

an intellectual grasp of what we are saying. We need the Holy Spirit deeply to convict people that they are sinners and that they don't deserve heaven.

So, the answer is not difficult. But we need to answer the question by taking them to Jesus and allowing him to answer the question. So, if people don't like what they hear, their issue is with Jesus not you!

In conversation – taking people to Jesus:

In Mark 10:17 we see how Jesus answers the rich man who ran up to Jesus and asked how he can get to heaven – 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?'

Jesus says: "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." There is our problem. We think we are good, but Jesus says that only God is good. Jesus shows this by talking about the Ten Commandments. The man says: "Teacher, all these I have kept since I was a boy." He thought he was good. But Jesus had left out the first four commandments – and this man should have got the point. The first four are about our attitude to God including those that tell us not to put other things before God and not to have idols in our lives. If he had stopped to think, he didn't love God above all things. Money was more important to him than God.

When we're honest with ourselves, we know that we don't keep God's commandments either. We don't love God with all our heart and mind, and we don't love others as we should. We have to admit that we have put other things before God. We have sidelined the God who loves us. So Jesus says, we are not good and we don't deserve heaven.

Taking the initiative - a question to ask:

"Have you even considered how Jesus can deal with the problem of us not being good enough for heaven?"

What about other religions?

In Preparation – working out the issue:

Jesus Christ is the unique revelation of God and the solution for sin. The issue is the uniqueness of Christ and the problem of sin.

How is Christianity different to other religions? Other religions are about trying to work out way to God. We will never be able to do this. Jesus Christ is God and he died to bring us to the Father.

In conversation – taking people to Jesus:

In John 3:1-10, we read about Jesus speaking to a very devout member of another religion – Judaism. Nicodemus approached Jesus to ask him some questions. Jesus told him that, as things stand with Nicodemus, he would not see the Kingdom of God. Religion will never get anyone to God. Everyone needs the fresh start that only Jesus can give.

Taking the initiative - a question to ask:

"Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus shows us that religion won't get us right with God. Do you know why Jesus came and why he is different to religion?"

NB: In John 3:16 & 36 Jesus first explains what the cross achieves, and then tells us about the eternal decision that everyone must face.

Other questions to explore (to be covered in part II)

1. How can I trust the Bible?
2. Hasn't science disproved Christianity?
3. Why does God allow suffering?
4. What about those who have never heard about Jesus?

ST. MARTIN'S CHURCH, BRAMPTON

Exploring Common Questions... (part 1)



What is the evidence for the existence of God?

This is one of the questions that comes up again and again. This is especially the case since the rise of the new atheists and publication of books like Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion*. The question of God's existence is presented in different ways. Sometimes people ask it straight out. Other times it's delivered as a statement, as 'I can't believe there is a God' or as 'I'm not prepared to rip my brains out and completely ignore all the scientific evidence that tells me clearly that there isn't a God'. The question comes in different ways, but however and whenever it arrives in a conversation, we need to answer it by taking people to Jesus.

In Preparation – working out the issue:

Before thinking about what we might say to an unbeliever, we need to ask ourselves, '*What is the Christian answer to how we know God exists?*' We need to think this through before we engage in conversation.

In a nutshell, we know God exists because God himself has revealed himself to us. That is the Christian answer. Theologians call this 'revelation'. The Christian belief for God hasn't come about because Christians arrogantly think that we're exceptionally clever and have worked out that God really is there. Christians are not certain of God's existence as a result of our rational or intellectual ability to reason that God must be there. Our certainty doesn't come from the realm of philosophy. *It comes from the fact that God has revealed himself to us.* That is why we are certain of the existence of God

Next we need to think about how God has done that. *How has God revealed himself to us?* The bible tells us that God has revealed himself in creation (Romans 1:20 and Psalm 19). However, God has also revealed himself through his Word, speaking to the world

through his prophets and the apostles. And most fully and wonderfully, God has revealed himself in Jesus. "He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15). "No one has ever seen God, but God the one and only, who is at the Father's side has made him known" (John 1:18).

The self-revelation of God in Christ is the supreme revelation of God. God is revealed much more fully and clearly in Christ than he is in creation.

In conversation – taking people to Jesus:

In Mark 4:35-41 we see this clearly. Jesus is in a boat with his disciples. We are told that a furious squall came up and the waves broke over the boat. It was such a bad storm that some of Jesus' followers thought they were going to drown. So they turn to Jesus who was asleep in the boat and woke him and asked. "Teacher don't you care if we drown?"

What happened next is amazing. Jesus didn't go to the back of the boat, grab the tiller and guide them through the storm and into safety. No, Jesus got up rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Be still!" And then the wind died down and it was completely calm. In an instant, the raging sea was as calm as a duck pond. What an extraordinary thing. They asked, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him".

Right throughout his life on earth Jesus did things that only God can do, to prove that he is God. That's why Christians believe that God exists, because in Jesus, God came and walked among us to prove that he exists.

Taking the initiative - a question to ask:

"So... there is good evidence that God came in the person of Jesus and walked among us. But have you ever considered why Jesus might have come to earth?"

You get to heaven by being good, don't you?

It is a basic misunderstanding that we encounter often. The idea that 'being good gets us to heaven' is a misconception about Christianity that is rife in our culture. It may be that someone asks: 'Why do you think that only Christians go to heaven?' Or 'All good people go to heaven, don't they. I don't understand why God does not allow good people into heaven.' Most Brits, if they think about these things at all, believe that Christianity is a moral code to live by. With that belief, they assume that at the end of their lives, if they have kept their noses clean, paid their taxes, and been good, decent citizens, then surely they will be allowed into heaven.

In Preparation – working out the issue:

Once again, before trying to answer the question, we need to do our homework. Why do Christians believe that being good is not good enough for heaven? The answer is not difficult. None of us are good. The theological issue that we are dealing with when tackling this question is the doctrine of sin: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). "All of us have become like one who is unclean and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6).

In short, the problem is simply this; we are not good – none of us. We have all failed. We are sinners. We have done many things that are deeply offensive to God. We have rejected God, broken his laws, treated others badly, and are selfish, self-centred and self-obsessed. We don't act from right motives, we don't do good for the glory of God.

So when answering the question of why good people don't go to heaven, we need to demonstrate to those who think that they are good, that people are not good. For anyone to grasp the implications of this for their lives, they need to have much more than an