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What I Believe About You

You are no accident.

You have been in God's heart and in His plan
from eternity past.

God is at work in you.

All the broken places in our lives are simply opportunities
for God to show His great love and transforming power.

God never fails.

He is smarter than our enemy,
stronger than our addictions.

God likes you.

He likes hanging out with you.

You are deeply treasured.

No one can take your place in God's heart.

God will satisfy all your desires with good things.

The signature of God is on you;

you are His creation,

and God doesn't make junk.

You were created to live forever,

designed to make a difference,

engineered for excellence.

God is with you.

You have what it takes.

You are here for a purpose.

You carry Jesus into our broken world.

You are the answer to someone's prayer.

You are the friend someone longs for.

You are the difference your world needs.

When you took the hand of Jesus,

you entered into life.

You became indestructible,
undefeatable,
incorruptible.

All the powers of hell
might line up to take you down,
but Jesus pushes those bullies up against the lockers,
and you walk by unharmed.

You are a royal son, a regal daughter of God.

And thank you for being my friend.

Dwight Clough

“Prove to Me God Exists”

Do you doubt? If you do, here are some thoughts for you.

Let’s imagine two different realities. In one reality, everything the atheist believes is true. God does not exist. The universe and life originated on its own. In the other reality, everything the Bible teaches is real. God is exactly who the Bible says He is.

Now imagine yourself stepping from that first atheist reality to that second Biblical reality. Focus in on that, and imagine what that experience would feel like. You just stepped out of the no-god universe into the God-centered universe.

What changed for you?

More to the point, what, if anything, did you lose? What did you give up? What do you lose if God is real and everything the Bible says about Him is true?

These are important questions.

I look at the life of Jesus, and I notice something: He never attempted to prove that God exists. Not once. But over and over He challenges us to calculate what it will cost to follow Him. There’s a price we need to pay if we’re going to follow God.¹

What is that price for you?

Deep down inside, I think you have a sense for what that price is. Take some time and see if you can identify for yourself what you fear would happen to you if you stepped into that God-centered universe. What would happen to your world? Identify those feelings and see if you can put words on them.

1 I’m not talking about money, although that might be part of it for some people.

Now a prayer. If you don't believe God exists, consider this a scientific experiment. A prayer:

“God, if you exist, this is what I think would happen to me. This is what I think I would lose: [Fill in the blank.] What do You want me to know about that?”

Pause.

You never know. What you believe will happen to you might be true. It might be false. But if there is a God, it sure might be nice to get His perspective on it.

Now a question:

If God is real, would you be willing to pay the price? Would you be willing to give up what you need to give up in order to live in His universe? Be straight with yourself.

If the answer is no, then, no, I cannot prove to you that God exists.

If the answer is yes, then look up and look around. God's fingerprints are everywhere.

Good News

Christians use code words. I'm sorry that we do; I wish we didn't. Personally, I try to avoid using these code words, but sometimes I slip and use one anyway.²

Let me give you an example:

The gospel.

This is a really loaded code word with many different meanings. But the main thing it means is "good news" or "good message." You could call it the candy of Christianity.

That reminds me of a story I once heard.

A fellow carrying a Bible was going door to door to tell people the gospel. As you can imagine, that didn't go over very well. Most people didn't answer their doors, and, when they did, they held them open only long enough to slam the door in this fellow's face. But then he came to a door where someone was willing to listen. The homeowner listened for a couple minutes, and then interrupted.

"Let's cut to the chase," he said. "You're telling me that I should invite Jesus into my life."

"Yes, sir!" the man with the Bible said.

"And why should I do that?"

"So when you die you can go to heaven," the man with the Bible beamed.

"What will we do in heaven?"

The man with the Bible was stumped on that one. He had never been to heaven, and he didn't know anybody who had been to heaven. "I don't know," he said. "I guess we'll just sit around and praise Jesus."

2 By the way, if I slip and use a code word without explaining it, track me down and get me to explain it. This will help me learn from my mistakes.

“Sounds boring to me.” Slam. The door closed.

I share this story because some people have a strange idea of what the gospel is. They think that the gospel is a ticket to a place where you sit on a cloud after you die and sing hymns day and night in a never-ending church service in the sky. Meanwhile, here on earth, you take orders from some cosmic killjoy who wants to ruin all your fun.

If that’s the gospel ... ick! If that’s the gospel, I would pray the prayer to stay out of hell, but the moment I got to heaven, I would be looking for a place to hide.

I’m sorry.

I don’t want a never ending church service in the sky.

I don’t know about you, but I’ve been to plenty of church services that were downright boring. And, to be honest with you, I’m not big on singing. I’m not any good at it, and most music is just noise to me.³ I don’t want to spend forever hopping around on puffy clouds and strumming on harps. That does not sound like fun to me.

What do I enjoy instead?

I like hiking out in the middle of nowhere, crunching autumn leaves with my boots, watching the sunrise. I like getting lost in a good story or sharing a great meal with the people I love. I like listening to someone’s life journey. And I like listening to *good* music or watching a great movie.

Why do I like these things?

Because Somebody designed me with a unique and quirky set of likes and dislikes.

That same Person designed you.

What do you enjoy? Whether it’s deer hunting or dress up, football or flowers, tractors or tea parties, there’s a reason you like what you like.

So what is the gospel? What is the good news?

The good news is this: The God who designed you wants to be your

³ I know that will sound like heresy to some people, so let me offer this explanation: Sometimes I do sing. Sometimes I hear music that I really, really like. Sometimes music allows me to connect with God in a powerful way. But often it doesn’t. The music I like and the music you like might be two different animals, and I think that’s okay.

friend ... forever.

The God who created adventure and romance, sunsets and sex, music and mountains, and a zillion other good things is the same God who created heaven.

It won't be boring. Not for one second.

More importantly, this God who created and designed you wants to hang out with you.

He likes you, and He wants to be your friend.

What About This Sin Thing?

Warning! We're about to get into another code word:

Sin.

A noun or a verb meaning (to make) wrong or harmful choices.

The Bible introduces us to a moral universe where choices have consequences. Example: Someone chooses to drive drunk. A car accident ensues. A child is paralyzed for life. The drunk driver ends up in prison. Many people are hurt by a person's bad choice.

Wrong choices are called by many names in the Bible including evil, sin (falling short of God's moral standard), wickedness, transgression (breaking the rules), corruption, iniquity (twisted for evil). Our good desires become corrupted, and we end up sinning against God in our thoughts, our words, our actions.

Another warning! I'm about to say something that could raise all kinds of red flags. You may want to shoot me. Hold your fire. Let me say the whole thing; then decide whether you want to put me in front of the firing squad.

God is angry, and I'm glad He is. (Keep reading.) God is angry at sin. Let me give you an example. A little child is abused. As a result, she is emotionally scarred for life. Do you think God doesn't care? I can assure you, He cares a great deal. He is angry. That was His precious daughter that someone messed with. He is angry. I would be concerned if He wasn't.

A dear widow in her seventies is conned out of her life savings. As a result, she has nothing. She is destitute. God is angry. That was His daughter that somebody robbed.

God is angry because sin creates all kinds of problems for the people He loves.

The trouble sin creates for us

Sin creates three problems for us:

1. We have been *damaged* by sin.

Not only are we hurt when *we* make wrong choices, we are hurt by the sins of *others*.

A classic example of this is the survivor of childhood sexual abuse. A perpetrator sinned, but the survivor of abuse suffers all kinds of hurt—panic, depression, intimacy issues, unresolved anger and more. Some of us bear physical scars from violence directed at us. *All* of us bear emotional and spiritual scars from living in a messed up world.

But before we start pointing fingers at all the people who have sinned against us, we need to look in the mirror.

2. We have sinned. That makes us *guilty* before God.

Imagine living forever. Now, imagine living forever with people you don't like. Quite a difference, isn't it! The reality is that eternal life can only be good if it is shared with good people. That includes you and me. Any imperfection in us would be magnified for all eternity. That's one reason why God's standard is perfection. Our shortcomings drag us away from God. Perfection is a tall order; none of us is there ... yet.⁴

Suppose I got a speeding ticket, went to court and said to the judge, "But you don't understand, Your Honor. I've never murdered anyone. I've never raped anyone. I've never broken into anybody's home or stolen anyone's car." Would the judge cancel the speeding ticket because I'm such a nice guy? No. Either I'm guilty of speeding, or I'm not guilty of speeding. In the same way, the sins we haven't committed don't make us not guilty of the sins we have. Sin once, and we become guilty.

That's a problem.

Have I sinned? Sure. More than once. Many times.

Have you sinned? I don't need to know you personally to know that you

4 From Day 1 of *The Easy Bible Volume One*

have. The Bible says:

All of us are polluted with sin. No one is truly good. Here's what the law shows us: We're all guilty before God. You can try all day long to get declared "not guilty" by obeying the law, but it isn't going to work. You will fail. And the law will put a magnifying glass over your sin. ROMANS 3:10-23 (summary)

God wants to hang with us, and we, once we learn the truth about God, want to hang with Him. But something is in the way. We are guilty of sin. The very thing God hates has infected the people He loves.

So, it makes sense that we should clean up our act, right?

Sorry ... more bad news.

3. By ourselves, we have *no power* to stop sinning.

Jesus said that once we sin we become a slave to sin.⁵

Those of us who have come out of denial about our life controlling issues or addictions understand this. There are things that we don't want to do, that we feel compelled to do anyway. Life can be a seesaw battle with sin. We're tempted. Sometimes we resist. Sometimes we succumb.

People who are trying to make themselves good enough for God remind me of the two swimmers who set out to swim from California to Hawaii. The first one was a world-class athlete. The second swimmer was in terrible shape. He smoked three packs a day, and was about seventy-five pounds overweight. But they both wanted to swim to Hawaii.

The gun went off, and the race was underway. Right away, the athlete jumped into the water and took a commanding lead. But the non-athlete was determined to catch up, so he soldiered on. After about a hundred yards of swimming, his heart failed, he died and sank to the bottom.

The athlete went on swimming for twenty-one miles—the width of the English Channel at the Strait of Dover. But even the athlete had his limits. He ran out of steam and became food for the sharks.

Here's my question: Which one of them made it to Hawaii?

5 John 8:34

You and I are not going to swim from California to Hawaii—at least not without a great deal of help. And you and I are not going to make ourselves good enough for God.

Trying to dress up for God is a lost cause. Give it up. It's a waste of time. It doesn't work. We have a problem we cannot solve by ourselves. That problem is sin.

It's a mess.

Things are not as God intended. The infection of sin has marred God's beautiful design for you and your world. Sin came along, promising much, and delivering nothing but pain and guilt. You've been hurt. You've been deceived. You've sinned, and you've been sinned against. The beautiful plan God has for us cannot be ours until the infection of sin is removed.

The race of humanity tried and failed to overcome sin. But we cannot remove this infection ourselves. None of us can.

Fortunately, God understands all of this. He came up with a solution.

What Jesus Did for You

Knowing that we were helpless to remove the infection of sin and repair the damage it has done, God intervened. He sent His Son Jesus to earth to do what we could not do. Here from the Bible⁶ is the story of what Jesus did for you:

A prediction

He was despised and rejected.⁷ He experienced sorrow, suffering and pain. We looked the other way. He was treated like scum, and we didn't care. But it was our sorrow and pain that He carried, even though we thought God was punishing Him for His own sins. Why did He suffer? He was wounded because we broke God's law; He was crushed because we were corrupt. The suffering He experienced makes us healed and whole. Like sheep that wander off and get lost, we wandered away from God. But God took all our sins and laid them on Him. ISAIAH 53:3-6⁸

The purpose

When John⁹ saw Jesus, he told the crowd, "Here's God's sacrificial Lamb, who takes away the sins of the world. JOHN 1:29

God cares about you, your family, your friends, everyone in your world. In fact, He cares so much that He gave what was most precious to Him: His only Son. Why did He do that? Because He wanted to rescue you from destruction, and grant you life with Him that never ends. How do you get in on this life? Just this: Center your faith on His Son, Jesus

6 Adapted from *The Easy Bible*[®], particularly Days 50-62 of *Volume Two*

7 Jesus was not part of the "in" crowd. He wasn't cool. That's wonderful news for those of us who have never been popular and probably never will be. Jesus identifies with us.

8 Isaiah lived and wrote this about 700 years before the time of Jesus.

9 That is, John the Baptist, a prophet who lived at the same time as Jesus.

A plot

The highest ranking religious leaders were scheming¹⁰ on how to secretly arrest Jesus and kill Him. But they said, “Not during the week of the Festival;¹¹ otherwise the people might riot.” MARK 14:1-2

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- 10 This happened just before the Jewish Passover and Festival of Bread with No Yeast. The Passover and Festival of Bread with No Yeast (or Unleavened Bread) was an eight day celebration commemorating the release of the people of Israel from Egyptian slavery. The angel of death “passed over” the houses of the people of Israel and did not kill their firstborn sons, because the blood of the sacrificial lamb was found on the doorposts and lintel of their homes. The Festival of Bread with No Yeast followed the Passover for the next seven days to represent the people of Israel leaving their homes in a hurry to leave the nation of Egypt. Because of their haste, they were unable to add leavening (or yeast) to their bread before baking it. In the Bible, yeast sometimes symbolizes sin or false teaching. Jesus, as God’s sacrificial “lamb,” is seen as the fulfillment of the everything the Passover and Festival of Bread with No Yeast represented.
- 11 Thousands of people gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover and the Festival of Bread with No Yeast. As it turns out, Jesus was put to death during the Festival, as the perfect fulfillment of everything the Festival represented.

Find the rest of this book at

<http://dwightclough.com/books2/dwight-clough-books/what-i-believe-about-you/>