



STREETLIGHT BELIEFS PT 3:

At Streetlight Community Church, consistent with 2,000 years of orthodox Christian doctrine,

- 1. We believe that man was created in the image of God; that he sinned, and thereby incurred not only physical death, but spiritual death, which is separation from God; and that all human beings are born with a sinful nature and are sinners in thought, word, and deed.***

This is our sixth article of faith.

We believe that men and women were created in the image of God. We believe in the “Imago Dei”. This comes from the first chapter of Genesis, which states that “God created man in His own image; He created him in the image of God; He created them male and female.” (Gen. 1:27)

Billy Graham once wrote, “There are three of us (as humans):

1. The person we think we are
2. The person others think we are, and
3. The person God knows we can be through Christ”

Billy hits it on the head. We were created to be something in Christ that is beyond what we think we should or could be, and what others think we should or could be. That's Imago Dei. That's the image of God in us.

I personally have thought a lot of things about myself throughout my life that I no longer think. How about you? I have been through plenty of phases, especially in my younger days. I have believed I'm a pothead, psychedelic maniac, sex addict, loser, drop out, destined to be rock and roll star, not supposed to exist, Tibetan Buddhist, yoga master, transcendentalist, Aztec Indian, and in my wildest party days I even once briefly believed I was the reincarnation of John Lennon.

And then as a Christ follower, I have believed that I'm angry, idealistic, restless, perfectionistic, a renegade, a maverick, a truth teller, a worship leader, then never to be a worship leader again, a missionary in New England, a complementarian, an egalitarian, a Calvinist, a reformed theologian, a social justice warrior, an anti-racist fanatic, and more.

Throughout my life, people have thought of me as a hippie, a rebel, a poet, a creative, high-strung, weird, too blunt, annoying, a musician, a great leader, a terrible leader, a verbal processor, a funny person, and more.

But what does God say about Ben White? What does God say about you? Who He's forming us into is often quite different from the things we think about ourselves and what others say about us! I guarantee that the Lord wants to unleash Imago Dei in you. He wants you to fully function in who you were created to be.

We got an orange tabby cat Daisy in 2020 right around the time when COVID was barraging our culture and world. They found Daisy in a box out in the freezing winter with another baby kitten that was obviously her offspring. The other kittens were nowhere to be found. It was clear that Daisy had given birth to a litter of kittens. Daisy had been abandoned. When we took Daisy in, she literally had cat sniffles and needed a humidifier and lots of rest. It was the weirdest thing to see a cat with what appeared to be a sinus infection! She was depressed, thin, unhealthy, and defensive too.

Daisy was afraid of us for quite some time after we brought her in. She had obviously been abused and abandoned. She would, at times, sneak onto our bed at night and sleep near me, but if I moved ever so slightly, she would run away.

She was always a very sweet and friendly cat, but was traumatized and squeamish from her past. She had, through the experience of being mistreated by others, begun to likely

believe things about her feline self that may not have been right or true. At least they didn't have to be true anymore...

So, we set about loving her, petting her, feeding her, keeping her litter box clean (most of the time!), and even getting a pink cat backpack that our daughters (and yes, sometimes me- I'm a girl Dad y'all what do you expect?) could take her for walks in.

And now, Daisy is the nicest, gentlest, most peaceful, loving cat you could imagine. She goes out of her way to sit on people's laps, even people she doesn't know that visit our house. She even sits on our friend Jess Swiger's lap, and Jess is terrified of cats. She loves being petted. She spends every night nestled up against my wife Sarah or me. We can hold her, snuggle her, and even get up to go to the bathroom and she'll stay in the same spot, waiting for us to return.

God wants to love, nurture, heal, comfort, forgive, and breathe peace into you! And at the end, Christ will have more and more of His way in your life, and the Imago Dei, the image of God, will come alive in you! I guarantee the image of God in you will flow from the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life! The love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control of God almighty. (Gal. 5:22-23) He wants to unleash all of this in you!

However, despite this Imago Dei that the Lord breathed into Adam and Eve, and all humanity, Adam and Eve **sinned, and thereby incurred not only physical death (Gen. 3:22), but spiritual death, which is separation from God; and as a result, all human beings are born with a sinful nature and are sinners in thought, word, and deed. (Rom. 3:9-26; 5:12-21)**

10 as it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one. 11 There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. 12 All have turned away; all alike have become worthless. There is no one who does what is good, not even one. 13 Their throat is an open grave; they deceive with their tongues. Vipers' venom is under their lips. 14 Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. 15 Their feet are swift to shed blood; 16 ruin and wretchedness are in their paths, 17 and the path of peace they have not known. 18 There is no fear of God before their eyes. (Romans 3:10-18)

In Hinduism, a sin (pāpa) or Adharma (not dharma), is any transgression, wrongdoing, misdeed or behavior inconsistent with Dharma. The word is also used in Hindu texts to refer to actions to expiate one's errors or sins, such as adultery by a married person.¹ In Hinduism, dharma denotes behaviors that are considered to be in accord with Ṛta—the

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pr%C4%81ya%C5%9Bcitta>

"order and custom" that makes life and universe possible. This includes duties, rights, laws, conduct, virtues and "right way of living".²

According to Buddhism, there is no such thing as sin as explained by other religions. To the Buddhists, sin is unskillful or unwholesome action - Akusala Kamma, which creates Papa - the downfall of man. The wicked man is an ignorant man. He needs instruction more than he needs punishment and condemnation.³

Judaism regards the violation of any of the 613 commandments as a sin. Judaism teaches that sin is a part of life, since there is no perfect human and everyone has an inclination to do evil "from youth", though people are born sinless.⁴

Islam teaches that sin is an act and not a state of being. It is believed that God weighs an individual's good deeds against their sins on the Day of Judgement and punishes those individuals whose evil deeds outweigh their good deeds.⁵

In Christianity, we believe that everyone is screwed. We're all sinners. There's no way around it. We don't believe intelligence can cure it. We don't believe education can cure it. We don't believe one set of people is better than another.

Most people think this is incredibly negative and a nasty viewpoint.

But think about it for a moment. The Hindu idea of sin is anything that defies a perceived "right way of living". In Buddhism, sin is a lack of knowledge and enlightenment. Because Hinduism & Buddhism essentially purport that truth is in the eye of the beholder and not absolute, then one can impose this idea of true "right living" and "enlightenment" as being a variety of things. This has unfolded, contrary to popular Western naivete, in a variety of ways within Hindu and Buddhist contexts. There are systems of karma and reincarnation that leave some destined to be at the bottom of society, and others given the free pass to oppress those people.

On top of that, both Hinduism and Buddhism operate, at their core, with a karmic cycle. They believe that we keep getting chances to live lives eternally, with no end, but keep coming back as different things, based on the lives we've lived before. So basically, if we do more good than evil, we can get "promoted" to a higher state of being in a "heavenly realm" beyond this one, or even get promoted to a higher human plight. But we can blow it in the higher realms, and get "demoted", then having to serve our

² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dharma>

³ <https://www.budsas.org/ebud/whatbudbelieve>

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_views_on_sin

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_views_on_sin

sentences of an unwanted life, desperately desiring to climb our way back into a better life. Getting demoted can mean being tormented in hellish realms, and can also mean coming back as a lower life form- such as a snail, lizard, or mosquito.

So ultimately, there's no real hope in Hinduism and Buddhism. The highest plane of enlightenment, or "Nirvana", in the Tibetan Book of the Dead, is the highest plane of heaven, where people are so detached from their desires and human struggles, that they all basically float around in bliss, totally unaware of one another, with no relationship except that to themselves.

That doesn't sound heavenly to me. It sounds detached, selfish, and weird. If that were my great goal in existence, then I'd spend most of my life internally disregarding everyone and feeling superior to others.

We could say much more about this but for brevity's sake, we'll end there and leave the rest to your own study. Don't be intellectually lazy about this stuff read broadly and deeply about it!

On the other hand, when whittled down, the view of sin in Judaism and Islam ultimately has to do with obedience, and, much like Hinduism and Buddhism, tipping the righteousness scale in the right direction. However, in Judaism and Islam, one gets one life in relationship to a monotheistic God. So we get a shot to do it right, and we better do it right! This viewpoint can certainly lead to many good deeds and efforts, because one can not be quite sure if they've done enough good to outweigh the bad in the perpetual pursuit of satisfactory behavior in the eyes of the vague divine. I would imagine it can lead to plenty of guilt when followed to its full end.

One could also speak myriads of the distortions of goodness that exist within the Quran, but that's for another day and another discussion. Again, read it for yourself.

And then we have Christianity, saying that we're all screwed. We're all sinners and there's nothing we can do about it. Many of us in the west look at all of this information, and we basically reject ancient religions. We adopt materialism, consumerism, and individualism as the driving forces in our lives. We live materialistically, for the here and now, and immediate pleasures we can gather. We live consumeristically, acting as customers everywhere we go, and treating everything- from restaurants, to hotels, to stores, to churches, like concierge services that are meant to fulfill all our preferences and "needs". We live individualistically, and think far more about what we think, like, feel, perceive, and strive for than how all of those things actually fit into a community and common ethos.

But is that what Christianity is really saying? That we're all screwed? That we're all horrible? That we basically suck?

The fact that we're all sinners doesn't only mean that we're flawed. It means that we all are equal. I, no matter how much money I make, how I look, how talented I am, how hard I work, how much good I do, where I was born, what skin color I have, how I grew up, what I do for a living, or what kind of education I attained, am equal to the person that makes less money than me, more money than me, is better looking than me, is less talented than me, is more talented than me, is less hard working, is more hard working, does less good, does more good, came up harder, came up more privileged, has a different skin color than me, had a crappier upbringing, had a better upbringing, has a tougher, lower paying job, has a nicer, higher paying job, is less educated, or is more educated than me. Through the doctrine of the Imago Dei and original sin, I can look at any and everybody, and simply say, they're the same. God has unleashed the same potential for love, grace, temporal, and eternal purpose in everyone!

So because of the Imago Dei and original sin, I don't have to judge people for their politics, their culture, their race, their theology, their sexuality, their sexual past and present, their quirks, their personalities, their enneagram number, their myers-briggs, their DISC, their APEST, their current level of maturity, and more!

And even more so, this leads right into our seventh article of faith;

2. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ lived a sinless life, died for our sins according to the Scriptures as a representative and substitutionary sacrifice, and that all who believe in Him are justified on the basis of His shed blood.

There are so many scriptures that explain this amazing, transforming, life changing, beautiful truth! You can read John 3:16; Rom. 3:21-26; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:5; and Heb. 4:15 to bask in the glory of this reality more!

But let me just make it plain and tie them all together for you. Jesus Christ lived a sinless life! He was the one who healed the blind, the sick, the lame, the paralyzed, the deaf, and the demon possessed, the one who raised people from the dead, the one who calmed a tumultuous, deadly storm, and turned water into wine, also did not commit sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. (1 Pet. 2:22)

So we all naturally lack spiritual power, and are all, by nature a combination of sinfulness, selfishness, unforgiveness, consumerism, greed, rage, addiction, laziness, rudeness, hurtfulness, deception, misguidedness, trauma, hopelessness, and helplessness. Jesus, on the other hand, never sinned. However, He was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. (Heb. 4:15) Remember that we already explained how He was fully God and fully human before in Streetlight Beliefs, Part Two.

So God didn't just look at our lowly state and decide to set an impossible standard for us to perpetually strive for. He could have done that. Many serious strains of Judaism and Islam would say that God has done this and we must live striving for this standard. God didn't say that we need to get our act together and set up a hierarchy of enlightenment, also saying that some are destined to be smarter, wiser, more enlightened, and have it way more together than others, like many strains of Hinduism and Buddhism would purport. No. Instead He revealed Himself throughout history in all His holiness and perfection, made us aware that we could never strive to attain all that He is, and yet also, as an extension of His perfection, "He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Cor. 5:21)

God literally wanted to blow us away with His love, grace, and forgiveness towards us so much, that He willingly sent His very own Son, whom He created the Universe with, whom He loved dearly more than anything with His perfect love, on mission to die for humanity. For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3:16-17)

Don't think of this in a human perspective. You must see it through a divine lens. We are talking about a perfect God here who lives outside of time, and has a view of all eternity. And He didn't want to create us to fail and implode miserably, though, by our wills, we often do just that! He created us for eternity and fellowship and love and hope and forgiveness and peace and forgiveness! He sent His Son on mission to us to prove ***all of those things!***

And all of us who believe in Jesus Christ and what He has done for us get this free gift of eternal salvation granted to us, along with the invitation to hand our entire lives over to Him in His service to bring this message to the many that so desperately need it in this life and beyond! But Jesus' sacrifice for us didn't end on the cross!

3. We believe in the bodily resurrection of the crucified Lord Jesus Christ, His ascension into heaven, and His present life there as High Priest and Advocate for all believers.

If you want to learn about Jesus' resurrection, ascension, and status at the right hand of God, read through John 11:25, 20-21; Acts 1:9-11; Romans 8:34, and 1 Cor. 15. But I'll summarize it all off the cuff for you here.

Jesus was brutally beaten, tortured, and crucified. He died and was buried, with an almost impossible to move stone rolled in front of His tomb and Roman guards placed on watch in front of it. On the third day, after he would've been proven to be fully deceased, the stone was rolled away, and Jesus rose again. We celebrate all of this on Holy Week leading up to Easter.

Jesus didn't only rise again in bodily form and appear to some key people who followed Him, the first being women who were His disciples. He appeared to hundreds of people in bodily form. He gave a great commission and mission to all those who were going to fully follow Him with everything to make disciples of all nations and peoples. He reminded them that the Holy Spirit was going to fill them and empower them to be His witnesses all over the place, and then literally ascended to heaven in their sight, to sit at God's right hand and eternally advocate for us, His followers.

Jesus wants to raise you to life! He wants to promise you eternal life, eternal forgiveness, eternal pardon, eternal love, eternal hope, eternal mercy, an eternally sinless body, and eternal truth. If you think the stuff you're living for here is better-getting buzzed, getting drunk, physically getting off, enjoying pleasures, buying toys for yourselves, making your life as comfortable as you can, eating the food you enjoy the most, putting on clothes you like, doing meaningful things with your time, filling yourselves with information, entertainment, and ideologies that cater to your preferences, and loving the people around you that are closest to you, then you got another thing coming. Eternity with Jesus is going to be crazy better. I'm praying that the Holy Spirit would implant that deep into your soul and spirit! It's why Paul wrote;

53 For this corruptible body must be clothed with incorruptibility, and this mortal body must be clothed with immortality. 54 When this corruptible body is clothed with incorruptibility, and this mortal body is clothed with immortality, then the saying that is written will take place: Death has been swallowed up in victory. 55 Where, death, is your victory? Where, death, is your sting? 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! (1 Cor. 15:53-57)

Jesus rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, and sits at the right hand of God almighty, speaking to the Holy Spirit who lives, breathes, and moves in all of us, so that we can have eternity **burning** in our hearts, minds, bodies, souls, and spirits! We are meant to be set on fire by the very fire of eternity!

From a very young age, I was a hopeless romantic, and desperately wanted to meet the woman I loved for life. I would have been happy to meet her when I was like 5 years old, grow a friendship, date in high school, and get married at 18!

But that's not how it worked. I had three serious relationships in high school, all of them ended in heartbreak. One ended in me breaking the girl's heart. The other two ended in my heart getting broken, and ultimately even both of us trying to get back together a few times with it not working out- so there was some mutual heartbreak there as well.

And I went through a wilderness of not dating anyone and being earnestly, though imperfectly celibate for 2 & ½ years, desperately searching and hoping for a woman to love and grow old with for the rest of my life.

And then Ms. Sarah Jayne Peters showed up into my world. She was better than anything I could have hoped for. She is a woman of God. She is kind. She is wise. She is my dear dear friend. We are always growing together. She is so beautiful. She is such a great Mom. She's talented. She's musical. She likes Law and Order SVU, Theater, the Beach, coffee, and New York City. She challenges me all the time and pushes me towards Christ, and lets me do the same for her. We have so many things in common and so many differences and it keeps our life together interesting.

We can long for all the things of spirituality and accept poor substitutes in our spiritual journey. We can look for God in all the wrong places. We can distort the message and truths of Christianity into fitting our own liking. But at the end of the day, far more than my wife was better than the girls I dated in High School, Jesus will always be the best option and redeemer of everything. He will be the One to put everything together for you and make sense of it all. He'll fill you with eternal hope. He might even call you to suffer for Him and serve Him with your entire life. Trust Him and give all to Him. Find all your peace in Him. Find all your hope in Him. Cast all your cares on him, because he cares about you! (1 Pet. 5:7)