

## Introduction

*Wherein our collective minds are emptied. Then filled again with only the stuff that matters.*

Welcome to *What's the Least I Can Believe and Still be a Christian? A Guide to What Matters Most*. This class is taken liberally from Martin Thielen, the senior pastor of Brentwood United Methodist Church in Brentwood, Tennessee.

Much of the content, thoughts and ideas that we will cover originate or come directly from Pastor Thielen's book. Except for the \_\_\_\_\_ stuff, which is all mine. All. Mine.

What this class is:

- Fun
- Insightful
- Challenging
- Orthodox

Who this class is for:

- Christians
  - Who want to get to the stuff that matters most
  - Who are willing to recognize that there are different levels of theological truth
- Non-Christians
  - Who want to understand what Christianity really is without all the noise
  - Who want to know if there is a place for them

What I expect from you:

- Respect for all participants and viewpoints, even those you disagree with
- Love for believers and non-believers regardless of what they believe
- Trust that God is big enough that we don't have to know everything or be right about everything
- Be willing to let go of some of the less important things, and rightly order your beliefs

## Theological Truth

*"In Essentials Unity, In Non-Essentials Liberty, In All Things Charity."* - Rupertus Meldenius (c1627)

Essentials are things we should not disagree on.

Examples include:

Non-Essentials are things we can debate, in-house, but we should not divide over. Examples include:

Charity is the call word for all possible situations.

In this class, we will move through two ideas (one topic) each week. An Essential and a Non-Essential. Ultimately working through the whole Salvation story and cutting out all the extra stuff.

Week 1, we will work through Creation, Science and Evolution.

## Non-Essential: Science vs Christianity

How the universe began (if it did) is divided into two main thoughts:

1. **Creationism** is “the belief that the universe and living organisms originate from specific acts of divine creation, as in the biblical account, rather than by natural processes such as evolution.” (Oxford Dictionary).

- Literal Creationism – the literal six day creation story from the Bible. One the seventh day, God rested. (Literally. Because he was tired.)
- Intelligent Design - the theory that life, or the universe, cannot have arisen by chance and was designed and created by some intelligent entity.

2. **Evolution** is “the process by which different kinds of living organisms are thought to have developed and diversified from earlier forms during the history of the earth.” (ibid.)

- Darwinism – the theory that all species of organisms arise and develop through the natural selection of small, inherited variations that increase the individual's ability to compete, survive, and reproduce.
- Theistic Evolution / Evolutionary Creationism – “all life on earth came about by the God-ordained process of evolution with common descent. Evolution is a means by which God providentially achieves his purposes in creation.” (Biologos)

## Pop Quiz

A. “The Bible ...is the supreme authority in everything it teaches. Its authority is not limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes but includes its assertions in such fields as history and science.”

B. “[We are] committed to the authority of the Bible as the inspired word of God, and believes it is compatible with new scientific discoveries.”

C. “Scripture is our supreme and final authority in all matters it addresses.”

\_\_\_\_\_ - **Reasons to Believe (Intelligent Design)**

\_\_\_\_\_ - **Biologos (Theistic Evolution)**

\_\_\_\_\_ - **Answers in Genesis (Creationism)**

*Which of these groups is Christian?*



**Essential: Who / What is God?**

God is:

1. The one who exists (Exodus 3:14-15), "I am who I am"
2. Immortal / uncreated (1 Timothy 6:16, Psalm 90:2)
3. Glorious (Every. Where.)
4. Spirit (John 4:24)
5. Unique (Isaiah 40:25)
6. All Powerful (Jeremiah 32:27)
7. Knows Everything:

*I am God, and there is no other;*

*I am God, and there is none like me.*

*I make known the end from the beginning,  
from ancient times, what is still to come.*

*I say, 'My purpose will stand,  
and I will do all that I please.'*

-Isaiah 46:9b-10

8. Everywhere (Psalm 139:7-10)
9. Perfect (Matthew 5:48)
10. Good (Psalm 145:9)
11. Holy (1 Peter 1:15-16)
12. Faithful & True (Isaiah 25:1)
13. Sovereign (Psalm 9:7-8)
14. Love (1 John 4:8)
15. Just (Deuteronomy 13:4)
16. Life (John 14:6)

(Thanks to <http://www.ichthys.com/1Theo.htm> for this list.)

**Essential: What Did God Do?**

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Genesis 1:1

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." John 1:1-3

**Conclusion Questions**

What is Evolution is right? What if it's wrong?

Can a Christian believe in evolution?

Can someone who doesn't believe in God's characteristics be a Christian?

What is truly essential?

*Food for thought:*

*Science is "the intellectual and practical activity encompassing the systematic study of the structure and behavior of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment."*

*Theology is "the intellectual and systematic study of the nature of God and religious belief through observation and faith."*

The Nature of Everything, p1