

What's the Least I Can Believe and Still be a Christian?
A Guide to What Matters Most
by Martin Thielen

Part I: Ten Things Christians *Don't* Need to Believe

Chapter One – God Causes Cancer, Car Wrecks and Other Catastrophes

Scripture:

Luke 13:4-5 – *Those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them – do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you.*

How do we experience suffering and evil?

- Natural evil (earthquakes, tornadoes, physical illness) – forces that destroy though not intentionally because they have no personal will
- Human evil (murder, warfare, abuse, discrimination) – especially abhorrent when targeted against the “innocent” such as children
- Passive evil (negligence, ignorance, apathy) – careless driving, poor working conditions, unknown pollutants, etc. create unintended harm

How is God involved in suffering?

- Invulnerable God – God has the power and opportunity to alleviate suffering but only does so some of the time – Are we meant to know why suffering happens? is it so that we might grow in our faith?
- Vulnerable God – God suffers alongside us, as was made known to us in the Cross, and offers us the opportunity to participate in healing through the hope of the resurrection and the body of Christ.

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Bottom line:

Although God can and does bring good results out of tragedy, God does not cause tragic events to occur.

Notes:

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Chapter Two – Good Christians Don't Doubt

Scripture:

Mark 9:23-24 – *Jesus said, 'All things can be done for the one who believes.'*
Immediately, the father of the child cried out, 'I believe; help my unbelief.'

Matthew 28:17 – *When they saw (Jesus), they worshiped him; but some doubted.*

The gospel is often summed up by John 3:16 – *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.*

Can we live with uncertainty about issues of faith?

- If God is loving and all-powerful, why is there suffering in the world?
- How can I reconcile a belief in science with a belief in the Bible?

What accounts for the recent, dramatic rise in agnosticism in our culture?

- According to Pew Research services, the fastest growing segment of the American religious landscape is “Unaffiliated” (up to 16% in 2010)
- How much truth is there to the idea of a “foxhole mentality” about God

Bottom Line:

Doubt is not the enemy of faith but is part of authentic Christianity

Notes:

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Chapter Three – True Christians Can't Believe in Evolution

Scripture:

Genesis 1:1 – *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (NIV)*

Biblical Interpretation – is the Bible inerrant, infallible, and unchanging?

- Scientific (young-earth) creationism – according to a literal reading of Genesis, God created the world in 6 literal “days” and earth is less than 10,000 years old. Therefore evolution is only a myth.
 - Scientific problems – what about fossils, dinosaurs?
 - Biblical problems – inconsistencies between the “two” creation stories of Genesis 1 and 2

- Theistic evolution – God created the universe and directs the process of evolution; attempts to reconcile science and religion

Bottom Line:

Science and faith are fully compatible, and theistic evolution is a perfectly acceptable Christian belief.

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Chapter Four – Women Can't be Preachers and Must Submit to Men

Scripture: (one for, three against)

Galatians 3:28 – *There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ.*

Ephesians 5:22-23 – *Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the Church.*

I Corinthians 14:24 – *Women should be silent in churches...If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home.*

I Timothy 2:11-12 – *Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man, she is to keep silent.*

Was Paul (or other New Testament writers) speaking to traditions of a particular time and place, or for all Christians?

Presbyterian Ordination of Women – In 2006, the PCUSA celebrated the 100th anniversary of the first female deacon, the 75th anniversary of the first female elder and the 50th anniversary of the first female pastor.

Bottom Line:

Women are fully equal with men in marriage, in church, and in society

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