
WHAT I BELIEVE

A Comprehensive but Simple Statement of Faith

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

Throughout the summer of 1973, between my Junior and Senior years at UCLA, I led a small group of college students on an outreach program in the seedy streets and sordid nights of Hollywood. Among the many interesting people I met was Evgenna, a young woman who had just arrived in America with her younger sister and parents after escaping from communist Czechoslovakia.

The 3rd grade level of her English was remarkable considering the few months she had been in the U.S., but her limited vocabulary wasn't the only challenge I faced in sharing Jesus with her. Growing up in an atheistic culture, she had never heard the Name of Jesus, and had no grasp of concepts like sin, Heaven or atonement.

Where was I to begin? What could I say to her about Jesus and *His Kingdom come*? In many ways, Evgenna is like most of our friends and co-workers in 2006. Today's global culture resembles the wildly pagan 1st Century Greco-Roman world, and the spiritual tenor of our nation has shifted so far away from a common Bible-base, that many people around us have been left in the dark about God's love for them, as much as Evgenna had.

NOT A QUESTION OF WORDS

Many of us imagine that if we were more eloquent in our speech or better versed in how to talk then we'd see more of our co-workers saved. But that isn't necessarily true. If *Kingdom* advance depended on our ability to choose the perfect words for communicating with our friends—well, there'd be little advance! Words alone—even carefully chosen ones—are not the vessels God has selected to carry the dynamic of His power on Earth. We are.

It's true, we are supposed to season our speech "*with salt*" and "*be ready in season and out*" to explain what we believe (Colossians 4:6; 2 Timothy 4:2). But the secret for good evangelism isn't "knowing the right words" or parroting the proper phrases. It is truly knowing what we believe—and simply explaining it. The apostle Paul intentionally avoided fancy language in his conversations about the Lord, and focused on simple belief. He knew what he believed and in whom he believed!

Evgenna and her sister did give their hearts to the Lord, and I've never forgotten that experience, using a 3rd grade vocabulary to talk about Jesus with someone who had never heard anything from the Bible. It's a good pattern for speaking to anyone.

Like the time, a few years after Evgenna came to Christ, I got to talk about Jesus to a professor and a group of fellow PhD students. The professor was brilliant—an expert in his field. He asked me a semi-derogatory question about my beliefs, so I explained why Jesus died. I kept using 3rd grade words because, as the Lord reminded me, these people were very intellectual! I can still hear the professor's words: "*I've never heard anything like what you're saying!*" He was staggered by my beliefs, not by my words.

The wonder and mystery of the Gospel doesn't come from how profoundly we speak, but from the sheer power it has to bring salvation to people. We don't have to make the message eloquent or intellectual, ***just clear and simple.***

A STORY OF LOVE

So what do we believe? Trying to remember everything we're supposed to believe can be intimidating. Most of us feel like we'd probably flunk a final exam in Christian doctrine! To remember the basics more easily, I create an imaginary timeline from *Creation* to *Heaven*, and tuck various truths into a simple sequence between those two bookends. The story I believe all started with God's love:

1. What we know about everything spiritual, we know from the Bible, God's word revealed to men who wrote it down exactly as His Spirit instructed them. The Bible teaches us the truth, and we can rely on its counsel and revelation 100%—even when it seems to say things that disagree with natural, human knowledge.
2. God, who is perfect and *exactly-as-He-is-supposed-to-be*, existed long before He made the Heavens and the Earth. He has always been; He will always be. He is eternal and *ever-I-AM*, having no beginning in the past and no end beyond the future. He had the first word on everything, and He'll have the last.

3. The One True God—as opposed to the many empty and false gods—explains Himself to us as: Father, Creator and Ruler of all; Son, our Savior and Redeemer; and, Spirit, Comforter, and Counselor. They are not three Gods, but three expressions of the One God.
4. Though God is far greater than humans can understand, the essence of His nature is most like pure love—selfless, adoring, kind, patient, forgiving and sacrificial. God is compassionate, merciful and very much in love with us. He’s also just, meaning that things ultimately have consequences. God’s love moves Him to forgive those penalties, but (here’s a huge point) God has to pay the price! He can’t just make them disappear.
5. In love God chose to create Adam and Eve on the 6th of seven days of Creation. (He stopped work one day early to declare that His finished work was precisely the way He wanted.) He fashioned male and female, placed them in the Garden of Eden as overseers of the planet, and encouraged them to be fruitful and multiply. God walked and talked with them because He loved them so much.
6. But the serpent, an angel once named Lucifer, tempted them by convincing them God didn’t want good things for them. In the eons before, he had led a rebellion, *born of pride*, in the heavens, and was cast out of God’s presence. In his exiled state, he is called Satan, the liar and accuser, who seeks to mislead humanity. He’s still up to the same tricks, telling people God can’t be trusted.
7. God had placed one simple restriction on Adam and Eve in order to spare them from a terrible awareness of evil and, thereby, the likelihood that they would do wrong. Eve, and then Adam, disregarded God’s caution, ate of that deadly fruit and opened our world to sin—things thought, said, or done that go against the way God lovingly intended for things to work.

THE MAIN POINT

Now we come to the pivot point in our timeline, and the single most important point of our faith. Other than the love of God—and Jesus’ resurrection (we’ll come to that in a moment)—there isn’t anything more necessary for someone to understand than what sin has done to our race.

1. Sin breaks God’s heart because it breaks apart His kind and good plans for us. The original sin destroyed the perfect world where Adam and Eve lived in the Garden. Sin produces terrible consequences by cutting us off from what He wanted for us. It’s like getting on the wrong road with no chance to turn around—ever!

2. Sin brought death into our world. Not just physical death, but spiritual death as well. As strange as it sounds to say, a dead person cannot have a relationship with a living person; a dead person has no tomorrow. Our sin-caused, spiritual death cuts us off from relationship with God and from the future He had in mind for us.
3. If our relationship and eternity with God are going to be restored, sin must be eliminated. Imagine what that is like for God, to see the ones He loves lost to Him forever, like a father whose children end up on the far side of a swelling river, cut off from rescue. We need a bridge to cross back over, but no man-made bridges escaped the flooding. Rescue must come from His side of the river.
4. Rather than giving up on our whole race, God chose to walk along the riverbank, making arrangements for a way to save His children. He used an undistinguished people, the Jews, to remind us of His ways and His love. He raised up prophets to encourage us and warn us of dangers. He said over and over, "I will never forsake you." And He hasn't.
5. When the time was perfect for rescue, He sent His Son Jesus. God assigned Him much more than being a prophet or teacher of morals, philosophy, or spirituality. God intentionally sent His Son to die in our place as payment for the deathly consequence of our sin. God was true to His character; He was both just and loving. Jesus' death on the Cross is payment-in-full for all sin—for all time.
6. Everyone faces eternity; we all die, and simple math confirms the fact that our after-life is many, many times longer than our life on Earth. What happens to us after we die, and how we end up wherever we end up after death, are huge questions. Other religions teach that our eternity depends on how good we are on Earth—if our good works outweigh the bad.
7. But God says that all our good works are like filthy rags compared to His perfection (Isaiah 64:6). No measure of good works can restore our life with God. But everyone who relies exclusively on Jesus' good work—coming and dying in our place—will be saved. We cannot possibly pay off our debt with good works; Jesus pays it for us. That's what it means to be saved (from spiritual death): we believe in our hearts that God raised Jesus from the dead, and we confess Him as Lord.
8. Three days after Jesus died on the Cross. God brought Him back to life. He will never die again. Jesus' resurrection demonstrates that God has power over death, and the life He offers each of us is life-after-death. Just as God raised Jesus from the dead, so He can and will cause Jesus' followers (that's us) to live even though we die (physically).

FROM NOW ON

Once we're saved, that resurrection power in us begins a process of spiritual growth that increasingly transforms our former way of living into God's way of thinking, believing and doing. We exchange our thoughts for His, and become integral parts of His body—serving His purposes on Earth. We mature and minister more and more.

1. The instant we believe in Jesus, the Holy Spirit enters our spirit and starts His work in us, reminding us of Jesus' words and leading us in life. In addition to that indwelling, the Spirit also wants to baptize us in His power, so that, as Jesus says, we can be His witnesses in word and in power throughout the world.
2. God wants to save everyone, but people cannot be saved unless they believe in Jesus, and they cannot believe in Him unless someone tells them about Him. According to Jesus, that is our primary assignment for the years of our earthly life. We introduce people to Him, and then tell them the things He has taught us. Through us, He performs miracles to serve people.
3. One day our physical life will end, and we who have been forgiven because of our belief in Jesus, will receive a spiritual body far more suitable for eternal life with God in Heaven. Those who do not believe, who refuse God's offer of forgiveness, will spend their eternity away from God in Hell.
4. Hell was never intended for people. It's designed as a prison for Satan, demons, sin and death, to quarantine their evil and prevent them from ever infecting our lives again. People whose sins have not been washed away by the *blood of Jesus*, carry the deadly sin-virus. God has no choice except to honor their choice to stay tied to their sin. Consequently, they forfeit their lives and must be kept away forever.

And that brings us back to love. In love, God sacrificed His Son; in love, Jesus surrendered His life. In love, Jesus sends us, empowered by His Spirit, to those who do not yet know about Him.