

# **Atheism or Christianity Debate:**

**Kris Wagner**

**v. Andrew Bushard**

(Transcribed from some YouTube transcription site  
and edited with Google Gemini)

**Dave Stene:** Welcome to tonight's debate. The topic for the debate is the question, "What is the best life: Atheism or Jesus Christ?" And we have two students debating the issue, and they will be presenting the case for both of those sides and letting you decide for yourselves as the evening goes on.

I'm going to let you know who I am. My name is Dave Stene, and I am on staff with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, which is one of the groups that is sponsoring tonight's debate. The other sponsor is the Federation Without Television.

And I'm going to be serving as moderator, and I realize that there's a potential for bias on my part in

being moderator. So I'm going to try my best to, one, not get caught up in the cord, and secondly, to do the best job I can to be objective in my role as moderator so that I don't have any influence in the presentation of either side in the debate.

I'm going to give the debaters a chance now to introduce themselves, and first I'm going to let Andrew introduce himself.

**Andrew Bushard:** Good evening, everyone. My name is Andrew Bushard. I am a graduate student here in sociology. I'm also a member of a really cool organization called Federation Without Television. Federation Without Television sponsored this debate, but the group as a whole does not take a position. This is my position that I'm taking. There's plenty of different views in this group. I would encourage everyone to get involved. You don't have to hate television; you can love television just as long as you want to participate in discussions. If you are interested in this group, see me during intermission or see me afterwards.

**Kris Wagner:** Hi, I'm Kris Wagner. I'm part of InterVarsity, and I'd just like to invite you all. Every Thursday at 8:00 InterVarsity is in room 284 right up there in the CSU. I know that there are a lot of people who are new to campus and don't necessarily

know everybody, and InterVarsity is always an awesome place to meet people. And yeah, there's some happy people there. So, 8:00 Thursdays, get to know Jesus, get to know people. That's what we're all about.

**Dave Stene:** Before the debate begins, I'm going to let you know a little bit about what is going to come tonight in the format. We're roughly going to be around two hours for the debate, and there'll be an intermission for about 10 minutes at the halfway point.

We're going to start with each debater being able to give opening statements, and then each debater being able to give a rebuttal off the opening statements. Then the debaters will have a chance to cross-examine each other and ask questions of each other. At that point, we'll take an intermission, and they will each be able to come back and offer a rebuttal again.

Then we will have a time for some questions from the audience. That's the little card that you got when you came in. You'll be able to write down any questions that you have, and we'll be collecting those at the beginning of the intermission so that we can be asking those after the intermission during that time.

Then each debater will give closing statements, and after the debate, if you'd like to talk with the debaters or ask them some more questions, they'll be available around the front here and you can come down and do that. At this point, we're going to start with the debate, and Kris is going to give her opening statements for what is the best life and the case for Jesus Christ.

**Kris Wagner:** First off, I would like to just throw something out there. I have nothing to offer but the truth—what I have come to know as the truth, what I have given my life to know closer and more deeply as the truth.

And I'm going to read this: 1 Corinthians 13:1–7 and 13. *"What if I could speak all languages of humans and of angels? If I did not have, if I did not love others, I would be nothing more than a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. What if I could prophesy and understand all secrets and all knowledge? What if I had faith that moved mountains? I would be nothing unless I loved others. What if I gave away all that I owned and let myself be burned alive? I would gain nothing unless I loved others. Love is kind and patient, never jealous, boastful, proud, or rude. Love isn't selfish or quick-tempered; it doesn't keep a record of wrongs that others do. Love rejoices in the truth, but not in evil. Love is always*

*supportive, loyal, hopeful, and trusting. For now there are faith, hope, and love; but of these three, the greatest is love."*

As a Christian, I'm not going to fight the reality of a God, because I think you either need to accept the reality of a God or believe that this is all a cosmic joke. We believe what the Bible tells us: that God is love. The Bible is an immeasurable proof of who God is and who we are in Christ.

As a Christian, we believe that Christ is God in the flesh, that He came down and He walked this earth as a sinless man and did nothing but love the sinners. He did nothing but love the people everyone else rejected, everyone hated, and everyone mocked. Jesus loved. He performed miracles in His Father's name. He healed and He delivered demons.

I think I found that history actually has supported more of Jesus than I thought. First, I'm going to tell you about the historical background of the Bible as much as I can at this moment anyway. The Bible was written by, or the New Testament anyway was written by, the eyewitnesses of Jesus. It was written by the followers of Jesus, and it was written in a time when any lie could have been rebuked by the Roman Empire. The New Testament, I know for sure, is accounted for by geological—and I'm not being able

to speak—an archaeological, historical proof. It's pretty accurate, and if you have any questions about that, you'll probably be able to find more than I can in some of these books. I have a lot of sources that I've been reading in, and if you honestly seek truth and honestly seek answers to any questions that you have, you will find. Jesus said that if you seek, you will find, and I wouldn't be here if I had found nothing.

I would like to share who it is, this Jesus, that the people of the old day believed in, the first-century followers believed. They said that they saw Jesus walk on water, still a storm, heal crippled bodies, feed 5,000 people with a few pieces of bread and fish, live a blameless life, die a terrible death, and alive again.

If we believe that God is real, then we need to establish who God is. God is an all-powerful, all-knowing, omniscient presence. He has all power, and He can make Jesus come back from the dead. If Jesus was God, He can do the things that He said He was and did.

Now, we believe that Christ is love because Christ is the Father. It is only Christ among all the religions that has ever spoken of a Father who takes note of every sparrow that falls, a Father who numbers even

the hairs of our head. It is Christ who reveals a God who shows how much He cares for all that He has created. It is Christ who clothed Himself in our humanity to feel what we feel, and then to suffer and die in our place. It is Christ who reveals a God who cares as much about His creation as the design and detail of the natural wealth indicates.

There's much more, but Christianity is a faith. It's not a religion or a doctrine; it's a faith. It's a faith that Christ was God, and it's backed up by historical, archaeological, and geographical evidence, or we wouldn't believe it. We wouldn't have any reason to believe it. It's been going on for 2,000 years. People have been trying to disprove Christianity, and the majority of those who have have become believers.

I am very honored to have this chance to share what it is I know. I don't know everything, but I'm going to try and share because I love my Jesus, and that is the most important thing to me. So I hope that whatever it is I say in this can be counted for Christ's glory, and that you see that I am only human and I am not all-knowing or omnipresent or omniscient. But I hope to share a little bit more of who God is.

**Dave Stene:** Andrew will now give his opening statement for the case for atheism.

**Andrew Bushard:** I believe the atheist way, or its near cousin the secular humanist way, is the best way.

Many times Christians tell atheists, "I don't understand how you can get any motivation to live. I do not understand how you cannot endlessly be depressed. I do not understand how you can ever find purpose or motivation in your existence."

I believe it is a matter of optimism. You have to ask yourself, is the glass half empty or is the glass half full? You have to ask yourself, are you going to be miserable because you're focusing on the fact that someday you're going to die, or are you going to be rejoiceful that you have this opportunity to live and to make a difference? As the cartoon character Ziggy said, "I can either be upset that the rose has thorns, or I can be happy that the thorns have a rose."  
[<https://www.gocomics.com/ziggy>]

Sometimes there's certain analogies that fit perfectly. We've all heard them in many different areas of our life. I heard an excellent analogy for what atheism does for your life. This was presented by another atheist debater named Dan Barker. He said, "Imagine you have cancer. When you have cancer, you have a different perspective on life." He said, that "you're motivated to value life more." This

analogy is great because we hear about people who have cancer who then have everything put into perspective: What was petty doesn't concern them, because they want to maximize their moments; they realize that there's only so much time left.

Humans value what is scarce. We do not value what is persistent. We love gold. When we view life as scarce, when we view it as limited, the urgency drives us to do good and to do great.

Many people ask the question to atheists about life: "What is the meaning of life?" Atheists have a problem with this question because atheists do not believe there is a meaning of life. That may depress lots of people, but as secular humanist philosopher Paul Kurtz said, "There is no meaning to life, only opportunity." It's amazing, because just think what you can do: whatever you set your heart and your mind to do, you can do it. The sky is the limit. There was another thinker who wasn't even an atheist who said, "There is no security in life, only opportunity." The urgency drives us to greatness. When we realize we only have so much time here, we will strive to do our absolute best.

Different people value different aspects of life. To demonstrate the point that there is a lot of joy, satisfaction, and fulfillment in existence, I would like

to share with you what I have found fulfilling, enjoyable, and satisfying in life.

I have been very fortunate to get involved in social justice campaigns. Activism has been very valuable to me. When I have engaged in activism, I felt as if I have been completing a part of myself. It feels wonderful to stand up for a cause, the right cause, even though people may tell you you're wrong or give you garbage. It feels wonderful to sacrifice for the greater good. Many people do not like those who protest, and many people demean those who protest, but as Clarence Darrow, a famous agnostic, pointed out, "much good in our society occurred because people protested." One professor pointed out to a person who said, "you should never protest a business", "Would you have dumped tea in the Boston Harbor?" Others have also pointed out how this nation is "a nation of protesters." What we have today we owe to these protesters.

I love good humor. There is a wonderful sensation you get when you laugh. Many say "laughter is the best medicine." It is wonderful to make others laugh and to laugh yourself. Types of humor I really enjoy are pranks and satire. They really get my sides splitting.

There's an institution which is indeed one of the most wonderful institutions ever conceived by the human race. This institution was introduced to America by someone who, according to the logic of Christian faith, is burning in a horrible place right now: that would be Ben Franklin. Even the worst libraries are wonderful sources of intellectual stimulation. If all this world had was the New York Public Library, we would be blessed. It is hard to get bored in life; I do not believe boredom is a legitimate response to all the excitement out there.

Creativity is wonderful. I enjoy creating. I enjoy writing. I enjoy composing speeches. It brings satisfaction to create something. Creativity to me is indispensable; a life without creativity is a life I don't want to be living. Creativity is awesome, it's glorious, it's romantic, and it's noble.

Sometimes certain events in life give us great perspective. A couple of years ago, we had this issue about Y2K. I was not one of those who betted everything the world would end, but it did get me to think. I asked myself, if indeed these people on the fringe are right that there will be major problems come January 1st, 2000, what do I want to do? I do not want to live with these regrets. What do I want to do with my life? I believe this motivated me to do some really good things.

Christians are likely to say such a motivation motivates people to hedonism, but in fact, one of the deeds that I did was the antithesis of hedonism: one of the deeds I did was ascetic. It's very empowering, it's very powerful to engage in altruism. It feels wonderful to help others out. I have been fortunate; I have had some opportunities to engage in charity. There's a saying in the world of charity people like to say: "It's hard to feel bad when you're helping others." I would encourage everyone to engage in some form of altruism. I believe it is a necessary component of life.

I believe atheism cultivates true morality, because I believe the best morality is morality done for its own sake. In Christianity, you have the threat of hell and the reward of heaven. There is a story in Greek philosophy about the Ring of Gyges: When you wear the ring, you can get away with anything; you become invisible. The point of this story, as interpreted by many people, is if you do bad deeds just because you can get away with it, you're not moral. When atheists do good deeds, we do them not out of fear that we will spend eternity in a bad place, but because we believe the act is good in and of itself. I believe it is ultimately best to do everything for its own sake. The problem with our capitalist society is the fact that it gears people to do something for

something else. The act becomes devalued because it's only a means to an end.

There's just one song by atheist philosopher Dan Barker which says this quote: *"Living life as if it were a mere dress rehearsal makes no reason or rhyme. The only way to value the beauty all around is to take it one world at a time."*

Other atheists have used the analogy of Christians viewing this life as a waiting room. This room is only valuable to these Christians in relation to the next life: Atheists live this life for its own sake: That's what makes it all the more glorious.

As a person who has run competitively, which is another great joy, I will tell you: rarely do people run their best during practice. People usually run their best during the meet. Why is this? Because they have a different perspective. They look at the meet and view it as very important, while practice is just a means to the end of the meet.

I believe we should live life for its own sake. I believe this way, this atheist way, this secular humanist way, is the best way to live. I encourage you to live this way. You only have one life: maximize it, optimize it.

**Dave Stene:** Andrew will now give his rebuttal from Kris's opening statements.

**Andrew Bushard:** I believe there are troubles with Christian philosophy. These are dangerous both from the standpoint of reason, which many atheists critique Christianity on, but perhaps more importantly, from the standpoint of morality.

We hear lots of talk from those who believe in God that God is perfect, yet they also tell us we should love and worship God. If a being is perfect, they do not need your worship, they do not need your love. [This may have come from George Smith's *Atheism: A Case Against God*]. Therefore, I believe it is best to not waste your love on God. Use your love on those who need it; use your love on those who hurt. Humans, by nature of being finite beings, only have a certain amount of love; therefore, it is dangerous to waste any of that.

A common critique from the atheist side of Christianity is this notion of heaven and hell. According to Christian faith, if you believe in Christ, you go to heaven. If you don't, you go to a place that really sucks. This place does not have any Oreo cookies.

It's important to think about what this entails. A big problem many atheists have is that there will be many great people who will be in that horrible place called hell, yet there's plenty of people with

questionable morality who will be in heaven. Let us demonstrate who will be in heaven and who will be in hell. Non-believers will go to hell, as Christians will tell you. Who were non-believers? Plato. Also, many founders of this nation were not Christians; examples include Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, Benjamin Franklin, and John Adams. If you read about the period, you'll find out lots of people were Deists back then. They're in hell. Freethinkers tell us about Clara Barton, who started the Red Cross; she was not a believer, so she will be in hell. Atheists, such as the excellent writer Annie Laurie Gaylor, point out big feminists have been non-believers in Christ, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton. They're going to burn.

I had this conversation with a Catholic who said, "he didn't believe Gandhi would go to hell." According to Protestant Christian ideology, Gandhi will go to hell because he didn't believe in Christ; Christ was not his personal Lord and Savior. That great, noble man is in hell.

Contrast this to heaven: if you believe in Christ, you go to heaven. Therefore, the worst slave dealers in the past are in heaven. If you read about the Ku Klux Klan, you will find out that you have to be a Christian to be a member. Atheists like me cannot belong. Klan people are in heaven.

Let's talk about the founder of the Protestant faith, Martin Luther. I have read this man advocated torture; he loved torture. I also read from a book on hazing that there were young people who would be mean to the people younger than them. According to this book, they would "cut them under the lips and then make them drink the salty brine." According to this book, these people went up to Martin Luther and complained: Martin Luther basically told them, "Too bad, it's tough." That wonderful man is in heaven. According to this circumstance, many atheists are liable to say: "All these great people are in hell, and all these horrible people are in heaven. Why would I want to go to heaven?" It surely makes you think.

Christians often talk about Pascal's Wager. The basic premise of Pascal's Wager is this: you have everything to gain and nothing to lose by believing in God, while on the opposite, you have everything to lose and nothing to gain by being an atheist. I believe those premises are hogwash, because I believe you have a lot to lose when you believe in God, and you have a lot to gain while you're an atheist.

We've all heard the saying, "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." You have to ask yourself, are you going to sacrifice this life for the potential two in the bush? Pascal's Wager often talks about gambling.

I believe a wise gambler would not throw away the one bird in their hand.

Political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal makes a very interesting point about Christianity in one of his commentaries. He says “the only group of people on this earth to have ever dropped an atom bomb on others were Christians.” Christians often claim morality is only possible through Christianity. It wasn't a Buddhist nation that dropped the atom bomb; it wasn't a Hindu nation that dropped the atom bomb; it wasn't a Muslim nation; it wasn't an evil atheist nation; it wasn't even a satanic nation.

I believe it's best to be eclectic. When you are eclectic, you are not putting all your eggs in one basket; you're getting your knowledge and wisdom from a variety of sources. Christianity is often seen through a very absolutist lens. If Christians happen to be wrong, they lose their whole basket of eggs. If you're an eclectic person and you happen to be wrong on one belief, you may be losing out on that, but you have all these other beliefs.

Another atheistic argument I hear again and again is one about mental health. People who have created this argument state this: “how many mental hospitals do you go into where people are saying “I

am God," compared to people in mental hospitals yelling "I am not God"?

I believe it's arrogant to assert that Christianity is the only way to get morals. I believe morality is possible without Christianity. The Nobel Prize winner named Steven Weinberg put it very well. He said quote, *"Good people will do good, bad people will do bad, but for good people to do bad, that takes religion."* We need to examine this claim that Christianity has a monopoly on morality, because I do not believe it does.

Another point I'd like to address is the concept of God. Many atheists criticize the Christian God as being an evil dictator, why? Because for the offense of not believing in God—whether it's merely out of not understanding or of defiance—you spend eternity in hellfire, even if you bless all the children you want. Many atheists say, "God has an ego problem, because He cares if somebody doubts whether God exists or not." An interesting argument I heard from an atheist—I don't know who originated it, but it is this: "what if God loves people who have the guts to doubt God? What if those go to heaven?" [Dan Barker has often used this argument in debates and talks]

I believe there's a number of flaws with Christian philosophy. I believe they're sufficient on both moral and rational grounds to reject this faith.

**Dave Stene:** Kris will now give her rebuttal.

**Kris Wagner:** I think I need to define Christianity once more. Oh well, I probably didn't do it right the first time.

This may be a little harsh, I think. The Bible talks a lot about knowing Christians by their fruit. One of the songs that we sing is "We Are Christians by Our Love." A Christian without love, as I read earlier, is not a Christian, because God is love. The only way we are ever going to be moral and just in any way is by finding that source of love, that God who is love.

And so, a Christian who goes around killing people and enslaving people is just not displaying any of the given characteristics of God that are poured out through us in the New Testament, and does not display the character of Jesus. Jesus Himself was one who did everything He could to help those who were hurting. When everyone else turned their back and walked right past those beggars and those broken people in the streets, Jesus stopped and He touched the lepers. He touched the people nobody else would go near; He loved the people nobody else would love. I said that earlier. Jesus did everything

that He could in order to love on people and to help people, and that is the sign of a true Christian.

There are a lot of Christians who do bad things, and there are a lot of humans that do bad things. We can't narrow it down to one religion or one denomination or one sect of people, because humanity is fallible, humanity is imperfect, humanity is untrue. We do not have the capability in our own power to love unconditionally.

We see that more people have been killed under the banner of atheism in the last 100 years than have been killed in the name of God in all of human history combined. Communism, Nazism, and fascism, which are all thoroughly opposed to Western religion, particularly Christianity, killed 100 million people in the 20th century.

We are imperfect creatures, and therefore there is only one place we can go to if we ever want any source of truth, or justice, or love, or any measure of reason to live. There's only one place we can look, and that's the only place I've ever found morality. If there wasn't a set guideline of roles, there would be anarchy.

I think the issue of who will be in hell and who will be in heaven is something that we have no idea about. I mean, I'm glad I'm not God. You know, I

wouldn't be able to tell someone I love, "You're going to hell because you don't know Christ." I wouldn't be able to do that, and therefore I'm not God. We cannot say who is in heaven or hell.

I was confused when you were giving the list of people, because we really don't know who's going to be in heaven or hell. It's going to be a hard statement, but I believe it's definitely true: there's going to be a lot of good people in hell and a lot of bad people in heaven, because it does not matter what our works are or are not, what we do or do not do, what is good or bad. Christ didn't look at that; He looked at the heart. He looked at our heart.

We can't live perfect lives, and we can't live sinless lives, and Jesus knows that. So He looked at the hearts, and He pulls that part of the heart out that cries out for something more, that says, "I can't do this, I can't live the right way." You know, He sees that part of the heart and He pulls that out of us, and that is what He cares about: it's our heart. That's what salvation is all about; it's not about our works and what makes us good or bad people. It's our salvation. It's just that Christ wants our heart.

I mean, that's why when we draw pictures or when we write love letters or whatnot, we put a heart there. It's because our heart is the center of our

being; it's the part that gives out the blood to the rest of our body. Our heart is our source of life, and that's where Christ wants to live. That's what He wants: He wants our heart. He doesn't want our works; He doesn't need our works. There's nothing that we can do to make ourselves good enough people for Christ.

God is immeasurable; He's got everything in the world. He could wipe us out in a moment because He doesn't need our works; He doesn't need anything that we can give Him. But He did give us free will. Therefore, He let us go in hopes that we would come back to Him with our hearts open wide and say, "Jesus, this is a mess of a world and I'm in need of You." That is a beautiful thing for God: to know that His people will come home. I think that's the reason He gave us free will in the first place.

I think there were some other things I wanted to touch on: creativity. I do like the fact that with creativity, you know, we are all given inherent creativity, and we're all created so unique, so different, and so beautiful. These are awesome gifts that God has given us. Creativity is just a small analogy to the big, huge God. We love to create: we love to fix cars, we love to write letters, we love to construct objects, paintings, and beautiful objects.

That's one of the analogies that I thought of when I was trying to figure out why in the world would God create us if He knows that we're imperfect and all this. Why would He even create? I saw this picture of this great big God, this great big beautiful God full of love, full of beauty and radiance, and He's got all this love and joy and peace just growing inside of Him.

If I had the creativity and the ability to draw and to paint and to create beautiful works of art, I could not hold that inside of me. If I was standing in a room full of paints with an easel and paper and pencils and all this stuff that artists use, I could not help but to create something. That's what God did: He is full of love, and He couldn't help creating something so that He can love on us.

To waste our love on God, it's not even possible. God is a God of love, and it's because He first loved us, not that we first loved Him. He created us so that He could love on us, and in that love, that we could love Him back. That's not a waste. I would love any one of you whether you love me or not, and I think that's the Christian way, because that's the Christ way. A Christian is a Christ ambassador, and that is what I have to say.

**Dave Stene:** We're now going to move into the cross-examination part of the debate, and Kris is going to be cross-examining Andrew first.

**Kris Wagner:** Oh, first off, I didn't know what you were saying when you said "eclectic." What is that?

**Andrew Bushard:** An eclectic is someone who gets knowledge and wisdom from a variety of sources.

**Kris Wagner:** Thank you. Could you define life for me?

**Andrew Bushard:** Life? I believe life is when a person or being breathes, when they are full of carbon matter, when they are exuberant—sometimes, though some folks are not. I believe life is when the heart beats.

**Kris Wagner:** By exuberance, do you mean emotions?

**Andrew Bushard:** I believe exuberance also often assumes the form of emotions. Exuberant people are often very emotional about life.

**Kris Wagner:** Okay, that's happy. I love exuberance. Where do we get that exuberance?

**Andrew Bushard:** I would answer the answer many atheists often give: from ourselves, from our own perceptions.

**Kris Wagner:** How do you define right and wrong?

**Andrew Bushard:** It's important to acknowledge that morality is not often easy. There's many areas which are difficult. Right and wrong: I define right as what promotes life, also healthy life, and wrong as what generally discourages it. This is not a complete absolute statement, but this is a general guideline.

**Kris Wagner:** Hitler, just as an example—Hitler believed that Jews were a plague on humanity, and he believed that it was right and it was moral and it needed to be done in order to create a healthy society to kill all the Jews. Did that make his decision right?

**Andrew Bushard:** Surely not. Indeed, morality differs from people to people. I would also like to point out there's this book called *Hitler's Pope*. The thesis of this book is that this pope, who had a school named after him where I used to live, supported Hitler or at least allowed him [I believe I read about this book in *Freethought Today*].

**Kris Wagner:** Do you think... you said right and wrong differ from person to person.

**Andrew Bushard:** What I said—I believe they can differ because people are imperfect. Some have different perceptions of what right should be.

**Kris Wagner:** Okay, so if I was to believe that I could go around hitting people over the head and that was right, would that be right because I think it's right?

**Andrew Bushard:** No.

**Kris Wagner:** Okay, where is that line? How do we draw that line?

**Andrew Bushard:** It seems as if many times people want an easy line, which atheists point out there's not always an easy one.

**Kris Wagner:** I guess I'm confused as to where we get this sense of right and wrong if we all have different opinions. If it changes from person to person, it doesn't seem like there could be a clear way to define a specific set of rules, because everyone has their own definition of right and wrong.

**Andrew Bushard:** The problem of interpretation also affects Christians. There's many Christians that disagree on points of the Bible; sometimes there are huge points. This idea has been presented in another

debate by another debater [Dan Barker said in one debate we hosted, “christians disagree on every issue from abortion to the death penalty; if there’s absolute morality, where is it?”]; I believe it's a good point.

**Kris Wagner:** Who do you say Jesus was? Who is Jesus to you?

**Andrew Bushard:** I have a feeling this is leaning to C.S. Lewis's arguments about Christianity. I believe, as a good number of other secular humanists believe, that Christ did some good. He had some good values, but there's also some bad values in the Bible.

**Kris Wagner:** That wasn't referring to C.S. Lewis, actually. I haven't read enough of him, though I wish I did. I was actually referring to the historical documentations of Jesus and what history writes Jesus to be.

Next question: is there a truth to know?

**Andrew Bushard:** I believe it's possible. I believe, because there is an argument that there's objective truth out there, but we may not be able to realize what it is.

**Kris Wagner:** Do you believe that we can create our own reality?

**Andrew Bushard:** Sure.

**Kris Wagner:** Okay, I guess that can end it. You clearly believe that there's no God, then?

**Andrew Bushard:** That's a very good question. George Smith in his book *Atheism: The Case Against God* tells about two different types of atheists. One type of atheist in this book are the “strong atheists”; the other are “the weak atheists”. In this book, “the strong atheists are those that believe there is no God, while the weak atheists do not believe in God”. I fall in the latter camp.

**Kris Wagner:** You believe there could... is it bordering on agnosticism? There could be, there could not be, you don't know?

**Andrew Bushard:** The interpretation of the latter camp, according to Smith, is the latter camp lacks a belief in God; they do not believe in God.

**Kris Wagner:** Okay, so you stated earlier that you live for yourself. What is there to live for when you get to the end of yourself? When you give everything that you have, what do you have left?

**Andrew Bushard:** I believe there's potential in us all. You look out at people that do so much for others and make these amazing sacrifices. I was impressed with Barry Horne, the animal rights activist in Britain. According to many sources, he fasted 68 days because he had so much love in his heart.

**Kris Wagner:** What makes a good person good?

**Andrew Bushard:** A good person is someone who believes in justice. A good person is someone who believes in altruism. A good person is a person that believes in righteousness.

**Dave Stene:** It is now time for Andrew to cross-examine Kris.

**Andrew Bushard:** Kris, have you ever been wrong about any matter in your life? If such is the case, have you ever had times where something looked right at one time, but did not at another time? How then can you tell that this belief in Christianity is not one of those instances?

**Kris Wagner:** At first, it started out where I had no idea. When I first became a Christian, or first admitted the reality of a God, it started out really... I had no idea. I was just shown the love. You know, I had gone 16 years of my life without love, and people first showed me what love was.

Then I later came to understand that there's more to God than love: there's a Christ. Then I started learning about what that Christ was, and I found out that there's more to Christ than just theology or philosophy. It's historical, there's documentation, there are prophecies from the Old Testament—an endless amount of prophecies that were fulfilled by Jesus, and there would be no way to fulfill those prophecies if it wasn't by God's hand. There's just so much evidence that you can find when you seriously seek with an open mind, and you'll find it.

**Andrew Bushard:** I'm going to ask you a question that was asked by another atheist debater to a Christian: “If God asked you to kill, would you kill?”

**Kris Wagner:** If the situation was... I do not believe that I have been given a heart... I cry when a butterfly hits my windshield. I cannot kill; in my own capacity, I cannot kill. But I know that there are instances in the Old Testament where God did order people to kill, and there would be an endless amount of "ifs" and "buts." Maybe I would have to be given a specific situation in order to answer that clearly.

**Andrew Bushard:** What if God asked you to kill me to show that atheists need to die because they're being too rebellious?

**Kris Wagner:** I should ask God. The question really defies all that we know about the character of God. He gave an endless amount of opportunities to people who didn't believe in Him. God could strike you down right now; He wouldn't need me to do it, because He knows that I can't do it on my own.

In the Old Testament, God gave the prophets of Baal so many chances. We have this life, and it is within this life that we make our decisions. At the end, He knows what's going to happen from there, but He's giving us an endless amount of decisions, and He would wish that none would perish. So He would not want you to die until you have been given every opportunity to know Him possible.

**Andrew Bushard:** I'm going to ask you a question which my friend asked his parents, actually, in a series of questions: "Would Jesus drop bombs on Afghanistan?"

**Kris Wagner:** I guess I'm kind of confused by the question. Did Jesus in the flesh or Jesus in the spirit?

**Andrew Bushard:** Okay, so would you rephrase that and ask if God would drop bombs on Afghanistan?

**Kris Wagner:** Jesus in the spirit lives inside of every one of us who believes; He lives inside of us, every one of us who asks Him to be. Jesus in the flesh died. Jesus in the spirit is alive in every one of us. So, Jesus in the flesh would be every one of His Christians, every one of His children.

I don't know how I could possibly answer God's mind in saying, "Would God drop bombs on Afghanistan?" It's not in my will, and I can't answer His will.

**Andrew Bushard:** What's up with the WWJD bracelets? Aren't you supposed to ask that question, "What Would Jesus Do?"

**Kris Wagner:** Yes, yes. And that's why before the president goes into his decisions and whatever, I'm sure he goes through lots of prayer. But if you take that on a smaller scale, I mean, I can't answer God's will; I cannot do that. I can only do the best with what He's given me. He gives us wisdom, He gives us knowledge, He gives us truth, and He gives us guidance through the Bible and through His Holy Spirit in our lives. That Holy Spirit would wish that none would perish, and so unless they were doing... I can't even answer what God would will for His people outside of His holy love, because He wills His holy love, His holy and divine love to His people. I

don't think dropping bombs on Afghanistan would show that kind of a love.

**Andrew Bushard:** I agree. Do you believe I'm completely immoral, completely unhappy, and live a completely meaningless life?

**Kris Wagner:** When did I meet you, Andrew? How well do I know you? What can I gauge from you already? It seems that you're a very nice guy. As to whether I think you have complete unhappiness, complete immorality, and live a completely meaningless life based on what I have in my knowledge of you right now, actually, I was very encouraged by you.

I've been very, very nervous at this debate, and I'm still nervous, as you can totally tell. Just seeing you smile and your confidence with having done this debate the day before did encourage me. You do seem to be very content with your life, and I don't know much beyond what I've seen, but does that answer your question?

**Andrew Bushard:** Do you believe it's thus possible for atheists or other non-believers to have some happiness, to have some meaning for life, and to also have morality?

**Kris Wagner:** I believe that morality has been established from the time that God gave the Ten Commandments. Morality has been established; it's had thousands of years now to be established throughout society. So we need only draw from the morality and the guidance that's been given to us from times past in order to live moral lives.

Yeah, I think that atheists and people who choose to live outside God's will and choose to live for themselves can have a form of happiness, but I kind of wonder what would happen when everything in their life is destroyed. Where would they turn? It's been evident that when someone dies or something traumatic happens, people cry out, "Oh my God!" You know, they cry out to God. That leads me to believe that there is something inside of us that says, "Yeah, I've got everything going for me, I'm the richest dude in the world, I'm the most famous chick in the world, everyone loves me, la la la la la," but there's got to be something more.

Money can only get you so much; happiness can only last you so long. And then the situations around you—I mean, this is a horrible world we live in with all the things that are happening. What do we have to be happy for unless it's something eternal?

**Andrew Bushard:** I'm going to ask you a question now that we discussed in past debates. Christians on the issue of animal rights often say, "it's okay to eat animals because God gave humans dominion over the animals, but they also say humans have a responsibility to treat animals right." From what I have read on the subject of modern food production, these animals are raised in atrocious conditions; one study said "90% of our food comes from these factory farms." I wonder, how can a Christian who believes animals should be treated humanely justify eating meat raised in these horrible conditions?

**Kris Wagner:** Are you vegetarian?

**Andrew Bushard:** I am.

**Kris Wagner:** Okay. How can we justify... oh, how can we justify the torture of animals, is that what you're saying? How can you justify contributing to these industries that treat animals improperly when you're supposed to treat animals responsibly? Where is... I'm not saying that I'm totally down with treating animals improperly, but where is the rule, the law, the guideline that says we are supposed to treat animals with all respect? Where is that law?

**Andrew Bushard:** Actually, interestingly, I heard this presentation from a Christian at UW-Madison named Dr. Dewitt, who argued that the Bible

presented environmentalism and even animal rights. He mentions verses from Isaiah to justify his beliefs. We have all heard the common Bible verse about dominion over the animals too, which I believe is in Genesis.

**Kris Wagner:** Yeah, in Genesis God gave us dominion over all the earth and all the creatures on the earth. Thus being said, I would say that as a Christian, I do not personally wish to contribute any more harm on animals than our cars do at night when we can't see a deer run across our road, any more than I would want to contribute to the death of millions in another country.

I know that with every breath that I take, everything that I do, someone in another country is dying, and I have no control over that. Just my freedom is contributing to many deaths around the world: human deaths. Animals are a secondary matter, but there is a certain amount of love that we should also grant to animals. I mean, they're totally awesome gifts, you know. It's been proven that having an animal and a home pet can help you live longer and happier lives. We can't take life for granted: animal, plant, human, or otherwise, we can't take that for granted. We have no right to torture any form of life.

**Andrew Bushard:** Why then would you eat meat when it's raised in torturous conditions?

**Kris Wagner:** It's there, and I'm hungry. But I'm sorry... it's a torturous world that we live in, and we can't help that. It's the way it's become. Anything we do can be considered torture in someone's eyes and someone's viewpoint. Everything we do could be seen as wrong from other viewpoints. I think that's why we also need to find an established set of rules, laws, and guidelines, or anything anyone does can be considered wrong and immoral.

**Dave Stene:** That closes out our cross-examination, and we now have a 10-minute intermission. In 10 minutes, we'll begin again, and Andrew will be giving a rebuttal off the cross-examination time.

If you have any questions, if you can put them in the KFC buckets, there's one over there, and hopefully we can get one over by that door also.

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Welcome back for the last part of the debate. We're going to have some time for a period for Andrew and Kris to both give some rebuttal after the cross-examination, and then we're going to have some time where we will be asking the debaters as many of the questions that you have submitted as we can,

and having them respond. Andrew is going to start with his rebuttal from the cross-examination now.

**Andrew Bushard:** I noticed when I was talking to my opponent before the debate that we both had similar school interests. I'm in sociology; she's in social work. Back at my old school, there was one department... I remember taking a class in sociology. In sociology, we made the point—the teacher told us—that “beliefs lead to actions.” This is key when it comes to Christianity. These beliefs are not just something that has no effect. My big problem is when these beliefs lead to immorality and these beliefs lead to evil acts in the world.

I had a big problem with that Christian president of ours. I do not believe he deserves to be in office. I do not believe he has many morals. Be careful about electing someone who has a drunk driving conviction for president. Not that people can't make mistakes, but when someone drinks and drives, that sends me the message of selfishness; they don't care about others. You want someone like that to be the leader of our nation?

My opponent talked about Hitler, Stalin, and Mao. Indeed, according to many sources, two of those people are atheists. As my friend once said, “There's no guarantee atheists either would be always moral

people.” Often people say, “there are no guarantees in life, of course, and after that they may say death and taxes. But as many point out, Hitler was not an atheist. If you ever read his book, as others will point out too, he doesn't claim atheism. I believe it's mistaken to assume he did it, as my opponent said, “under the banner of atheism.” I do not remember hearing anything about Hitler flying the atheist flag. However, atheists point out “there have been many people killed under the name of God.” We could probably sit here for hours listing as many people as that, but we don't want to.

One argument Christians give that absolutely gets on my nerves, gets under my skin, is the argument that takes this form: Focus on the Family, James Dobson, argues from this argument. I did a paper where I really critique it. He said that “ever since they took prayer out of the schools, society has gone downhill.” They make that claim again and again. As many thinkers point out, people have had this view for a long time that society is going downhill. One quote people often tell about is from Plato way back when; he said society was going downhill. Therefore, people say that it's foolish to argue that. We were talking about this in my one class, and a professor mentioned that's just a value judgment.

Many atheists point out the good that has happened since the '50s. There's a great song called "The Good Old Days of Theocracy," which Kristin Lems sings. In the song, she talks about how back in the day women were the property of men, children got spanked even worse, while today that's starting to end. You look at women's situation: it's not perfect, but it has surely been a lot better since back in the day. Many people critique this argument by saying correlation and causation are separate entities. Many people are mistaken, as critics point out, by assuming just because we took prayer out of school, society has gone downhill.

I imagine many people who are persons of color would not want to go back to the 1950s right now. It's not perfect, but it's surely a lot better. I was thinking a good number of my friends are not white, but if it was back in the day, we would probably have to go to different bathrooms. That's sick. We need to be careful about these claims.

I believe it's essential to use this opportunity. You cannot be immoral in this life; you cannot. What is especially dangerous, as many point out, with Christianity is the fact that oftentimes it discourages people from questioning authority. Many Christians follow this evil president of ours. Critics point out he used the death penalty crazy. Trends also point out

this nation is one of the only nations to use the death penalty on juveniles, also on people... Amnesty International mentions that a lot. We often heard about Christian President Bill Clinton, who executed that man. I believe there's a problem, but the good news is I'm not going to be one of those types that believe all Christians are bad. In fact, I got in a discussion with my friend who was making such a generalization.

I believe what's most important is our beliefs. I get encouraged when I see fellow Christians at the picket line. Back where I used to go to school, we would have weekly protests against the war, against what our evil presidents are doing. I was encouraged to see fellow Quakers, even some more mainstream Christians. That's great, we need that, because I believe preventing evil on this earth is a key ideal; it's all-important. Whether you're christian or whether you're Atheist, you should have a problem with what George Bush seeks to do. I do not imagine Jesus would support this.

As my friend asked his parents, Martin Luther King Jr. gave a speech which I had the fortune of reading during the Vietnam War. I'm very disgusted with how people view Martin Luther King Jr. Surely many people love him, but do they understand what he did, who he was? He was anti-war, communist—it's

important to keep that in mind, especially the anti-war part. In one of his speeches against the Vietnam War, he asked the question, "What would Jesus do?" My hope is when Christians ask this question, we will avoid many of the grievous evils that occur in our society, that we will avoid many of the horrible injustices that we face.

**Dave Stene:** Kris will now give her rebuttal.

**Kris Wagner:** WWJD, fully rely on God, pray until something happens... all these acronyms and things work for these bracelets and stuff. It totally leads us to something huge, bigger than ourselves. Great questions! "What would Jesus do?" is totally the number one question that we need to ask in any situation.

The cool thing about that is He already established what He would do. He lived a life of morality, of a sinless nature. He lived a life that is our number one prime example in any situation, and we can't keep looking towards the president or towards groups or religions or other people. We can't keep looking to each other for the answer, because we're the confused ones. So if we want answers on justice, on morality, on right and wrong and righteousness and all these questions of humanity, we need to look in the Bible and we need to see how Jesus lived His life

and how He called us to live our life. It's only in Him that we can find truth and any form of righteousness at all.

For the question of Bush doing as he is, I think it's awesome if drunk driving is the only thing we can push on him. I don't condemn anyone or condone anyone drunk driving, but if that's all that we can find to hold against him in relation to the rest of the presidents and the scandals that we found in them, you know, it's pretty amazing. There's probably more, because we're all human, so he's probably got a lot of sins in his closet, but so do we.

I think any one of us would have a hard time in the office of president. There's so many decisions, a world of decisions that he has to deal with every day, every moment, and there's no way we can judge him and say what he's doing is right or wrong, because we don't know the big picture. We have no idea what's going to happen, how the other countries are going to react to us. We only know as Americans what we see outside of our windows, which is so small.

I went on a mission trip to Mexico, and I was just appalled. We went to a garbage dump to distribute food, and I was so overwhelmed with our ignorance as Americans and how horrible living conditions

were. And they were happy people. They were happy that we were bringing them food; they were happy that we were giving them Bibles, happy that we were praying for them and showing them Jesus. They were happy, and they were living in worst conditions possible.

We are so sheltered in America, and the window that we look out of is so shiny. It is microscopic in comparison to the rest of the world, in comparison to the universe, in comparison to heaven. Jesus knows, God knows, because He is omniscient and omnipresent. He knows the past, present, and future. He knows what the big picture is, and we don't.

So for us to put our ideas of right and wrong on the president, on history, on the future of America and the future of this world is not even our right. We have no right to do that, because we do not know what is to come in the future. God bless the president, and God bless America, and God bless the rest of the world too. We need people who are going to stand up for Christ whether they've got sins in their closet or not, who are going to stand up for Christ in prayer and in truth. God knows his heart, and I don't.

I don't know how I feel about us going to war. I cry for the people in those countries who don't know Jesus; I cry for the people in this country who don't know Jesus. I love those people, and I have the Christ heart; I don't want anyone to die. Jesus Christ would wish none to perish, but God knows the big picture, and it is only for me to pray for the president that he can listen to God and hear Him clearly, as opposed to judging the president and saying what he's doing is wrong. It is not for me to do. If I'm going to do anything for the president, I'm going to pray for him, and that is my contribution. There's no way that I can do anything that can get up to him and let him know what's up, you know? I mean, I don't even know the big picture, so how am I supposed to tell him what's right or wrong? I pray for him, and that's my say on that. I took a tangent.

Taking prayer out of school: as I know he probably really hated hearing that argument, but I really do think that when we took prayer out of school, we took God out of school, and we replaced Him with guns and teen suicide. The estimations, the statistics are horrible. When we stop living for God, when we turn our back on God as a country and legalize abortion and legalize all these different things, when we took God out of schools and when we took God

down from the number one priority in our country, this is what we now live in:

- One murder every 22 minutes
- One rape every 5 minutes
- One robbery every 47 seconds
- Divorce has quadrupled since 1960
- Suicide is up 200% since 1962
- 2.7 million child abuse cases are reported every year
- 1.7 million abortions are confirmed every year
- 1.5 million reported cases of AIDS

This is what has happened when we took God down from the throne of our country. This is what happens when we turn our back on God: our lives go down the toilet. I know that from my own life, and I know that from everyone I talk to who has had an amazing encounter with Jesus, and I know from the statistics that we need Jesus back because our country is dying.

There's more I want to talk about, and that is the end of that tangent. Do I have time?

So, I was really taken aback by questions earlier, the plants and animals and life questions. I really was taken aback. But I have found out from the break that the conditions in the greenhouses—actually, this is from a friend who works in a greenhouse—the

conditions in the greenhouses are considered to be torturous for the plants, but it increases the goodness of them or whatever, but it's torturous on the plants. So to go along with how can we condone torturous conditions for animals, the plants in the greenhouses are the same way. There's no way we can run from torturous environments in this world, because this world is full of things.

I think there was another social justice... I don't remember if you judged Christians or said about Christians' sense of justice. I don't know what he said about that, but I don't want it to be thought that Christians are weak-minded, and I don't want it to be thought that Christians condone murder or any such torture.

The life of Jesus is one of complete sacrifice, complete servitude, and I come back to that every time. When in doubt, "What would Jesus do?" And I look to the Bible to see how He lived, and I look at the Bible not only because it is the inspired word of God, but because it is historically accurate and approved. Historians, Christian and non-Christian, have backed up the authority of the Bible and the authority of Jesus as He lived. So that's why I look to the Bible, and I just wanted to explain that too.

**Dave Stene:** We're going to have a time now of asking the questions that you gave, and this is Zach. Zach is an agnostic, and we asked him to sort the questions to eliminate any bias that I might have in that process.

**Zach:** Andrew, in reference to Blaise Pascal, you said that believing would waste your life, you'd be throwing it away. Tell me why: why can't you believe and yet be completely happy and still accomplish great things?

**Andrew Bushard:** I do not believe one completely would waste it. Surely Christians have done a lot of good, but your perspective is altered. As I mentioned earlier with Dan Barker's arguments about cancer, when you look... this argument makes sense when you think about people with cancer. People with cancer who have only a few months to live are not concerned about petty gossip; they want to make a difference, they want to do everything right because they only have so much time left.

**Zach:** Chris, it's great to have a guideline of faith in your life, but consider this: Aristotle once posed the question, "Is it right because God commanded it, or does God command it because it is right?" You might see the dilemmas of this theory. If God advocated you to mass murder all those that you love, you'd

probably say no; this would suggest a higher morality in love. I was wondering what your thoughts are on this theory, and what do you think we should do in a pluralistic society of so many different religions?

**Kris Wagner:** Weird not to have time to think about the questions; you have to bear with my instantaneous responses.

I heard Josh McDowell—I think it was Josh McDowell, who was a complete skeptic of Christianity, and he was challenged to prove that there was no God. He took the challenge and he became a Christian, because the evidence far outweighed for Christianity.

So he was speaking and he said something like, "How can you present truth in a world where all truth is equal?" I wish I'd listened closer to his response, but he was taking the Bible as an example, and he was asking people why they believe—asking Christians why they believe the Bible. Do they believe it's infallible? Do they believe it's the inspired word of God? And you know, they said yes, and then he said, "Why?" Nobody could answer that.

Eventually someone came up and said, "I know the answer!" And Josh was like, "Cool, what's the answer?" And he said, "I believe it's true because I

believe it." Josh said, "The difference between you and me is that you believe it's true because you believe it, but for me, I believe it because it's true."

There is a defined morality; God has made Himself known from the beginning of time, and He has made an outline for us to live by. All of the religions spawn off of the beginning of time with people wanting to take their own issues, their own rights, and their own pleasures and make it livable for themselves, to make it right or wrong.

So I think... can you read the question one more time?

**Zach:** It started with the question that Aristotle posed: "Is it right because God commanded it, or did God command it because it is right?" That question suggests a higher morality in love, and the person was wondering what your thoughts are on that theory, and what do you think we should do in a pluralistic society of so many different religions?

**Kris Wagner:** Thanks, I'm sorry, I like short questions. "Is it right because God commanded it, or did God command it because it was right?" They go hand in hand; they're synonymous. God is God; He is the ruler, God is God, and He is right regardless of what we think and what we feel. So they go hand in hand. Does that answer your question? Okay, sorry.

**Zach:** Andrew, do you know the number of hairs on a yak? Do you even know all the names of the students on campus? So let's assume you know 1% of all knowledge; that's 99% left. Can you think that in that 99% there is proof for a loving God?

**Andrew Bushard:** Do I know all the students' names on this campus? Actually, I don't. Is the question asking, is there any room in that 99% for the possibility of God? Sure. I have no claim that I know everything; I have no claim that I can't be wrong.

**Zach:** This is for both. Kris, you can start: Why is there pain and suffering?

**Kris Wagner:** This is a question that plagues humanity. The question on human suffering is huge; I'm sorry, I'll try and shorten my answer.

God gave us free will, one of the greatest gifts of all time. With that free will, we have the choice of good and evil: we have the choice to do good, and we have the choice to do bad. We have the choice to love, and we have the choice to hate. With that free will, we have an option, and God can only do so much before... He will not override our free will, and that is why it is our free will.

So the reason there's suffering is because we turned our back on God and we said, "We can do it our way." And our way isn't working. God intended it to be the Garden of Eden; He intended it to be beautiful and perfect, He intended it to be joyful and just amazing. And we ate the fruit. We said, "We want to know," then we ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. With that knowledge comes great responsibility, and we can't live up to that responsibility because we are not God. We've chosen our own way; we've taken our free will and we've hurt many people with that free will.

**Andrew Bushard:** I believe there's pain and suffering in this world in good part because we don't speak out about it; we allow it to occur. I believe there's some aspects of Christianity which discourage people from acting. One quote I heard from Dante's *Inferno* was this quote: *"The hottest places in hell are reserved for those who maintain their neutrality in times of moral crisis."*

There's another quote that I think of by Pastor Niemöller in Nazi Germany. He said something to the effect of: "When they came for the Jews, I didn't care because I wasn't a Jew. When they came for the communists, I didn't care because I wasn't a communist. When they came for the Catholics, I

didn't care because I wasn't a Catholic. Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak out."

There's a saying in social justice—I don't know who said this, in fact I looked for it but I could not find it because it's a marvelous quote: "*Action is the antidote to despair.*" I interpret this as saying, if there's something wrong, you should act on it; you should hold up those picket signs, you should fast or do other political actions. That is why there's suffering in this world; it's up to each and every one of you to speak out to prevent this suffering and pain.

**Zach:** Kris, before Christ was born, pagan religions existed.

**Kris Wagner:** It's a very good question. Whoever said it, I commend you. What I want to say is that again, I come back to the Bible: Who was Jesus biblically and historically? What kind of a life did He live? That is what Christianity is all about: Christianity is a name for the Christ-followers.

Everything else... different denominations believe different things, and they take the path on Christ in different directions. We all have different opinions on how the Bible should be interpreted and how we should all live, and you know, we take the Bible to mean so many different things. But what really

matters is how Christ lived, and that is what I think the simplest doctrine that we can live by as a Christian is: just the outline of Jesus.

That other pagan religions have attributed to Christianity, is that what the question is asking? I think you could also say that the pagan religions have also come from somewhere a lot farther back than that. Everything has had its origin, and the beginning of origin with a Christian view is Adam and Eve. So even the pagan religions came from somewhere. The prophets of Baal in the Old Testament, pagans that believe in many gods—it all comes from somewhere, and as Christians, we believe it all came from the beginning creation of Adam and Eve and went from there with our own selfish desires.

**Zach:** Andrew, why did the disciples, after the death of Jesus, preach so confidently and ultimately endure brutal deaths if they did not believe that Jesus was God?

**Andrew Bushard:** Maybe I don't contest that at all. Maybe I do believe they believed that there is a God, that Christ was God.

**Zach:** Kris, you said our works don't matter, God judges the heart, but you also said we are judged by the fruit of our heart. Which is it?

**Kris Wagner:** Thank you. Before I address that, I also want to apologize. I'm a big person for clarity, and sometimes when I don't understand a question, I ask for further clarification, and since these are written questions, I can't do that for my answers. I apologize, and I'm doing my best in answering them.

I'm glad you brought that up. I was quoting—I think it was 2 Timothy—that talks about works cannot bring you to heaven, works cannot get you salvation. Works are beneficial; our works are evidence of the life-changing experience we have with Christ. Works can benefit humanity, and Christ was all about benefiting humanity; that's why He came down and died for us so we could be with Him forever. And so, works are evidence of our Christian faith, but they do not get us to heaven.

**Zach:** Andrew, you say that you live an optimistic life. My question is, where does your optimism come from? Also, you said that when you do a good work, it feels like a part of you is completed. I believe your optimism comes from the part of God that is in you. I also ask you this: Could that part of yourself that is being filled possibly be the part that God took out when Adam and Eve sinned?

**Andrew Bushard:** I suppose that could be the case. The first question asks, where do I get this

optimism from inside me? There's also a lot of good in this world. Christians, so often you hear these preachers talk about the bad; what about the good? What about the good? Again, we should contest my opponent's view that society is going downhill, because many critics of that view point out there has been a lot of positive change since the '50s.

**Zach:** Kris, what is a Christian's motive for good works?

**Kris Wagner:** A Christian's motive is to share the love of God. Without good works, what's going to happen to this world if we don't do good things and be good people? Then the love of Christ is not going to be shown in any way. If we believe that God is love, we've got to show it somehow. We're just so full of that love that we've got to do good things, and we've got to do good works. It's not a measure of fearing God and fearing salvation, or what you said earlier; it's not that we fear hell, just that we're so full of God we've got to do something good.

**Zach:** Andrew, when you refer to altruism in a secular sense, how would you define the motivation for this under the premise of humans only having a finite capacity for love and energy?

**Andrew Bushard:** I believe that we do have a finite capacity, as that question states, but our love

can't truly be limited. There's only so much of me that can go around. I cannot tonight have a three-hour discussion with you, you, you, you, you, you. There's only so much that can go around. I believe it fits perfectly in the context of secular altruism: just because it's limited does not make the love any less noble or wonderful. We have to realize our limitations, especially when it comes to this. That is why, as I stressed earlier, God cannot benefit from your love; do not give God your love, give us your love—we can benefit from it.

**Zach:** Kris, do you believe that heaven and hell are predetermined for folks?

**Kris Wagner:** That's kind of a score... heaven and hell predestined? There's a big, huge controversy: free will versus predestination. That's one of the biggest, huge stumbling blocks for people not becoming Christians and whatnot, even for Christians. We struggle with that so hugely because we don't know everything, and I've been trying to actually study up on that so that I could answer that question with justice, but I'm probably going to butcher the answer.

Free will versus predestination: how is it predestined for some? Since God has laid out the laws and told us how it is we are supposed to go to heaven and what

will happen if we don't, He's told us how it is we can get to heaven and He's told us what will happen to make us go to hell. The laws have been around since He gave them to Moses, and they're right here. If we haven't chosen the way of Jesus, then obviously it's our choice to go to hell. He knows in advance who is going to make the decision, and He still allows for anything He can possibly do to get more of the truth in our lives so that we can make the right decision. He gives us every opportunity possible, and that is the mind of God. The heart of God is to give us every opportunity to keep us from going to hell, because He would wish that none would perish, and He loves every one of us. That's why He created us: so He could love on us. So for those of us who do not choose His way, it's our choice; ultimately it's our choice.

**Dave Stene:** We'll have one more question for each of you. Andrew, what was your upbringing by your parents, and what do you believe? "I know what the people you have studied believe, but what is your personal belief?"

**Andrew Bushard:** My background is interesting. My parents are divorced. My father is married to my stepmother; my stepmother seems to have pretty conservative Christian views. I would categorize my father's as more moderate Christian views. My

mother: that's not so easy. Now I see on her house stickers about Jesus. One of her roommates right now seems to be a strong Catholic. I've also heard her make comments like, "I don't need any religion."

The other question asked me, whoever wrote the question, it said something to the effect of, "I know what the people you studied believed; what do you believe?" I believe probably the same can be asked for her: many wonder where would her thoughts on the Bible differ. I've told you about some of my beliefs: my belief that this life is very important to live to the best. I've told you I believe in social justice. My hope is to transmit some of these beliefs to you.

We discussed how it's key to not throw away a bird in your hand for those ever-elusive two in the bush. I believe there's lots of excitement and joy; I believe intellectual stimulation is wonderful; I believe that reality is key.

I was at a gathering with a bunch of friends, and we were asking each other questions. One question was asked to all of us: "What do you believe is the most beautiful concept or entity in the world?" I stated I believed perseverance was beautiful, I believed passion was beautiful. I believe these lecture halls are wonderful because all you folks are here

gathered; we have a wonderful audience today. It's fantastic to see you all out here.

I believe that there's lots of beauty in our life. Surely a cynic can get down, but we also have to see the beauty in a cynic. I believe sometimes the cynics are the most beautiful people, why? Because cynics have the heart to see the wrong. It is no virtue to be smiling and believing everything is okay when it's not. When the cynic sees wrong, their heart is reacting; that is beautiful.

**Zach:** Kris, is Christian salvation dependent on knowledge? For example, do people that never had an opportunity to know Christ go to hell? Kris, you say you offer only truth; what about the classical Greek notion that knowledge and truth are unknowable? How do you define knowing the truth?

**Kris Wagner:** Also very good questions. How do I define knowing the truth first? There are other things you can only believe. I love my mom; there's no way I can prove that, there's no way you can know that—you have to believe that I know that. I bet that every one of you has someone that you love, and I challenge you to prove that you do by good works: by showing them, by giving them gifts, or telling them, "Hey, I love you," or something, you know. But it's just something you have to believe.

I don't believe that salvation comes by knowledge, but salvation is a gift of God. For those who haven't heard the message of God, there's a verse in the Bible that talks about from the stars and the heavens and every blade of grass, there's knowledge of God. God whispers throughout His creation, and you cannot sit in a field and look at the stars and not wonder why, or how, or who, or when. We are born with curious minds, and for cultures, for communities, for continents of people not to question why, who, when, how—I don't believe that anyone cannot question. And so when you question, when you ask, you will receive.

There have been... I don't know exactly who or where, I didn't bring all the papers... it's not a good day not to be able to talk. I don't have all the other people and where and when, but I have heard of different communities in places like Africa who have never seen a missionary, who have never seen a Bible, but who follow the practices of Jesus without specifically ever being told the practices of Jesus.

There was a documentary done on different communities and different cultures that have experienced revivals and transformations in their lives and in their communities. There was this community in... I think it was one of those cold places up there in Antarctica. It was way back a long

time ago, and the communities didn't really have much along the lines of technology way back then. This man actually came traveling into the community just totally out of the blue, and he did share a little bit about Jesus. He didn't even know much, so he couldn't tell them much.

There was one of the spiritual leaders in that community who was supposed to explain the ways of the spirit, explain where wind comes from, and explain all the spiritual questions. I'm really butchering the story, but it turned out that this spiritual leader was baffled by this new Jesus that he heard of from this person that wandered in. So he went out to seek the answer to this, because if he couldn't explain it, then what kind of a spiritual leader was he?

So he went out and he made a pact: "Okay, God, or whoever this Jesus guy is, if You are real, show Yourself to me, and I will kill a seal and I will make a tradition of this." So he went out and he waited by an air hole for a seal to pop up so he could spear the seal. I don't know why they made a tradition out of something like that, but that's their culture.

So he sat there and it got cold, so he made a nice shelter to keep him from the wind. He actually fell asleep because it took so long, and after a while he

woke up to this light—it was during the night, and light was shining down on him. It was just totally out of the blue, and he looked up and he saw winged creatures, he said. It was just everywhere, and he heard the truth. There wasn't a voice that went with it, there wasn't a scripture verse that went with it: he just knew what it was. He just knew that this Jesus that person told him about was God that showed Himself to him like that.

So he made this tradition. I don't know where that man that came in heard about Jesus, but I do believe that God is a big enough God to show us the truth in every form possible, in any way possible, and He's not constricted by our words, by where we travel in our human flesh. God is spirit and truth, and that is something that can travel regardless of where the Bible travels.

**Dave Stene:** It's now time for closing statements, and Andrew will give the first closing statement.

**Andrew Bushard:** As I mentioned before, my big problem with Christianity or other religions is when the faith doesn't motivate people to do the good deeds, to take action in the world. Thus, I am inspired by faiths that have people involved in social justice movements.

I have read some Unitarian literature, and from what I gather about the Unitarians, I really like what they stand for. One book I was reading, which I did not have the opportunity to finish, talks about this story: in this book, there is this one person who asks God, "How can You see all this injustice in this world and not do anything about it?" In this book, God says, "I ask the same question of you."

I believe it's absolutely key we all get involved in social justice. At my old school, where I recently graduated from, I was involved in lots of social justice activities. I haven't been doing as much here, but I am very fortunate to hear that there's an upcoming war protest I got an email about. I hope that it is at a time where I don't have class, because I believe going to class is important, but I have done some protesting of my own.

I'm not sure if anyone's familiar with the movie *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*. I do not believe I've seen the whole movie, but what can be even more lonely is being a sole protester. There should be a movie in addition to that other movie called *Loneliness of the Sole Protester*. But I believe you should be there when no one else is, because you have to stand up for the right.

I would like to make an altar call, a different type of altar call than Christians would make. I'm not going to ask you to give your life over to Jesus; I imagine most of you do not expect me to do that, and I'm also not converting spontaneously here either. What I am asking you to do is to engage in social justice: to look at the evil out there and protest it.

There's a certain business that absolutely gets under my skin: this business industry sells products which destroy people. I'm encouraged to see Christians protest abortion clinics; you may not believe an atheist believes abortion is wrong, but I do—too bad more don't. But I believe just as these Christians protest abortion, we should be protesting products that destroy people.

What really gets under my skin is alcohol. These taverns sell these horrible products that are not good for anybody; they're nothing but trouble. What does this alcohol do? Thus, I have been inspired to stand in front of these taverns alone. I was pushed into a busy street, Riverfront Street, by an angry tavern owner because I believed it was right. I believed somebody needed to be there to tell everyone that this is not the way it should be. It is wrong to profit off the destruction of people's health. Why can't he sell good products? Why can't he sell bananas and apples? He can make money doing that. I would

encourage all of you to possibly join me in such protests. I even met a Christian who was jogging around, and I posed some questions similar to what I posed to our opponent, and he told me that “you will be persecuted”; indeed you will.

I also would like to make, as Christians would call, an altar call: I would encourage any of you who are not vegetarians to become vegetarian. If you want ideas or sources for shoes, or if you want to have knowledge about what's in food, come to me; it's too important. My opponent talked about the greenhouses, but I'm wondering whether she made that point to justify what she's doing or to get at social justice.

I was a philosophy major, but what I didn't like about philosophy was it seems you could reason your way out of anything; people rationalize everything. Ben Franklin had a similar view: he once was a vegetarian, according to his autobiography. In his autobiography, he talks about how “he looked into fish and saw they eat each other”, then he decided, “If you eat each other, then I should be able to eat you.” Then he said in his autobiography, “I do realize humans can rationalize anything.” That Christian doctrine may tell you that it's okay to use animals, but who can justify animals raised in torturous conditions? I encourage you all to become

vegetarians if you're not, and if you are a vegetarian, it's also empowering to make the step to veganism.

Other social justice issues are very important, whether it be the death penalty or war. It's important to speak out, to protest, to do the beautiful acts of protest. It's awesome. I remember once at my school there was a student government meeting. Most of the time these meetings were not well attended, but this time we did not have enough chairs for the people: there were 70 people in the room, and usually you're lucky to get one or two people on an issue [as fellow student government senators observed]. As many people joke in student government, it's usually about parking. This issue was about sweatshops, because our school used products that came from cruel conditions. It felt awesome to be in a group of people all standing up for something good. I felt what many people call chills going down your spine, because it was so awesome. We even joined hands, and when they announced that they voted for the piece of legislation we favored, it was beautiful. It's great to join others; we've all heard the saying, "The totality of a group is greater than the sum of its parts."

When you join with others, altruism is ultimately beautiful. Thus, tonight I am making an altar call: whether you want to keep your Christian beliefs—

though I mentioned why it's best to discard those—I encourage you all to get involved in social justice. Maybe we should talk about accompanying at the protest of these taverns which destroy society.

Whether you care for animals or whether you want to stop people in war from dying, there's a great poster out there—I don't remember who put it out—this poster says quote, *"Imagine a child dying in your arms. Now imagine that happening 250 times a day."* The poster discussed how this happened in Iraq because of the sanctions three Christian presidents have decided to put on this nation. Opponents of this will tell you that “it's hard for Iraqis to get decent medical care, decent education, and sometimes even decent food.” Why do we put up with this? It's wrong, it's wrong. We must speak out.

Remember that great saying I told you about earlier: "Action is the antidote to despair." Or also as Mother Jones put it: "Don't mourn, organize!" Believe in yourself; that is what I like to tell people: believe in you. We want good to reign; we want good to be all-powerful. As John Africa put it, "The power of righteousness will never betray you."

I hope you all have been inspired to engage in social justice. I am empowered by Christians or other people who believe in religion who have the guts to

stand up for what's right. I admire those abortion protesters; I admire Martin Luther King Jr. Many critics point out that we can look at studies here and studies there about school violence, but in the '60s, racism was disgusting and awful. Because Martin Luther King Jr. did what he did, it has changed. Look at what he did! Have faith that you can make a difference; have faith that we can do good and great good.

**Kris Wagner:** Closing statements... I think I hope this is okay: I want to address something that I missed earlier.

It seems to me that the atheist idea, or the idea that Andrew presented—I really greatly admire taking action. We all need to take action; that is great for us all to take action, and I'll talk a little about that. But if there is no God, and if there is no reason behind our prayer, and if there's no communion with a God that can move where our words and our feet cannot, then there's no hope for those who can't take action. It seems like a Darwinism philosophy, the survival of the fittest. For the mentally handicapped, and the people who are in hospitals and are paralyzed from the neck down, they can't take action; they can't do all the things that they would like to do. They can watch TV, and they can smile and laugh with the

people who come to visit them and whatnot, but they can't do anything.

And so when we have Christ in our life, they can do a whole lot more than some of us with feet can, you know? They can lift up prayers to God, and God can go for it, and that's one thing we believe, and one thing that keeps us in hope. It's an awesome hope.

We need to stand up for what's right, too. Many people today aren't standing up for what's right, and other people are suffering because of that. We need to stand up for what we believe in, but we also need to hold true to our hope in Christ and the love that we have in Christ. When we stand up for what we know is right, we need to aggressively live in love and make sure love is the reason for our action, and make sure love is the final outcome of our action, that everything we do glorifies God in our actions.

My faith isn't one of those faiths that just came about because somebody told me it was right. I mean, I struggled my entire life, and I want to add something personal because I'm not the greatest philosopher and I'm not the world's greatest speaker, but I do have a heart that cares for those people who are hurting, because I was there too. That is why I'm so strong in Christ: because I was in the darkest of places.

Who is going to end up in heaven or hell? Could a molester end up in heaven? Would you want to spend eternity in a heaven that allows molesters, rapists, murderers? I would. We were all created by a God who loves us; we were created in His image, and this is what it comes down to. We can philosophize anything and believe anything that we want to believe to justify our own desires and pleasures, but what it comes down to is that there is a great big God. This is a real God who's done miracles in countless lives, miracles that cannot be refuted. If you want to know some of those miracles, you can come up and I will share some of those with you, but He has done a miracle in my life, and that is why I am here.

My father was an alcoholic and a drug addict, and he was an abusive man. I lived in that home for nine years. He was abusive physically and sexually; he was a monster. And I pray to my Father in heaven that he can be saved. I want my father to be in heaven with me. I've been away from him for 13 or 14 years, and I don't know if I could stand before him and talk to him now, but if I can change, he can change.

I hated the world because of what he did to me; I hated God because of what God allowed to happen; I hated Christians because they smiled when I wanted

to punch them. I hated! And God revealed His love to me, and after that He revealed His truth to me, and that is why I am here today.

God does miracles in lives. Just as He created every one of us in His image, He knows ahead of time everything that is ever going to happen, and that's why He works everything together for the good of those who love Him. I do not regret what had to transpire to make me who I am, because I love who I am. I'm not the best speaker, I'm not the smartest, but I love. I love you guys; I don't even know you, and I see your hearts and how much I love you. I couldn't if I didn't know God—that's love.

There is proof, there is evidence to back up Christianity—immeasurable evidence to back up Christianity. If you seek, you will find. I encourage you to seek, and when you have a question, do not stop until you have the answer. The Bible tells us to question everything, and if you don't understand something, question again. If you still are confused, question again, and do not stop. Do not seek answers from me, because I do not have all the answers. Thank You, Lord. We do not have the answers; we are human, we are finite, we do not know all things in all places at all times, but God does.

If you ask Him, He will reveal Himself to you, and any one of us Christians I know are willing to help you in any way. I know prayer sometimes helps, because prayer is awesome: it reaches out to a great God. If you want answers, they're there.

Christianity stands upon the truth that God is alive, and that is where we can find answers: that God was resurrected from the dead. After Jesus died on the cross, He rose again, and history has never been able to disprove that. In 2,000 years, history has not disproven the resurrection. If it was false, it would have been disproven; it hasn't been. It means Jesus is alive. He is alive in our hearts, and He seeks for a closer relationship with every single one of us.

That is the gospel message. That is the reason for our being as a Christian: to speak and preach and share and love above all things, to love in Christ's name. I love my father, and I pray that God can touch his life and bring him to heaven, and I just pray that every one of you here tonight, whether you liked what I said or not, you have heard. I encourage you to continue to speak. Jesus is real, as real as He was 2,000 years ago, as real as He was in heaven from the beginning of time. He is real, and He is love. Thank you.

**Dave Stene:** Thank you, Chris and Andrew, for debating tonight. Thank you to all of you for coming out and for hanging with us. I know we weren't able to get to all the questions that were written from the audience, and if you would like to... if you have other questions or other things you'd like to discuss, both Andrew and Kris will be up here afterwards, so you can feel free to come up and talk with them some more.

And one final thing: the people who were gathering up the questions before, I think... do you still have little note cards? If you could take a minute and just give us any feedback on tonight's event, that would be helpful if we decide to do this again in the future. Your comments would help us with that as we plan it, if we were to plan a future event. Thank you all for coming. Good night.