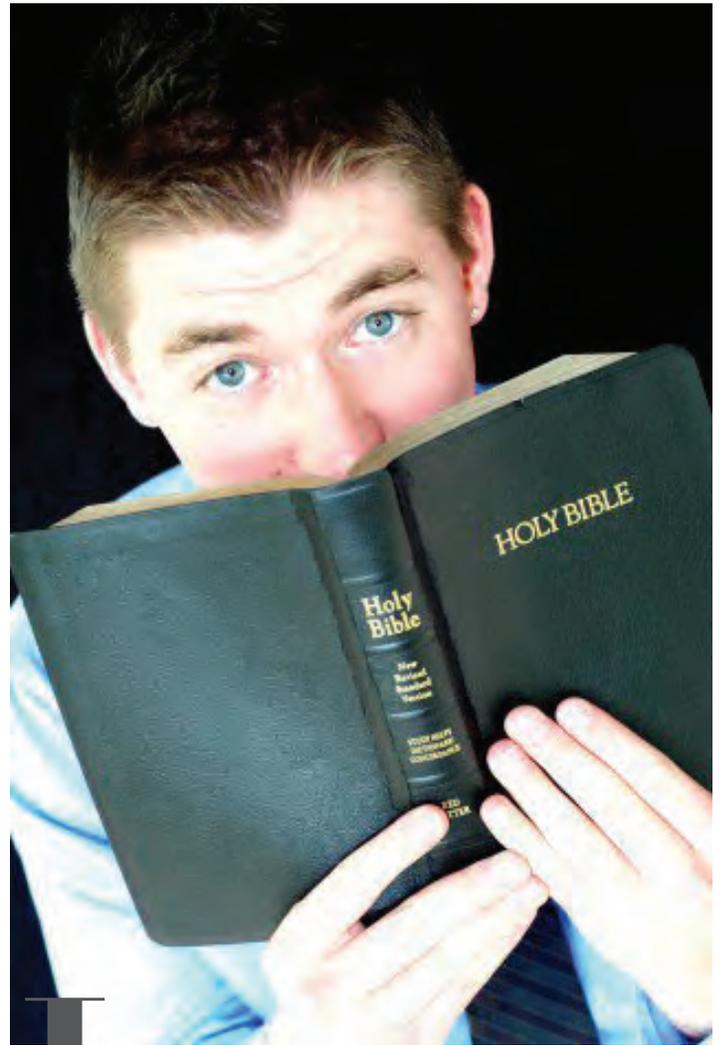


# Morality Versus Worship

by David G. McAfee

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“Live a good life. If there are gods, and they are just, then they will not care how devout you have been, but will welcome you based on the virtues you have lived by. If there are gods, but unjust, then you should not want to worship them. If there are no gods, then you will be gone, but will have lived a noble life that will live on in the memories of your loved ones.”

-- Marcus Aurelius, Roman emperor (26 April 121 – 17 March 180)

I would like to begin with this quotation because it outlines very eloquently one of the most popular arguments *against* Christianity, though it can be applied to many theistic traditions. Christians often preach, and the Bible states, that there are prerequisites for entrance into heaven beyond simply following the *moral* teachings of the Bible as you might interpret it, including the requirement of having accepted Jesus of Nazareth as Lord and Savior.<sup>1</sup> The Bible explicitly indicates that acceptance of Jesus as Lord is a necessary condition for entry to heaven in John 14:6: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.” This verse is, however, only one of the many indicating the necessity not of moral behavior to be saved, but of accepting Jesus Christ—who, according to doctrine, is supposed to have lived thousands of years ago and for whose existence we have little to evidence, neither as a man nor as part of the divine Christian God-head.

It is on the basis of this *acceptance requirement* that missionaries began their crusades to spread the word of Christ, because those who have not heard the true word of Jesus would be sure to suffer eternal damnation. From this we can infer two things: firstly, that those who have heard of Jesus the Christ and deny him will not receive the gift of eternal communion with God; and, secondly, that those who have *not* heard of the teachings of Jesus will likewise be condemned, as all humans are sinners according to this tradition and, in order to forgive

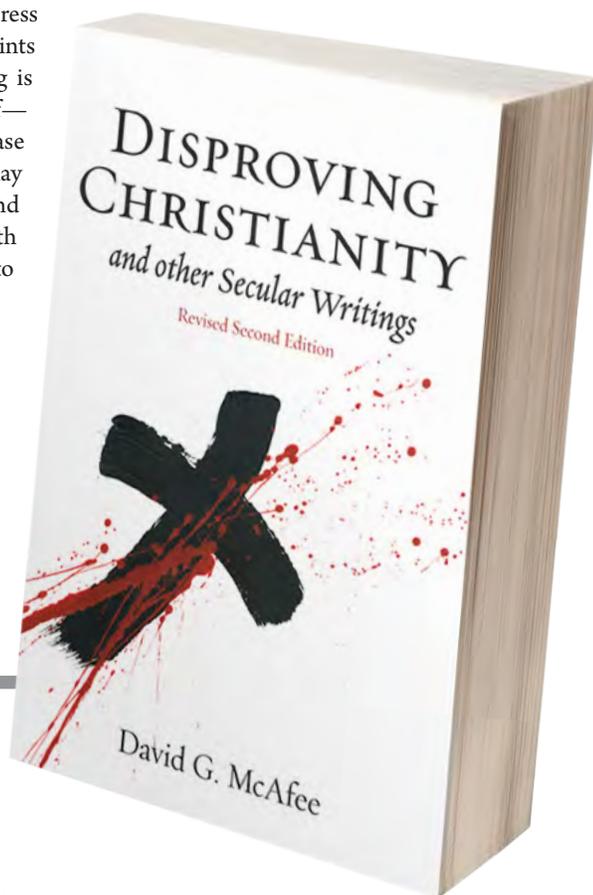
any sins, you *must* accept that Jesus Christ is God incarnate.

According to missionary authorities<sup>2</sup>, somewhere around 2.74 billion people have not heard the “gospel of Christ” and are therefore subject to the punishment of God. The problem with this lack of Christian universalism lies within the worship/morality barrier. Would a just God sentence a morally good individual to hell for never having heard of him? And for that matter, would a just God expel a morally good individual to hell who has *heard* of Jesus, but simply finds no evidentiary reason to believe? According to any reasonable interpretation of Christianity’s key doctrine, the answer is a simple and firm “yes.”

This is because, according to Christian dogma, it is impossible to *be* “moral” without Jesus Christ; I disagree with this on a fundamental level. It seems to me that this claim indicates that if a Christian were to lose his or her faith, he or she would no longer know right from wrong—a scary concept,

for unbaptized children. Many “modern” Christians stray away from this rather unpopular concept, but the fact remains that, biblically, it is impossible to enter heaven without first accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The *requirement* to obey and acknowledge God and Jesus Christ has caused the teachings of the Christian tradition to stray from morality to idol worship, creating a world in which a murderer can be forgiven and sent to heaven, whereas a loving and caring skeptic would be cast into damnation.

Not only do I believe that it is possible to maintain moral standards without the crutch of religion—but I would argue that it is the *only* way to achieve true goodness and express real altruism. Free from the constraints of organized religion, a human being is able to express decency from one’s self—as opposed to attempting to appease whatever higher power he or she may believe in. By separating *worship* and *morality*, we can act in accordance with our own human morals and be able to



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to say the least. Yet, if there exists a person who follows biblical moral code strictly, but doesn’t *believe* in Jesus’ divinity, the “merciful”<sup>3</sup> Christian God promises eternal damnation.

If it is the case that nonbelievers are punished based solely on nonbelief, and this is the purpose for early Christian missionaries to spread the Gospel, then we can conclude that those individuals who haven’t heard or cannot understand the teachings will be likewise damned. The problem is therefore extended from nonbelievers to those ignorant of Christ’s teachings, to those incapable of believing due to mental defect or age. For example, because the Bible teaches that no man is without sin<sup>4</sup> and does not mention the *specific* status of children in the afterlife, it is easy to conclude that, logically, children who die when they are too young to know Christ’s word may not have a place in eternal communion with God.

This debate led to various sects creating new Christian teachings promoting different purgatories and limbo-like layers of afterlife

be less selfish in our *motivations* for kindness and moral behaviors.

### Endnotes

1. John 3:16: For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.
2. The Joshua Project global mission statistics
3. Luke 6:36: Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father is also merciful.
4. 1 Kings 8:46: For there is no man that sinneth not.

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