

What about other religions?

- Sincerity and strength of belief do not equal truth. People can be sincerely wrong. If the major religions contradict one another, which they do at several significant points, they cannot all be right.
- The real question is, has God revealed himself, and if so, how? Jesus claimed to be God in the flesh. If he is God, then the foundational claims of other religions cannot also be true, though there may be shared values across different religions.
- The New Testament makes it clear that Jesus is the only way to God (Romans 1:18-32; Acts 4:12; John 14:6).

What do Christians believe?

- Avoid waffly answers about being good, trying our best, "it's about love" etc. Try to be specific.
- God is the loving creator of the universe, who made us to live in relationship with him.
- People everywhere have rebelled against him, but have failed to run the world and our own lives. This rebellion affects all life, even those we might describe as 'innocent'. The seeds of the world's brokenness are in each human being.
- Because God is just he will judge the wrong that results from this rebellion – but because of his love for us, he sent Jesus into the world, to bear the eternal consequences of it.
- Jesus died, carrying away the sins of the world – and rose from the dead, to demonstrate to us that we can have new life and a new start, here and now, and after death.
- This release from the consequences of sin, and the gift of new life are for everyone – but we need to respond to Jesus, accept what he has done and follow him.

What about those who have never heard the gospel?

- We can trust God to be just: he will judge people according to their response to what they know.
- Everyone has received some revelation, even if only from creation (Romans 1:18). Those who have had more revealed to them will be held responsible (Matthew 11:20-24).
- When Jesus reinstates Peter, after he has denied him three times, Jesus tells Peter to follow him, and leave the other disciple and his future to God. We are each responsible for our own response to God.

HANDOUT 5

Here are some of the difficult questions people may ask about the Christian faith.

The answers here give a few pointers, which you may wish to think, study and pray about, to deepen your understanding, and your responses to people when they ask.

In your answers, remember to be:

Truthful – don't make things up to win an argument, but point people to Jesus.

Loving – avoid judging – it's difficult for people to change their minds.

Honest – if you don't know the answer, say so, and offer to find out and come back to them.

Evangelistic – answer in ways that lead to Jesus and the gospel message.

Prayerful – we don't change people's minds, but we rely on the work of the Holy Spirit to lead people to Jesus, through our answers.

Aren't all good people Christians?

- What is good? Who decides? Without God, one person's views are of equal value to another's.
- Some people are better than others, but no-one meets God's standards (Romans 3:23)
- God says there is only one way, and it's not 'being good' (John 14:6) but through believing in Jesus and following him.
- God wants us to be in relationship with him, not just people who are trying (and sometimes failing) to be 'good'.

How do you know that God exists?

- All that we see and know had to be created originally. Christians believe that God is the creator and sustainer of the universe.
- He came to earth as Jesus, and we can know him through knowing Jesus.
- Jesus claimed to be God (John 5:18; 20:28-29) and his actions bore out that claim.
- There is more evidence for the existence of Jesus than Julius Caesar. Few historians doubt the existence of the historical Jesus.

Do you have to go to church to be a Christian?

- You become God's friend by being forgiven and committing your life to following Jesus, not by going to church.
- Once you are in relationship with God, you will want to meet up with other members of his family.
- On our own, it is easy to forget our real identity, and to become disconnected and wander off in our own direction, away from God's path.
- Being with other Christians regularly helps us to remember God's love, and to respond to his calling to build his church and Kingdom, for the sake of the whole world. Being rooted in a Christian community (church) helps us and others to develop and practise our faith.

Isn't faith just psychological?

- Christianity is based on objective historical events – the death and resurrection of Jesus – which have nothing to do with our mental state.
- Hundreds of witnesses saw Jesus alive again after his death.
- Our Christian faith may well be a 'crutch' in times of difficulty, but that doesn't mean that it isn't true.
- Millions of Christians today, and down the centuries, can testify to the reality of God at work in their lives.

Hasn't science disproved Christianity?

- Often people mean by this question that they think the theory of evolution has disproved Christianity, and that Christians ignore or oppose science.
- Many eminent scientists are Christians, and find no incompatibility between their scientific knowledge and their faith.
- Science describes for us the amazing universe God has created, and ways in which that happened. Christianity describes the nature of God himself, and his purpose.
- Scientists are always testing and revising their theories about the substance of the universe: Christians are always learning about God, but the core beliefs of Christianity remain constant, and have never been 'disproved' by science.

Can we trust the Bible?

- Historical evidence in the New Testament is confirmed at a number of points by the non-Christian writers Tacitus and Josephus.
- The New Testament documents were written close to the time of Jesus, and come from as many as ten authors, eight of whom wrote independently of one another. They have been passed down faithfully from that time.
- Although there are passages in the Old Testament that are difficult to understand, we need to see them in the context of people over the centuries grappling with what it meant to be God's people – and not always getting it right, or understanding God fully, as we know him in Jesus.
- The difficult passages should be read in the light of Jesus in the gospels, and the teaching of the New Testament.

Why does God allow suffering?

- It's important to understand what lies behind this particular question for the person posing it – a personal experience or general philosophical point.
- We can't know for sure why God allowed evil into the world. Much suffering is a direct result of human action, though some is not (John 5:14). All suffering stems from the fallen, broken nature of our world. (Romans 8:18-25).
- God can use suffering to warn, guide and strengthen his children (Hebrews 12:7-11; Romans 5:3-5) e.g. abusing our bodies has consequences.
- God has done something about our suffering: Jesus knows what it means to suffer as a human. He will judge all things. He suffered and died, to allow us to enter the new heaven and new earth God promises, where there is no more suffering. In this he demonstrates God's love for all his creation.