot of people would think that whatever religion you are is somewhat of a geographical accident in that, I mean... Well, it's a... People are Christian in the United States. Yeah, yes.

I virtue the fact that they're born here. Well, yes and no. Would you say, for example... See, here's the problem... There's three reasons why people believe we're disbelief.

Intellectual, personal and social. So, and this isn't just people who believe in God, but who disbelieve to. I think a lot of people though would say that social is like the probably the most powerful.

Well, you see... Because... Do you really want to say that? Here's the problem with that. When people say to me, and I had this, it said... These are secular people who kind of say that basically religious belief is socially constructed. And what they'll say to me is, if you were born in Madagascar, you wouldn't even be a Christian.

Now, the right comeback is, if you were born in Madagascar, you wouldn't believe in relativism. I don't think atheism is like... I think you're like equating atheism with relativism and... Well, no, no, no, but the point is, you wouldn't be an atheist. Let's just say an atheist says this.

You wouldn't be an atheist if you were raised in Madagascar. So, you're really saying... Your view of... Your view that truth is socially constructed can't be completely socially constructed, or else that truth would be... That statement would be meaningless. No, I don't think... I don't really follow what I'm just saying is that... A God that would send someone... Oh, yeah, see now... Since you think that there are people, obviously, unless you're like a really radical Christian, who some people I know don't believe in hell, but... I guess if you are like an Orthodox Christian, you think that some people are going to hell.

And I think people try to reason that out by saying that, "Well, God can't send people to hell for something that's kind of an accident of location." Okay. Because then he would be malevolent. Okay, and I'll tell you what, just for everybody else, you asked me two questions, and I'll answer... I'll remind you what I just tried to say, but you actually put two questions together.

I was just confused about the first one because you were going into like... Well, now, you know, listen, here's just a suggestion. Peter Berger, who is like the father of the sociology of knowledge. And sociology of knowledge says basically, we believe what we believe largely because of the social setting.

Right? To a great degree, you believe what you believe. Beliefs are found plausible because of the people around you. And in his book, "Rumor of Angels," he's got a chapter called "Relativizing the Relativizers." Now, this isn't directly what you're... I'm not going to write it at your heart, but this is for everybody else a little bit.

In which he says, one day he realized he was getting to the place where he said, "All beliefs are really socially constructed, so you're just the product of your environment." Then you began to realize that belief would be socially constructed just the product of the environment. He says, "Because I belong to a bunch of scholars." And when you begin to realize, when you say all statements are socially constructed except that one, you can't do that. But if that statement is socially constructed, are you really saying, therefore, it's meaningless? I believe it only because it's socially constructed.

No, no, no, no, I worked on this. I thought about this. And he says, it gets you back to the place where even though we're more chasin' and we're more humble about our beliefs because now we know to a great degree we're biased by our social setting.

We still have to make decisions which of these views is right and wrong because we have them all in front of us. So you can't be a complete relativist. But I think what you're after is the hell thing.

Well, maybe to clarify, this is not a question. I'm an atheist, but I think I don't really care about Christianity mostly because I think if there is a God, he's not going to send me to hell because I believe in... But that's... Because I'm an atheist just because I've reason that through... On my own, I've reason that I'm not saying that that's right for everyone else. Sure.

I don't think God would send me to hell for coming to the country. That's a pretty big leap of faith. I mean, what's your warrant for that? I mean, what... why would you? It's the same warrant.

It's a nice feeling, but I mean... It's the same warrant that you have for Jesus, you know, ascending in the air, I think. Oh, well, wait a minute. Go read an 800-page book by an empty right, a top-rated historian called "The Resurrection of the Son of God" in which he says, "There's no historically possible alternate explanation for the birth of the Christian Church than the bodily resurrection of Jesus." It's a very, very... I don't think it gets you all the way to proof, but it's awfully cogent and it would be really wrong to put up a feeling that God wouldn't damn me to hell against this... Well, I don't think... There's a tremendous amount of evidence.

I think it's more of a feeling of the fact that the kind of God would do that would be malevolent. It's not like me saying, "Well, that would be bad, so I don't want that to happen." It's the fact that a God that I think... Okay. I think that's a problem that a lot of people have with Christianity is that he would send people to hell for, like, for either geographical accidents or things that they have come to terms to believe on the planet.

Okay, two things. One is, most people... I have a Pakistani Muslim friend who once said to me, he says, "You realize the problem that people in America have this idea that there can't be once your religion in God couldn't..." He says, "You realize that it's a very

ethnocentric objection." In other words, Americans are so democratic in their thinking, so Western, so individualistic that every single person has a vote and everybody should get an equal chance, which, of course, most people most times have never felt that strongly, that they actually impose that on God. And even though this guy is not a Christian, doesn't believe the Christian God at all, he says it's interesting that that objection is pretty ethnocentric.

It's a way of saying, "This is a problem that my culture and my time has right now. It's possible that 100 years from now nobody in America will be bothered by it." And I would hate... You see, two-thirds of the things your grandparents believed you now are kind of embarrassed by. Two-thirds of the things your grandchildren believe are going to make... You're going to be embarrassing to them.

And right now, we live in a time in which we feel like God could have to give everybody an equal chance and he couldn't possibly let anybody be lost, who didn't get a kind of equal chance. And that's probably imposing a Western individualistic understanding of human rights on God. And I think it's a little bit... It's a little culturally narrow to say, "That's a slam dunk.

That just means that God couldn't... I just can't believe the traditional God." Because most people in other parts of the world, that's not a problem. They have other problems with Christianity, but not that. I wouldn't want you to inhabit that objection as if it's kind of a universal objection at all, you know, wise people would have.

Here's the other thing. Nobody ever goes to hell in the Christian understanding unless they want to. I mean, I hate to say this.

Reach chapter five in my book. I know I sound like a... I know I sound like a book hocker here, but the point is there is no way that... It sounds a little funny for people to want to go to hell, but that's... Well, no, no, listen, I'd like to read about... There's people down in hell saying, "Help me, let me out, let me out." I'm going to go... No, you can't. It's too late.

You know, you died and you had your chance. A C.S. Lewis basically relying on Dante will tell you that if you know anything about... How do I say this? People who go to hell, go to hell because they want to be away from a God who will tell them what to do. In other words, people in hell right now do not want to get out of hell.

They're miserable. This is fair to say, but I can go take a look at. If you know how the human heart works, I think you kind of recognize this.

They would be there saying, "It's pretty miserable here, but I would never want to be up there in heaven with God where he's just, you know, pushing you around all the time." People go to heaven because they want to be... They want to submit to God. They love

him. They want him to submit to him.

People go to hell because they don't want somebody telling them how to live their life. They want to live their own lives, their way. And therefore nobody goes to hell except people who want to go there.

And nobody in hell wants to get out. And if that is a little odd to you, if you say, "Well, that's not the Christian understanding of hell I've ever heard of," then you want to immerse yourself a little bit more in Dante and C.S. Lewis. It's really the most fair and just possible understanding of the afterlife is the Christian one, which says, "God only gives you what you want.

If you want to live with God forever, you get it. If you want to be your own person and you really want to be your own Savior, your own Lord, you get that. It's as simple as that." And you stay wanting it.

You don't suddenly change your mind. Have I just lost you completely? Really? That's just... I guess... I'm sorry. I just feel like a lot of the things you're saying are operating on me, like having... Or just, I guess, kind of believing in some part of Christianity, which I don't know.

Oh, well, listen. If you don't... Well, no way. It's not quite fair.

No, no, no. It's not quite fair because I'm trying to answer out a mic. No, I know.

I'm just saying, like, it's... I don't know. It's just... Well, I'm answering... Listen, you're asking me to answer in a way out of my own Christian worldview. Yeah.

Try to say, "How is hell coherent and not cruel?" And, of course, where you're standing, the whole idea is ridiculous. So, I have to kind of answer out of my... No, yeah. I know.

It's just... But, I mean, I hope you would see that inside the Christian understanding of thing, if there's a God, and he says, "You can choose me as the center of your life." I'm like non-Western thought, because that's... Oh, you didn't... That's an interesting point. No, I understood that point. That's an interesting point.

Okay. Well, if I gave you anything, I think that's about all I can do right here. I'm actually happy I did something, but I need to get around.

And forgive me for not actually in any of these cases, you know, giving the treatment that it warrants. Okay. Dr. Keller, if I may.

An objection, I mean, kind of looking at things from, you know, 40,000 feet. An objection a lot of people have is, I mean, clearly a lot of what you've been talking about tonight, your beliefs are obviously based on the Bible. But I think for a lot of students, a lot of people my age, you know, that's an ancient text, you know, written in a foreign

language.

It's got some fantastic stories. I mean, without going into that too deeply, because I know it's a deep subject, how would you respond just on an easy level to that? You mean, why give the Bible much credibility? Yeah, isn't it outdated? Aren't there, isn't sort of fairy tales? There's a book right now that actually has come out this year that is probably the best single book, though. It's, you know, it's not written at a popular level, but it's a book by Professor from St. Andrews University in Scotland called "Jesus and the Eye Witnesses." And probably what you have heard, and probably what maybe taught here, maybe taught here at Berkeley by somebody in the audience here, is that the Bible, take the New Testament Gospels, that the New Testament Gospels were oral traditions that were passed down for many, many years.

They were sort of massaged by each Christian community to kind of meet their own needs, so they were changed. And after many years, they were written down into the Gospels. And therefore, you really can't be sure they're probably legends, they were all traditions, they were changed.

And so we don't even know whether any of those things actually happen. Gee, Richard Baucom just wrote a book called "Jesus and the Eye Witnesses" that is probably going to overturn all that. In fact, it's so good and so right on that most scholars in the field have told me that probably the younger scholars, everybody knows that it's right, and yet probably nobody is even reviewing it because it really means that most, an awful lot of people in the field will make their scholarship obsolete.

So what will probably happen is it will be ignored and younger scholars will come along and implement it. But what he says there is the Gospel, not oral traditions, there are oral histories. And they were written down out of the eye of the eye witnesses while they were still alive.

Because that's how history was done then. And that's the reason why you'll have something like, for example, Mark chapter 15. It'll say Jesus fell and Simon of Cyrene picked up the cross and took the cross, you know, and carried the cross for Jesus.

And it says, "Simon was the father of Rufus and Alexander." So you're reading that text and you say, "Who the heck are Rufus and Alexander?" They're not even in the, they're not even in the, why they even mentioned. And Baucom points out, he says, "That was very clear in ancient historiography. What it meant was Rufus and Alexander are eye witnesses that were still alive.

That's why their name's there. And what it's really saying is, "Do you want to know that this happened? Just go talk to Rufus and Alexander." And so the book basically says, the book makes, it goes to, it's very, very thorough and basically says that the Gospel accounts of what happened of Jesus' life would have been written down within the

lifetimes of the eye witnesses that are named. That's the reason why, for example, in Mark, it personally just say, "Blindman." He healed a blind man.

The same story in Luke will say, "Bardomaeus." Well why was he named there and not there because Bartomaeus was one of the sources? It's a terrific book and it gives you all kinds of scholarly backing for the idea that no, these aren't legends. They were written down too early to be legends. Legends have to take a long time to develop.

You can't write something down when all the eye witnesses are still around and it really changed it. Secondly, they're too difficult to be eye witnesses. A perfect example of this is, in all of the resurrection accounts, women are the first eye witnesses of the risen Christ.

And back then, women were of such low status that their testimony was not admissible evidence in any court, either Rome or in Israel. And therefore, nobody making up a legend, nobody making up a story about the risen Christ, whatever, in a million years put women as the first witnesses. It would have totally undermined the credibility of the story with any listener, Jewish, Greek, Roman, whatever.

And the only possible explanation for the fact that women are the original eye witnesses in those accounts as if they were. There is no other possible reason for them to be there. Now, those kinds of arguments are in the book and they're in a lot of other books.

And it still, it bothers me that at the street level, there's still this idea, like you just did a wonderful job of saying, "Yeah, the Bible is kind of filled with legends, you really can't trust it." That just shows you haven't done your homework. You just haven't done your homework. And you really can't.

Now, that's not the same thing as saying, "I'm not arguing for the absolute infallibility of the Bible there. I'm just trying to say, the Bible, you can trust what it tells you about Jesus as historic. As historic accounts, read that, figure out who Jesus is, and go from there." Over here? Yeah.

Hello? Yeah. Okay. I'm very nervous, sorry.

But I appreciate you're coming here. You're nervous. I'm up here.

[laughter] So... You want to be nervous? No, that's a good point. [laughter] You all are being very nice to me. So, I hope... I don't think there's a question exactly in here, but I hope it's okay because there's... I was responding directly to something you said.

Okay. One of the five contentions you had. Yeah.

Kind of saying that evolution... You asked the question, "Why believe if it was just only another structure in the mind that caused what? What's the belief in evolution as with

religion?" So, my line of thought with that was... If we... Let me... If I can just read a little bit. Sure. Okay.

So, what I said was the way we approach reality is determined by sort of personal constitution that relates itself to and then reacts to the environment. And so, the beliefs we adopt are to a certain degree either inherited or made by conscious choices. So, the contention that religion is just a chance accident as a result of evolution, I don't think that actually is a legitimate position because it does nothing to devalue the belief in Christianity by just as you said, it's equally applicable to belief in evolution.

But I think it takes obviously certain faith to believe in evolution just like it would for Christianity because you have to have certain faith in scientific techniques and trust a lot of authority because I certainly have been done any personal research on the subject. So, I'm doing a lot of trust to authority. But what makes me devalue the idea of Christianity in a evolutionistic perspective is the fact that I have a belief system that makes me not want to adopt beliefs that you can trace historically to certain causes when the explanation for those beliefs seems more plausible under a naturalistic viewpoint than... the beliefs themselves.

So, to me, the idea of Christianity as... or religion in general, the religious instinct that you said evolutionists kind of trace to a natural origin, I would say, the idea that that's better explained by the fact that humans live in like a very harsh world, the early man had a lot of cruelty around them. And taking that as a kind of way to infuse values into their life seems like that makes for me it hard to believe rather than the explanation that you trace genealogically the feelings that originated in humans that might want to make them adopt a religion. So, it's... well, with evolution you have a value system that says, well, you can see, even if it's widespread, you can see that it's... even if it's also a natural instinct, just like Christianity is, even if it's just a natural instinct and it's to be scientific, that's not the reason to disavow it.

Only if there's a more plausible explanation for widespread belief in evolution is then that the fact that it's scientifically appealing should be brought against the question why I believe. So, I know that was a lot, but... So, you're thinking out loud. [laughter] So, I'll summarize, let's say, would you be willing to say that natural inclinations for evolution are equally as valid as belief in Christianity, but that there's another critique that evolution has, which is the fact that Christianity can be traced historically to a way to posit values in a meaningless world? I don't know about that.

I think you may be mixing apples and oranges because... and I'm... you know what? I may be wrong in hiding behind the majority, but I think most of us are having a little trouble understanding your question too. I don't think it's just me. So, okay, give it one more try, put it in a sentence.

Okay, yeah. And then that should be your last effort. Okay, so your contention was that

naturalistic explanations for Christianity can be equally applied to evolution.

Right, if it's... if my belief in God, you know what? I don't think you... I don't think anybody's trying to say that specific religious, like Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, nobody's saying that that's... that's... you know, you're hardwired for that. All they're saying is that children seem to be hardwired for belief in God. That's all.

So, when you bring in Christianity, that's where I'm kind of losing you. Okay, and I don't think I was trying... I think I was only saying if that's... if belief in God is nothing but a product of evolution, then it proves too much for the evolutionist. That's all I was trying to say.

So it... but so would you still use the contention that it can apply equally to evolution? Because what I'm saying is that there's two different value systems. So it's not so much that it's hardwired, it's which value system you adopt. So you either adopt scientific inquiry or you adopt kind of a more faith-based... And I'm actually... I just lost you on that one.

So I hope because you had this... I hope because we did this together that you're closer, but I'm not to what you're asking. So I hope that helps. I apologize, I'm a philosophy major, so maybe that explains it.

Over here, sorry. Who's next? I think I kind of understand... like you arguing for, I guess, like, absolute religions, but I want to know why... I guess because I think I learn a lot more of the defensive side, but why do you think Christianity is the absolute religion? Like, what is it about Christianity that makes you so confident that you have the right answer? Oh, well, I would say... yes, I didn't talk about Christianity much. When I... if I can trust the Gospels as telling me basically what Jesus Christ said and did, I just gave you a reason when I was talking to Clint about that.

I can trust the New Testament documents. That gives me Jesus Christ. I look at His words, I look at His deeds, I look at His claims, and then I look at the evidence for His resurrection.

And you have to decide this. You have to say, "If he really was bodily raised from the dead, then it's true." And if he wasn't bodily raised from the dead, then it's not true. And if you say, "Well, how on the world can anybody know that?" There's actually quite a lot of back and forth about this.

See, that's a historic event. It's one thing to say is Jesus is a better teacher than Mohammed, is Mohammed a better teacher than Confucius. And that's very subjective, and we can go on forever.

And there's almost no way of even judging best, you see. But the resurrection is different. That's a claim as a historical fact.

And so you either decide it happened or it didn't. And if it did happen, then you're confident that it's all true and that Jesus, as He said, He is, and all of His teaching is true. If you said, "No, it just couldn't have happened.

It didn't happen." There's another explanation. You have all these documents that say hundreds of people saw Jesus and they changed their mind and they became the church. And you can say, "Now I've looked at that and it's not plausible.

Then you don't believe Christianity." It's one or the other. Does that help you understand? I would say that the Christianity thing mainly hinges on the resurrection. How would you explain miracles that occur in different religions? They might happen.

I mean, in other words, that wouldn't... If Jesus says, "I'm the Son of God from heaven, I'm the way the truth and the life, and I'll prove it, die and rise from the dead," then I believe Him. I don't say, "Well, now, gee whiz, why is it that this other religion over here, this person was healed?" I say, "Fine." So, I mean, that wouldn't in any way undermine this exclusive claim by Jesus. Just because... I mean, frankly, if I had three different people who all said, "I'm the Son of God, I'm the Savior," and they all said that I'm going to die and rise, and they had these big movements of followers.

I saw Him rise from the dead. I guess it would be a little harder. Because then I'd not only have to look at this one claim, I'd have to look at three claims, but I've only got one.

And I have to decide, "Yes or no," about Him. And then it doesn't matter whether there's miracles, it doesn't matter whether there's great teachers, it doesn't really matter whether people's lives are changed, and say, "Oh, I got into this religion, and it really turned my life around." There's a lot of people who have turned their life around without any religion at all. So none of those things would matter.

The resurrection, it would stand and fall in the resurrection. Okay? Thank you. I haven't been doing very well lately.

So I'm not saying I answered that perfectly, but at least I got it. Go ahead. Yeah.

I have to form a warning that I'm a philosophy major as well, but hopefully I can get my question a little bit. So my idea kind of starts with the limits on human knowledge, basically, to know about metaphysical beings. And it seems like a lot of the force behind the Christian way of looking at the world is gained from a metaphysical point of view, or thoughts that knowledge has had about a metaphysical point of view.

And so my question is kind of if you accept Kant's idea that we can't really know about metaphysical points of view other than maybe by faith, then what is there left for us to go on between something like Christianity or evolutionary theories, which seem to be equal at that point in their fallibility? It seems like there almost would be kind of a nice ability with like, I think that's what is nice about the evolutionary theory is we can kind of

touch what we're thinking about. Well now, you know, you started the question saying if you grant, you know, what Kant says about not, well, what if I don't? Then if you could respond like that. Well, let's see, I can't because I'm a Christian because Kant has this big wall between the nominal and the phenomenal.

And the phenomenal is facts and we have access to them, empirical, the nominal is God, morality, values, that sort of thing. There's this wall between the nominal and the phenomenal, except the whole idea of what happened in the manger at Christmas was the nominal became phenomenal. That's the reason why the ideal became real.

C.S. Lewis says myth became fact. And I think that here's the problem with the fact value distinction, which is Kantian. I mean, that's Western.

Other parts of the world, that's not a problem. Your moral convictions are as valid for public discourse as empirical facts. They don't have this thing between the nominal and the phenomenal.

And I would, one of the problems with Kant is to say facts are provable or they're empirical, we have access to them. And the nominal isn't, you know, the phenomenal is the nominal isn't fact value distinction. But you know what, that isn't a fact.

You can't prove the fact value distinction. That's a value. The one thing that, years ago, I was studying this, the fact value distinction that Kant put in there, you know, I feel as a Western person, yes, that's right, you know, these are facts and these are just, these are kind of subjective things that I can't.

But then I began to realize the very fact value distinction is a value. It's not a fact. It's not self-evident to everybody.

And you can't prove it empirically. Those are the two things that you would, a fact is something you could either, either can prove empirically or is self-evident to everybody like we're all in this room. And I can't prove that actually because, you know, as you philosophers will know, you can't prove that you're not a butterfly dreaming you're a student.

But, and yet we would treat the fact that you're here self-evident that you can't prove. And one day I began to realize you can't prove the fact value distinction, the nominal phenomena of distinction. And the whole idea of Christianity was that that wall was breached.

The ideal became the real. Our great captain has opened a cleft in the pitiless walls of the world and he has bid us come through it. So as a Christian, I don't grant that.

And I don't know, I guess the other thing would be the resurrection would be to me proof that the wall has been breached. So I can't go with you past your premise to say if you

grant what Kant said, I can't do it. Would you then pull the phenomenal world as you seem to be doing towards the later end of your answer towards the nominal world and say, well, we can't actually know anything about the world around us.

And it's all kind of on the same level as, because the thing that I'm kind of trying to get at is there seems to be a separation in the amount that we can know about these certain things. And it seems like you're trying to pull them together. Yeah.

Well, you know Polanyi, personal knowledge? Yeah, you're right. You're very good at this. Thank you.

It's a little bit like the Holy Spirit down there. Yeah, I'm looking at you. I'm sorry.

No, you're doing it. You're right. Michael Polanyi on personal knowledge, I would only say that rationality, pure rationality, can only get you to probability.

But I actually think personal commitment can get you to certainty. And this might be a little too homey, a kind of illustration, but if I was trying to hire you on my staff, no matter how much rational investigation of you I did, I could never be absolutely sure you'll do well. I can't really be sure you're the right person.

And I do all my resumes. I do all your tests. I'd be as rational as well.

The only way I'm going to be sure is if I actually commit to you, which is, oh gosh, I have to hire you and now I'm risk. I think it's a little bit like, I think it's a lot like that. With my reason, I can only get to a certain degree of certainty.

But with my personal commitment, I'm as assured of my Christianity and these things as a person can be. If as a philosophy major you get back and you really do work more on the rational level, of course you start to get filled with doubts, but that's not how you live. Okay, thank you.

We have time for one more question, please. Oh dear, it's my fault. All right, over here.

This is a much easier question than all the other questions you've gotten. Well, I hope I do better than I did with the other ones. I follow your preaching ministry and I noticed that one of the major themes... You were going to ask me about my kizadei.

No, no, no, no. That you actually brought up tonight is the difference between religion and religion. And the gospel and you brought up tonight about the difference between a work's performance and the grace narrative.

I'm personally very thankful to you for that, just in my personal life, in loving and cherishing the gospel. I'm very thankful to you for your ministry in that regard. But my question is, how did you personally come to understand the distinction between just being religious and being humble and loving the gospel? And specifically, what are some

of the scripture passages and some books or resources that help you understand that distinction? Because for me right now, really you are the only resource that I have to understand the distinction.

Because I really want to understand the distinction. You're in trouble. So I'm wondering books, resources, scripture passages that have helped you to understand the distinction between religion and the gospel.

Martin Luther on that has really changed my life. In fact, Martin Luther was always struggling with not being a good enough person. He was meditating on Romans 1, verse 16, 17.

He was a monk. He was a very diligent, moral person. He had been teaching the Bible for years.

And he was always struggling with inadequacy and so on. Which says, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel. It's the power of God and salvation for all who believe.

He who through faith is righteous shall live." And he suddenly said, "Wait a minute. He who through faith is righteous shall live. He who through faith." And he suddenly realized the righteousness was not something he gave to God but a gift that he got from God.

And I remember the time that I thought, "Oh, I understood that theologically. I went to seminary. I got A's on papers." But I remember, so I understand the gospel, look at my resume.

But I remember one night I was just scared to death. I was going to have to preach to Mara. I didn't have anything good to say.

I hadn't really done my homework. I was going to really get up there. It's like getting up there without any clothes on when you don't know you don't have anything good to say.

And I remember looking at that verse, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." And suddenly it hit me. I'm a Presbyterian so we don't usually hear voices from God. But I felt I heard this verse.

I felt I heard this sentence. Yes. And he who through preaching is righteous will die every Saturday night.

And I realized, you know, I thought I understood the gospel. I thought I was telling people, you know, you have to not have moral performance narrative but a grace narrative. But anxiety, insecurity, inability to take criticism, feelings of superiority, racial pride, racial prejudice, all that comes from moral performance.

From looking to something besides Jesus Christ as your actual righteousness. And I was able to relax. If you like this and you want to hear more, like, share, review and

subscribe to this podcast.

And from all of us here at the Veritas Forum, thank you.

(gentle music)