

## Isn't Christianity just a psychological crutch?

It is true that some people feel better psychologically because of their belief in Christianity. This is not at odds with Christianity, because Christianity says that there are some psychological advantages to belief in Christ. For example, it says that if we trust in Christ, we can know peace and love and joy in a new way. Having said this, I readily admit that it is possible for someone to find psychological benefit by believing in something that is not true. Consider a prisoner of war. He might be able to keep sane because he believes one day he will be united with his family. Suppose, however, that in the end he is executed. While his belief brought solace for the years he was in prison, the belief was really nothing but a psychological crutch.

Thus, it is possible that Christianity is just a psychological crutch. But it is important to understand that it is equally possible that atheism is a psychological crutch for its adherents. Suppose a young man (because of a very authoritarian father) does not like the idea of a cosmic authority, and thus chooses to believe there is no God for the sole reason that he does not want to feel any accountability towards a heavenly Father. He may not have looked at any evidence for God in coming to his conclusion, but because the thought of a God makes him uncomfortable he dismisses God out of hand. Paul Vitz, professor at NYU, even brings up this possibility in his book *Faith of the Fatherless: The Psychology of an Atheist*. In the book, he notes how many prominent atheists had poor or non-existent relationships with their father. According to Vitz, there is at least as much reason to believe that atheists have developed their beliefs for psychological reasons as there is to believe that Christians have done the same.

Clearly Christianity and atheism can't both be true even if they are providing certain psychological benefits to adherents. That's why we should not measure the truthfulness of a belief simply because psychological benefits are involved.

As noted above, Christianity does purport to give people peace, hope, love and joy, but it has never presented itself to be true based on psychological benefits. It claims to be true based on the evidence of God's work in history, and particularly his work as evidenced in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. If Jesus did not live, die, and rise again, Christians are to be pitied despite any temporary psychological effect. The Bible itself says this (See, for example, 1 Corinthians 15:13-19).

I am probably like you. I want to believe in things that are true, not just because they make me feel good. The question then in regards to Christianity is whether it is true regardless of whether it makes one feel better. That is the same kind of question the atheist should ask of herself: is it true that there is no God, even if not believing in God makes me feel better? Elsewhere I write of reasons to believe in God and even the miraculous. I also discuss the veracity of the Bible and what it says about Jesus. If when we look at evidences surrounding those issues there is good reason to believe in Christianity, then psychological crutch or not we do well to believe in its teachings.

One final note: while Christianity does talk about the joy and peace that is found in Christ, do not think Christianity says that if you believe in its teachings you will go from one happy, peaceful moment to the next. In many ways, Christianity promises to make us uncomfortable. As C.S. Lewis wrote: "I didn't go to religion to make me happy. I always knew a bottle of Port would do that. If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity."