

CONFIDENCE IN **JESUS CHRIST**

The Joy of Personal Discipleship



Clarke Morledge
& John Paine



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The Joy of Personal Discipleship

With great appreciation for all the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control that has been extended to us by our families, mentors, and friends. Thank you and God bless!

Clarke Morledge

&

John Paine



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2013

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SharedVeracity.net
Williamsburg, Virginia

Don't put your faith in Jesus because anyone tells you to—do your homework and draw your own conclusions. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Ultimately "the truth" is a person. The search is not some ethereal quest for unknowable wisdom, based on fairy tales for idiots. It is a fascinating, joy-filled, fact-based undertaking that will highlight the veracity of the Scriptures. This site is all about sharing resources that can help you figure it out.

If your deepest thoughts don't bring you joy maybe it's time to figure some things out.

Veracity blog, 2012



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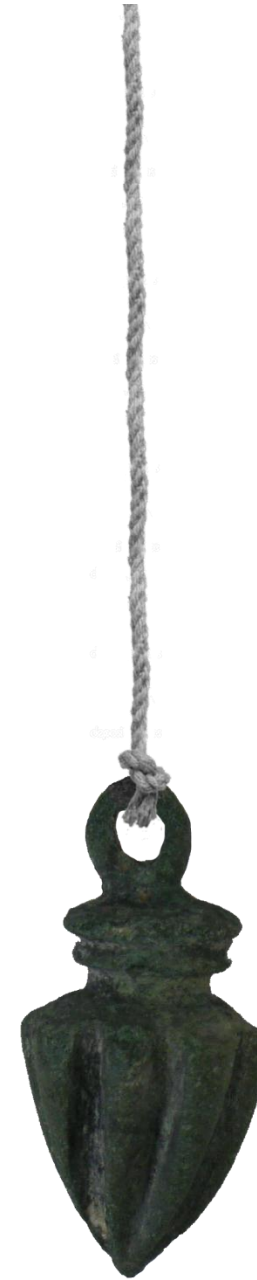
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Introduction

Does God exist? Is the answer to this most profound question completely settled as far as you are concerned? If so, what are you doing about it, *really*?

If God *does* exist, there would be implications, probably even *personal* implications—right? He would have certain characteristics, and if he really created us wouldn't it be reasonable to expect that he might want something from us? (Otherwise why would he bother?) Maybe he would have some guidelines or something—conceivably there might be a purpose and a plan. It's not unreasonable that he might want some sort of relationship with us, right?

Maybe you're a person with religious convictions. Is your faith *real*, and if so do you know *how real*? Do you look forward to opportunities to engage others in thought-provoking discussions about your faith, or are you hoping to get through life without ever having to lay down your cards? After all, it can be pretty embarrassing when people make fun of your religious beliefs—particularly in front of other people.

Maybe you've heard enough imbecilic statements by people calling themselves 'Christians' that you're totally turned off. Christians make you sick. They're just a bunch of idiots fooled by ancient and out-dated ideas about some savior or prophet who may or may not have existed, but regardless could not have risen from the dead. People just don't do that. How can people be that *stupid*?

On the other hand...maybe, *just maybe*, there might be *some* useful shreds of wisdom that could help you lead a more comfortable life. After all, it's a dog-eat-dog world down here, and a little kindness wouldn't hurt anybody.

You get the point—people come at this God thing with all kinds of perspectives and baggage. I do. There was a goofy kid in junior high with goofy hair who talked with a lisp, and who was *on fire* for Jesus! Oh brother. He would get on the bus and one of the cool kids would start baiting him with questions to get him to use the 'J' word. As soon as the goofy kid hit the 'J' word the howling and derision would commence like fireworks. It took decades to get over the idea that Christians were goofy.

People find all kinds of reasons to avoid thinking about God: sex scandals among the priesthood, gone-awry televangelists, the crusades, lavish churches, pain and suffering, evil, 9-11, a goofy coworker, problems with authority, a game of golf—you name it. If you just can't stomach thinking about God, may as well go get a beer right now and relax.

This book is a collection of selected posts from the first year of the Veracity blog. The tag line for Veracity is, "Sharing resources that corroborate the Bible." We encourage readers to put the pieces together using personal discipleship. Apologetics, the apostle Paul, archaeology, the Gospels, tools, topics, witnesses—whatever it takes. We tend not to engage in "check-this-out-because-it-worked-for-me" arguments—but if we were to make those kinds of statements I could say that the process of personal discipleship can lead to overwhelming joy as you figure out how the parts of the Christian faith are really connected.

Tim Keller says, "You cannot be a Christian without using your brain to its uttermost." We invite you to read and watch this material and see if you agree.

Make an investment. Start reading and clicking on the hyperlinks. By all means watch the videos. Protect your time and get the job done. It's worth it. By the end of your investment you just might have greater confidence in Jesus Christ. And you will have had a pretty healthy sampling of personal discipleship and all that comes with it.

Teleological arguments, cosmology, existentialism, genomes, evolution, creationism, textual criticism, religious pluralism, open particularism, analytic philosophy, faith and science, general and special revelation, the identity and character of Jesus Christ, the historical arguments and significance of the Resurrection, Kierkegaard, Winslow Homer, Large Hadron Colliders and impact wrenches, with some rap music thrown in for good measure. If you like thinking you're in for a joy-filled ride. New atheism? Welcome to a new evangelicalism.

Chi Rho,

John Paine

February, 2013
James City County, Virginia

John Paine twisted my arm a few months ago to contribute to Veracity. I was hesitant at first, but now I am glad I signed up. On Veracity we enter into dialogue, sharing thoughts even with people who might disagree. I learn stuff all of the time on the blog.

If you think that you have to "park your brains at the door" before you enter the church, then you have come to the right place.

Or perhaps you just need some tools to help you connect the life of the mind to your faith. We want to try to gather some of the best resources available on the Internet that might help anyone along in coming to grips with Jesus. Believe me. We do not have all of this stuff figured out. If you have been challenged with something you read, or you do not think something we say is right, please comment and tell us.

When all is said and done, we simply want to be about following Jesus Christ. Wherever you are in your spiritual journey, we hope that you might come and join us.

In His Grip,

Clarke Morledge

February, 2013
Charles City County, Virginia

What is the Gospel?

Let's start at the beginning. God exists in three manifestations—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This isn't a belief that was decided at some ecumenical council held hundreds of years ago—it was spelled out directly by Jesus Christ, in his own words (Matthew 28:18-20, John 14:5-14).

God created everything in the universe, from nothing, more than 13.7 billion years ago. We can be certain of the date by several types of scientific measurements, all of which consistently corroborate the 'singularity' (as it is referred to by cosmologists). Even the staunchest atheists agree *when* the Big Bang occurred. Whether you interpret the Hebrew word 'yom' to mean 24 hours or a long, finite period of time is not essential to your personal relationship with God. There is no test on this issue. However, arguing that "science is wrong" undermines your credibility in a very real sense. As you will read in this book, on Veracity, and in many other materials, science and faith are in accord with what is written in the Scriptures. And here's an extra nugget as long as we're on the subject: the Christian faith is grounded in reality. Have doubts? No worries; stay objective and keep reading.

God created mankind in his own image, as the pinnacle of his creation. Mankind is the only part of his creation that can recognize and worship him. Planets, galaxies and subatomic particles are evidences of his mighty creation works, but they don't worship him. No other animal can worship God. God wants a relationship with us—that's the reason for us.

God is a personal God. This truth has profound implications—much more than most of us realize. If he wants 'love' between himself and mankind, from a purely logical standpoint, there has to be "not love." Otherwise he could have made us all robots and what he would have would not be love.

God gives us complete freedom to make personal choices. We can choose God's way, or not. The "or not" has a theological definition—it's called 'sin'. A lot of people bristle at this word because it has been so abused and misused. If you hear the word sin and it causes you any difficulties, just think about it in its most literal form: it just means "not God's way."

One of the most common difficulties people have with God is the idea that God makes the rules. Too many of us want God to conform to *our* expectations, rather than make the effort to discover and consider *his* expectations. It is really important to check your biases and emotional baggage at the door, and contemplate Christianity with an objective, discerning attitude.

God laid out the rules, and we can do what we want with them. That's pretty much how our culture works. But in our culture we can change the rules, and the values—as we do continually. Not so with God. So right away we have a problem.

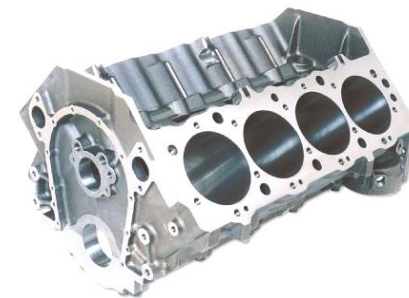
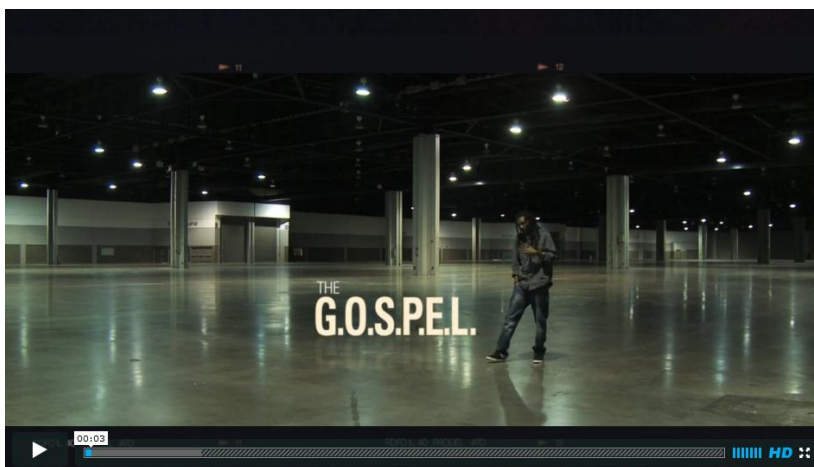
Here's where it gets interesting. God knew that mankind could not handle complete freedom. He knew we'd screw up. But he loves us anyway. In fact, so much so that he provides a way back into his good graces. He bankrupted heaven by sending Jesus Christ to bear the consequences of our transgressions against him. God plays by his own rules. He took the burden of our bad choices on his own

flesh, and willingly suffered the cruelest and most painful torture mankind could dish out. Another ponderous reality—it hurt so much that God the Father couldn't look upon the suffering of God the Son upon the cross.

One sacrifice, one time, to atone for all the shortcomings of mankind's choices.

So what's the deal? After all that, what does God really want from us *personally*? Our money, possessions, great deeds, penitence, longsuffering, what? He wants us to exist after our earthly death (which is completely assured), outside of time, in perfect communion with him. Sounds great, but you need a ticket. That ticket is your trust in him and appreciation for what he has done for you. You've got to figure it out—in your head, but most importantly *in your heart*.

You can hear or read a lot of outstanding presentations of the Gospel, but none finer than the one in the following video. If you put all the pieces together, this is the engine of our faith—the Gospel.



Searching for God



An impact wrench is a fine tool for changing brake pads or tires. But it's completely useless when searching for scientific evidence of God. For that job you need a Large Hadron Collider. Right? (The right tool for the job and all that.)

The recent experimental confirmation of the existence of the Higgs Boson and Higgs Field comprises a major milestone in mankind's understanding of the universe. After 50 years of mind-numbing, abstract theoretical research, theologians and scientists are lining up to interpret the data. But not everyone is coming to the same conclusion.

Finding the Higgs Boson doesn't prove the existence of God. On that theologians and scientists are in complete agreement. But some of them are as far apart on their interpretations as the tools they use.

I had breakfast recently with Dr. Ken Petzinger, a retired physics professor who really works at his faith—meaning he is constantly reading, studying, thinking, and sharing. Ken always has books to share. At one point he pulled out a text by Kenneth Samples and I chuckled and said, “Just what is a *theologian* anyway?” Don't get me wrong, I think Kenneth Samples' work is outstanding. I just don't have a great appreciation of what theologians really do. I haven't yet met anyone at a party who said they were a theologian. It's definitely an unusual occupation.

This week I came across several powerful illustrations that turned on a couple of light bulbs and caused me to better appreciate theologians. The following thoughts and quotes are summarized in an updated version of Paul Little's *Know Why You Believe*, which Ken caused me to read.

(God in a Test Tube)

It is obvious we cannot examine God in a test tube or prove him by the usual scientific methodology. Furthermore, we can say with equal emphasis that it is not possible to prove Napoleon by the scientific method. The reason lies in the nature of history itself and in the limitations of the scientific method. In order for something to be proved by the scientific method, it must be repeatable. A scientist does not announce a new finding to the world on the basis of a single experiment. History in its very nature is nonrepeatable. No one can rerun the beginning of the universe or bring Napoleon back or repeat the assassination of Lincoln or the

crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The fact that these events can't be proved by repetition does not disprove their reality as events. There are many real things outside the scope of verification by the scientific method. The scientific method is useful only with measurable, material things. No one has ever seen three feet of love or two pounds of justice, but one would be foolish indeed to deny their reality.

Paul E. Little, author of "Know Why You Believe"

(On the theory of the Big Bang)

Now we see how the astronomical evidence leads to a biblical view of the origin of the world. The details differ, but the essential elements in the astronomical and biblical accounts of Genesis are the same. The chain of events leading to man commenced suddenly and sharply at a definite moment in time, in a flash of light and energy. Scientists have traditionally rejected the thought of a natural phenomenon which cannot be explained, even with unlimited time and money. There is a kind of religion in science; every event can be explained in a rational way as the product of some previous event; every effect must have its cause. Now science has proven that the universe exploded into existence at a specific moment. It asks, "What cause produced this effect? Who or what put the matter and energy into the universe?" And science does not answer these questions. ... For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.

Dr. Robert Jastrow, astronomer, physicist and cosmologist, agnostic

(Infinite Time Plus Chance)

*Hoyle then explains that it would be equally as difficult for the accidental formation of only one of the many chains of amino acids in a living cell in which there are about 200,000 such amino acids. Now if you would compute the time required to get all 200,000 amino acids for one human cell to come together by chance, it would be about 293.5 times the estimated age of the earth (set at the standard 4.6 billion years). The odds against this happening would be far greater than a blindfolded person trying to solve the Rubik's Cube! In another analogy Hoyle bolsters his argument. He likens this to a "junkyard mentality" and asks, "What are the chances that a tornado might blow through a junkyard containing all the parts of a 747, accidentally assemble them into a plane, and leave it ready for takeoff?" Hoyle answers, "The possibilities are so small as to be negligible even if a tornado were to blow through enough junkyards to fill the whole universe!" In his impressive book *The Intelligent Universe*, Hoyle concludes, "As biochemists discover more and more about the awesome complexity of life, it is apparent that its chances of originating by accident are so minute that they can be completely ruled out. Life cannot have arisen by chance."*

Marie Little on Sir Fred Hoyle, British Astronomer, atheist



“For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”

Apostle Paul, Romans 1:19-20 (ESV)

If you want to find proof of God, check out this photograph of a father gazing at his newborn son. When it comes right down to it, either people appreciate that baby is a gift from God or they don't. Take it from an atheist—the odds of that baby being the result of infinite time plus chance are the same odds as a tornado ripping through a junkyard and producing a 747 ready for flight. Take it from an agnostic—theologians figured this out centuries ago.

If you want to search for God, the best tools are the Bible, reason, an objective mind and heart, and an appreciation for the gift that God is revealed all around us. You don't need a collider for the job. Just ask a theologian.



Does God Exist?



Believe it or not, formal debates on the existence of God regularly turn out thousands of ticket-buying intellectuals to hear atheists and theists go at it. Although it may seem silly to give out medals for something every kindergartener should know, there is much to appreciate in well-turned arguments that support the affirmative.

Setting personal style biases aside, how *do* the best theists make their case for the existence of God? For a sampling of how heady this question can get, check out [William Lane Craig](#), Research Professor of Philosophy at Talbot School of Theology. Sam Harris, one of today’s most prominent atheists, recently described Dr. Craig as

“the one Christian apologist who seems to have put the fear of God into many of my fellow atheists.”

Here’s a full-on “Does God Exist” debate between Dr. Craig and [Dr. Peter Atkins](#).



Why adopt an intellectual approach? After all, can’t we just fulfill the Great Commission by living a good life and introducing others to the Bible? Sometimes we have to meet people where they are, and often they refuse to accept biblical arguments. Christians contend that Christianity is reasonable, and therefore science, logic, and philosophy are all in play. But is the juice worth the squeeze? The intellectual approach *is* hard work.

There are [many Christians](#) who traveled the road from atheism to Christianity by thinking, studying, and applying logic. But don’t take it from me, read the comments at the bottom of this [popular atheist’s post](#) on the effectiveness and debating skills of Dr. Craig. (Don’t skip over the previous hyperlink—it really provides

insights into the value of an intellectual approach to apologetics.)

Most of us aren't as skillful at making arguments as William Lane Craig, even after reading his books and studying his material on the Internet. Fortunately there are some shortcuts. Of the 20 or so historical arguments for the existence of God, Dr. Craig routinely uses only four or five of them in his debates. David Work has been posting summaries on his Reasons for the Hope blog. Here you go:

Does God Exist?

Part 1 The Kalam Cosmological Argument

Part 2 The Vertical Cosmological Argument

Part 3 The Teleological (Design) Argument

Part 4 The Moral Argument

Part 5 Intelligent Design

Part 6 The Argument from Need

Why not invest a couple of hours studying these arguments, put them in your apologetics tackle box, and try them out when the fish aren't biting?

Enjoy!

HT: David Work, William Lane Craig, Sidney Harris

Can We Trust the Bible?

“The Bible says it, I believe it, that settles it.” *Really?!*

Many theologians and pastors strongly disagree. If there was such a thing as a fantasy theology team, my top (living) draft picks would include: Dick Woodward, Bill Warrick, William Lane Craig, Hugh Ross, Ravi Zacharias, Matt Slick, Tim Keller, John Yates, Michael Card, Ray Vander Laan, Andy Stanley, Lee Strobel—and Daniel Wallace.

Here's a slightly irreverent, very funny, and spot-on lecture by Dr. Wallace given at Dallas Theological Seminary about the “worst Christian slogan ever concocted” (my apologies in advance to people from Arkansas).



Seriously, how much research is there to corroborate Dr. Wallace’s observations and conclusions? How reliable are the Bibles we have today?

It turns out Dr. Wallace has serious credentials, having conducted exhaustive research in the field of textual criticism. He founded the Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts, highlighted in this earlier post. Their work was also documented in the first two parts of a three-part series by the Day of Discovery folks. These videos make an overwhelming case for the reliability and value of the Scriptures (not just the accuracy of the manuscripts).

There are skeptics who will attack the Bible over textual variants. Take a few minutes to watch these videos, and become acquainted with intelligent, overwhelming, objective research that is easy to understand and easy to use when answering cynics. As Dr. Wallace notes in his lecture above, it is incumbent upon Christians to enlighten those who dispute the facts, often without considering the evidence—not unlike those who would revert to the cliché at the beginning of this post.

Enjoy!



Inerrant and Infallible

We cannot explain or resolve all parts of Scripture. However, to surmise that apparent conflicts in the Bible must be ‘errors’ is an arrogant and dangerous supposition. Too many people give up too easily—if it doesn’t make sense they aren’t willing to dig deeper. Or to trust.



A couple of years ago I listened as wise, godly friends discussed the inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible. All of them are mature Christians. The issue was not the authority of Scripture for faith and practice. The issue was whether it is necessary and/or appropriate to include in our statement of faith that the Bible contains the ‘inerrant’ and ‘infallible’ word of God.

While I try not to get too personal with this blog, the most that I can contribute on this topic *is* personal. Specifically, the more I study the more it all makes sense. Not just in a little way, but in one “Oh wow!” realization after another.

Many (not all) passages that at one time confused me or caused me to wonder if the writer was correct, came into sharper focus with deeper study. This detailed-study-leads-to-edification process has happened so many times that my view on the inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible has strengthened considerably.

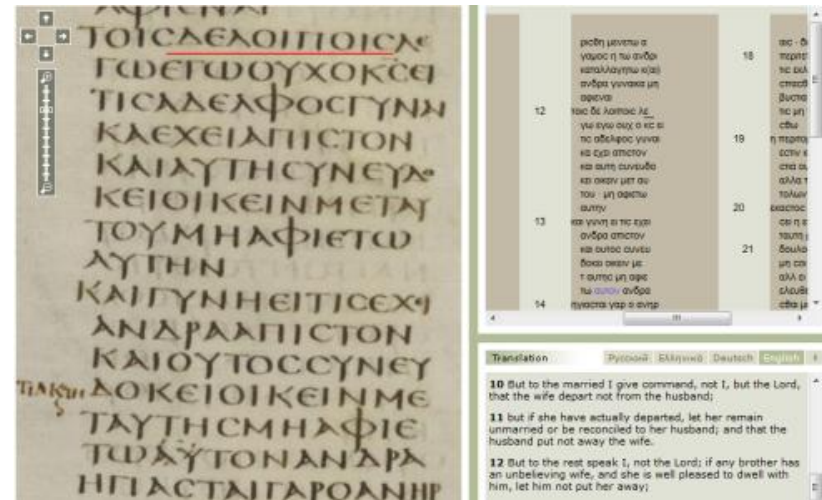
Just one example—I recently audited an apologetics course entitled Creation and the Bible by Reasons To Believe. Dr. Hugh Ross, a renowned astrophysicist and the founder of Reasons To Believe states in his testimony that he became a Christian by reading the foundational books of the world’s religions and discarding them one by one based upon scientific errors apparent in their text. When he got to the Bible however, he found 13 scientifically accurate statements about the creation of the universe in the first chapter of Genesis. If you take the time to dig, the details are amazing and dramatically support the case for ascribing inerrancy and infallibility to the Bible.

There’s no shortage of opinions on the accuracy of the Bible. Our post-modern culture promotes individual opinions and disharmony over conformity and agreement. Fine. Got it. No one wants to give a straightforward yes or no to the question of Biblical inerrancy, and actually that *should* be the case. What do you do with translation differences, poetry, allegorical statements, the use of Koine (slang) Greek, textual criticism, differing accounts of the same events by different authors, a lack of modern technical precision, observational descriptions of nature, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, and so on? It takes a fair amount of clarification before we can get to a yes or no response.

But the concepts behind these adjectives are extremely important, and there are those who have done a very good job building a case for unity on this topic. The [Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy](#) is a document worthy of very careful reading. Before I read it, I had my own unfocused views on the subject. After reading it and thinking it through, I'm in. I support the Chicago Statement.

So back to the question of whether it is necessary or appropriate to include that the Bible is inerrant and infallible in our statement of faith. In its constitutional context, the Williamsburg Community Chapel's [statement of faith](#) is reduced to eight points about which we believe so strongly that we would break fellowship with those who would disagree. In this context, personally I believe it is appropriate—but not necessary—to include these terms (see Article XIX of the Chicago Statement). In other words, would I break fellowship with someone who was struggling with the [genealogies of Christ in Matthew versus Luke](#)? No. Would I break fellowship with someone who insisted that the differences in these genealogies prove the errancy of the Bible? Absolutely. More importantly, do I believe that the Bible is the inerrant and infallible, inspired word of God? Yes.

Parsing Greek



1 Corinthians 7:12 in the Codex Sinaiticus

Scripture contains some amazing context clues that point to its trustworthiness. For example, consider the Apostle Paul's words in his letter to the Corinthians:

To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife. To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her.

1 Corinthians 7:10-12 (ESV)

Paul makes a point of stating that verse 10 is *from the Lord*. But in the very next statement (verse 12) Paul writes, “I just want to add *my* thoughts here.” He makes it completely clear that these are *not God’s words verbatim*. This does not imply that Paul’s words should be deprecated or discredited in any way—quite the opposite. Paul was careful to differentiate that which was directly from God and that which was from Paul. Not exactly the approach of someone who is making things up or playing loose with the facts, is it?

This is not a post about divorce. Divorce has to be considered in the context of what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, and Paul’s words here and elsewhere have to be read in context. But what is particularly exciting is the nature of Scripture that is revealed in these verses.

Christians believe that the Bible is the authoritative word of God, holy and inspired. Many of us would add ‘inerrant’ and ‘infallible’. God communicated through special revelation to inspire 40 authors over 1,600 years to write the 66 books comprising the Holy Bible.

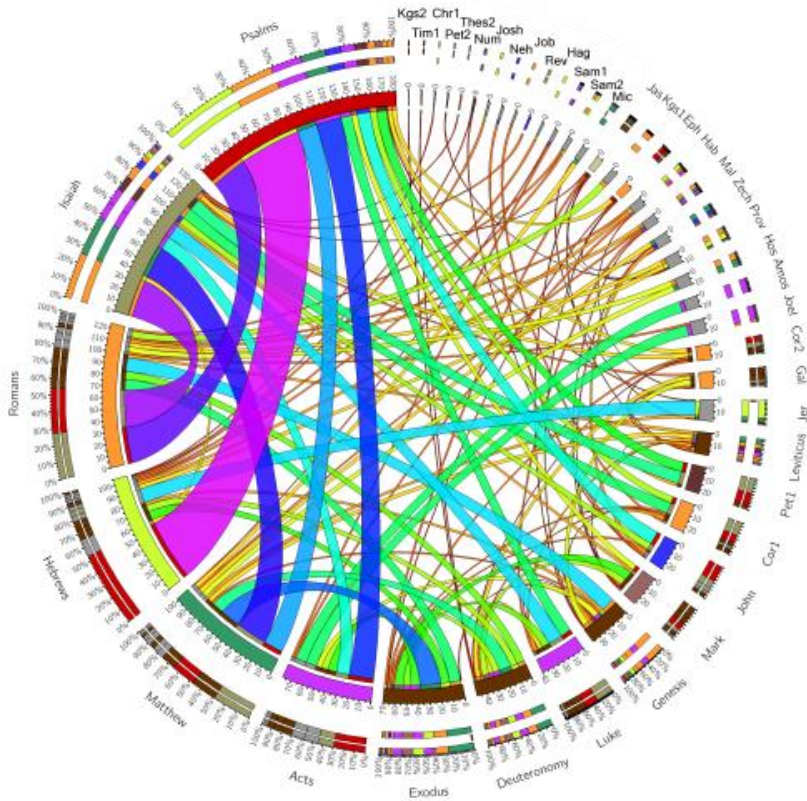
1 Corinthians 7:10-12 gives a clear insight into the inspiration of the Scriptures, and in the trustworthiness of the primary author of the New Testament. Why was it important for Paul to differentiate God’s thoughts from his own? From this text we can conclude that the Bible was not *dictated* to its authors (although in many places God is quoted directly). Paul, in his careful and precise writing, is communicating both truth and character to his readers. He’s not making this up, and he preserves scriptural integrity with these qualifying statements.

The image above is from the Codex Sinaiticus (c. 350 CE), the oldest complete copy of the New Testament. The Greek words in 1 Corinthians 7:12 under the red line are “I, not the Lord.” The KC with a bar over it is a “nomen sacrum” (indicating a sacred name), and shorthand for “the Lord,” a common practice among ancient scribes. Here “C” represents the “lunate” form of the Greek sigma. This post is not about biblical Greek, but as long as we’re looking under the hood...note that there is almost no punctuation, no letter case differentiation, and no verse numbers (they weren’t added until the 16th century). Still the words that Paul used to honestly communicate his thoughts—and God’s—are unmistakable.

Enjoy!



Bible Genome



Map of Direct Citations in the Bible

What Scriptures were most influential to the writers of the Bible? Who cited whom? Which writers were most schooled in Scripture? Which Gospel writer referred the most to other Scriptures? How big a role did Revelation play in their thinking and teaching? How about Genesis and Job? How are the parts

of the Bible connected? Which books appear to have been written at the same time?

From God To Us Revised and Expanded: How We Got Our Bible by Norman Geisler and William Nix is a foundational text for those interested in the topic, and I can highly recommend pretty much anything by Dr. Geisler (more on that in a future post).

“Jesus and New Testament writers amply illustrate their belief in the full and complete inspiration of the Old Testament by quoting from every part of the Scriptures as authoritative, including some of its most disputed teachings. The creation of Adam and Eve (Matt. 19:4–6), the destruction of the world by a flood, the miracle of Jonah and the great fish (Matt. 12:39–40), and many other incidents are quoted authoritatively by Jesus. No part of Sacred Writ claims less than full and complete authority. Biblical inspiration is plenary.”
 Geisler, Norman L.; Nix, William E. *From God To Us Revised and Expanded: How We Got Our Bible*. Moody Publishers.

While reading a litany of cross-references called out in the Geisler and Nix book, it occurred to me that it would be helpful if we could somehow *visualize* the direct citations, and thereby visualize the case for plenary (or full) inspiration. After all, it’s one thing to read about Adam and Eve in Genesis, and it’s entirely something else for Jesus to refer to Adam and Eve in a non-allegorical context. Or maybe not (it depends on your initial understanding and belief).

According to data available from Crossway Bibles, there are 599 direct citations between verses in the Bible. If you add word-or-phrase, thematic, and less-direct

references, there are over 115,000 cross references that have been mapped by Crossway. To graphically illustrate these cross references, we can borrow a genome mapping tool from our Canadian friends working in the field of genetics.

The above illustration is a non-genomic map of all 599 direct citations in the Bible. If you spend a little time studying the map, it highlights and supports some very interesting observations and conclusions.

How to Read This Map

Briefly (I wouldn't attempt to get into details with a normal audience, but Veracity readers *are* special), here are some keys to help you read the map.

- The connecting bands represent 'bridges' where one book cites another. The width of the bands is indicative of the number of citations between the two books. The colors of the bands are meaningless, except to distinguish one connecting band from another.
- The INNER ring is color-coded by writer (Paul is orange, Luke is lavender, Psalmists are red, Moses is brown, Peter and Mark are plum, John is blue, the writer of Hebrews is chartreuse, Isaiah is olive). Numbers on the inner ring are the number of verses containing direct citations. For example, Isaiah has over 130 direct citations from other books, and Psalms has over 180.
- The OUTER ring represents percentages of connected verses within that book. For example approximately 30 percent of the citations of Psalms appear in Hebrews.

So What?

OK (Lon Solomon), *So What?* Actually there are some really cool concepts that emerge from the map.

- The most influential/influenced Scriptures (the biggest wedges) were Psalms, Isaiah, Romans, Hebrews, Matthew, and Acts—accounting for half of the direct citations in the Bible.
- Matthew is more grounded in the Old Testament than the other three Gospel writers. (Isn't it argued that Matthew's text was written originally in Hebrew?)
- Paul in Romans, Acts (some of which is Paul), and the writer of Hebrews have the lion's share of the New Testament citations.
- Paul cites 13 different Old Testament books in Romans alone.
- Genesis gets surprisingly little attention outside of Romans.
- Job, which is arguably older than Genesis, gets even less recognition (in terms of direct citations anyway).
- Peter apparently wasn't very well read, as may also be apparent in Mark with so few Old Testament citations. (Mark was thought to be Peter's secretary, so the Gospel of Mark is actually Peter's source material.)
- Revelation has almost no direct citations. It cannot be surprising that no other books cite Revelation (Revelation was the last book written), but is interesting that the content of Revelation is full of direct dictation from Jesus and John's apocalyptic vision(s). In a graphical sense this reminds us that very few first-century Christians would have had their understanding of heaven

based upon Revelation, and that Revelation is truly unique—and a gift to later disciples.

- The Gospels are generally lacking in citations of each other—could this be an indication of their contemporary authorship (i.e. that they were written at about the same time).

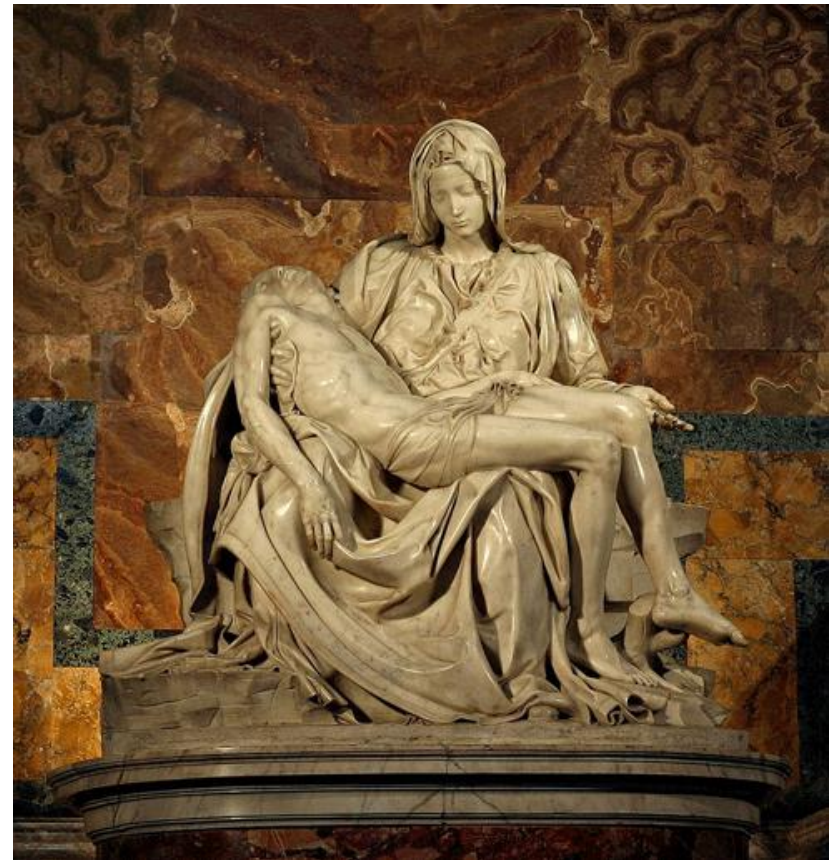
What else do *you* see in the data? Please comment below.

Ultimately, what we best might take away from this map is an appreciation for how tightly all of the Scriptures fit together, thereby supporting the case for the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures—in graphical form no less.

Enjoy!

HT: Dr. David Rudy; Krzywinski, M. et al. [Circos: an Information Aesthetic for Comparative Genomics](#); [Crossway Bibles](#) and Jim Darlack

Who Is Jesus?



Pietà by Michelangelo, 1499

Who is Jesus? Wow, talk about a profoundly important question! There are a lot more people who “believe in Jesus” than there are those who know what Jesus actually claimed about himself. Many think he was a great moral teacher, a prophet, or a wise Rabbi. Some think a legend, a myth, or a contrivance. Still others that he was one of many gods,

or one of many roads to God. That Jesus straightforwardly and clearly attacked these notions is of little consequence to those who will not invest the time to read the Gospels and weigh the evidence for his claims.

Jesus had to fulfill hundreds of Old Testament prophecies written centuries before he appeared on earth, and live within the Mosaic law of the Torah. He had to submit to the cruelest punishment mankind could dish out, and to top it all off he had to rise from the dead. No small feat. When you think about it, he had to color between some *extremely* tight lines. Lee Strobel calls this framework the “unmistakable fingerprint of the Christ.” *Only* Jesus was man enough for the job—that was the whole point.

He did it all willingly—to prove the depth and breadth of God’s love for us. Jesus claimed that if you couldn’t believe in him, you should believe in the miracles he performed as proof of his authority. (How’s that for putting it on the line?) He claimed that he is one with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. So what keeps us from moving from *believing* in Jesus to *trusting* in Jesus? Often it’s suppositional beliefs.

There are the arrogants—those who believe ultimately that *each of us* should decide what is right and wrong in our own heart, and live our lives accordingly (as long as we don’t hurt anybody else). If they disagree with the teachings of Jesus, then Jesus isn’t *valid* for them. They consider the question of *who* gets to make the rules and set the standards, and conclude that it should be them.

Skeptics are close cousins to the arrogants—if it’s not within the realm of their experience it cannot be true. To be knowable truth must appear between where they stand and the horizon, no further. On this basis it would be

impossible to weigh the evidence of a miracle, unless you had experienced the miracle yourself.

And there are the indignants—people who are angry at God for allowing evil and suffering in this world. If they or someone they know has been dealt a harsh reality, their reaction is to be angry with God, or to insist that a loving God cannot allow evil and suffering, therefore God does not exist.

And then there are the fatalists—people who just shrug off their conscience and think “whatever, it doesn’t really matter.” They’re intellectually or emotionally tired, or lazy, and just don’t want to think because thinking requires energy and effort. Many of them just want to enjoy (or endure) life with a blind eye.

But being a ‘Christian’ doesn’t guarantee the right answer either. How many believers see Jesus as the means to a more prosperous life? Or fail to realize that Jesus calls us to *fight*—with kindness, humility, compassion and love—even when we don’t want to? Or fail to realize just how far we fall short of God’s standard of perfection, particularly when it comes to living a God-centered life?

Here’s a clear video synopsis of what Jesus himself said about his identity (click on the play button when you get to the website). How we appreciate the answer to “Who is Jesus?” is incredibly important to us and the world around us. As Mart DeHann suggests at the conclusion of the video, and as we stated in our [About page](#), do your homework and draw your own conclusions.

Enjoy!



The Resurrection

The resurrection of Jesus is the basis for the Christian faith. No resurrection, no Christian faith—it’s that simple according to the Apostle Paul, who wrote half the New Testament. But how well *does* the resurrection stand up to historical scrutiny?

The Gospel accounts of Jesus’ burial and resurrection are found in: [Matthew 27:27–28:15](#), [Mark 15:42–16:8](#), [Luke 23:50–24:12](#), and [John 19:38–20:18](#).

Here’s a presentation on the historical reliability of these accounts by Dr. William Lane Craig, in which he uses *analytic philosophy* to get at the truth of the resurrection.



If this sounds a bit intellectually over the top, check out our recent [Apologetics 101](#) post where he explains the process—using logic, clear definition, and the careful enunciation of arguments, with an emphasis on the

derivations of conclusions from premises. It's a lengthy video, packed full of sound reasoning, and well worth the time it takes to watch.

Backstory

So how did William Lane Craig, one of the greatest deep thinkers of our time, come to faith in Christ? It must have been in response to the writings of someone like C.S. Lewis or Søren Kierkegaard, right? Maybe he read classical theologians like Augustine of Hippo, or reformists like Martin Luther, John Calvin, or Thomas Aquinas? Or maybe he read the Bible and found some special truth that appealed to his intellect? Here's Dr. Craig's surprising answer (you just can't make this stuff up).



He was “hit like a ton of bricks” by an annoyingly happy girl named Sandy. Go figure.

The Ascension Was Not Enough

Have you ever thought about the events that transformed the apostles from runaway associates of Jesus into witnesses willing to be martyred for his message?

The 'About' page on the Veracity blog encourages readers to “figure some things out.” That's precisely what the apostles did between Good Friday (on the eve of the Jewish festival of Passover) and Pentecost (during the Jewish festival of Shavuot). But what they figured out wasn't good enough.



The apostles witnessed all the miracles of Jesus while shadowing him for three years, but when the Roman soldiers showed up in Gethsemane all they had processed during those three years was quickly abandoned. They distanced themselves from him. So much for being bolstered by intellect. Obviously they were focusing on self-preservation and avoiding the pain and suffering that was about to be inflicted upon Jesus—just like you and I would have done. They knew that Jesus was God and that he had the power to raise the dead. They were there for the miracles, the transfiguration, the raising of

Lazarus. Intellectually and experientially they knew—but they followed their feet.

Forty days after the resurrection, they witnessed the ascension. But as mind-blowing as that event must have been—particularly in the afterglow of the resurrection—it *wasn't enough to change the apostles from cowards to revolutionaries*. Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem (for Pentecost, 10 days later).

This video from Glo Bible and our friends at Day of Discovery summarizes the events leading up to the ascension.



Jesus knew that his ascension would not be enough when he told the apostles beforehand, “...**you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.**” The anointing of the Holy Spirit wasn't icing on the cake, and it wasn't an unplanned or spontaneous result of all the teaching that

transpired before Pentecost. It wasn't an insurance run in case the apostles didn't get it. It was a vital part of God's plan, preordained, and God's provision for equipping disciples.

Ray Vander Laan has an amazing lesson on Pentecost (on the Southern Stairs of Herod's Temple). It is one of the clips from the Faith Lessons DVDs, that should be in your personal library. This is teaching as good as it gets, and you can understand why Ray gets choked up when he describes the significance of being on those steps.



So...after all they had witnessed in the 51 days after Good Friday, particularly the resurrected Christ and his ascension, the apostles still didn't have what it takes. We may like to think that if we had seen the ascension we would have been fully convicted and empowered. But the truth is it takes more. It takes God *with* us, not merely God before us. God knew that. God knows that.

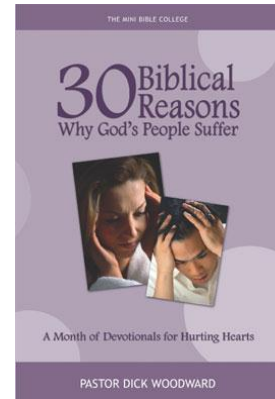
When Christ gave the Great Commission in Matthew 28, he commanded his disciples to go to all the nations and

baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, *and* the Holy Spirit. The ascension was *not* enough. It took Pentecost. It takes the power and person of the Holy Spirit. Dick Woodward has a lot of teaching [about the Holy Spirit](#), as does the [Apostle Paul](#). If we're going to get anywhere in our devotional lives, it takes the Holy Spirit. There are rich blessings behind the preceding two hyperlinks.

Why is it important to appreciate the ten days between Christ's ascension and Pentecost? It gets to the heart of the Trinity, and understanding that God is manifest in *three* persons—and that we need the power of all three in our lives. It also clearly demonstrates God's plan for us—we are not only his children, but his *anointed* children. Without that anointing, it's not enough.



Why Does God Allow Evil and Suffering?



When God gave us His Word, He was not in denial regarding the suffering of His people. Have you discovered the Bible is filled with Scriptures that answer the 'why' questions the people of God ask when they are hurting? I have been in a wheelchair since 1983 and have been totally paralyzed for many years. What I have written here is not unproven theory from passages in the Bible. I have personally needed to search the Scriptures and find these "Thirty Biblical Reasons Why God's People Suffer." If you are suffering, or you know someone who is, join me as I explore thirty biblical responses of God to people with hurting hearts. Dick Woodward, [30 Biblical Reasons Why God's People Suffer](#)

How can an all-powerful and good god allow evil and suffering? As William Lane Craig points out, the problem of evil and suffering is the primary argument against the existence of God. In [this presentation](#) he argues that "Christian theism is man's last, best hope for a solution to the problem of evil," distinguishing between the *intellectual* and *emotional* versions of the problem of evil.

But the question is so profound that it can be particularly difficult to separate emotions from intellect. It can gnaw

at our soul. Even those who accept the existence of God can have a hard time resolving evil and suffering.

In the cool light of reason (if never in the immediacy of tragedy) there are a number of precepts to the problem of evil and suffering:

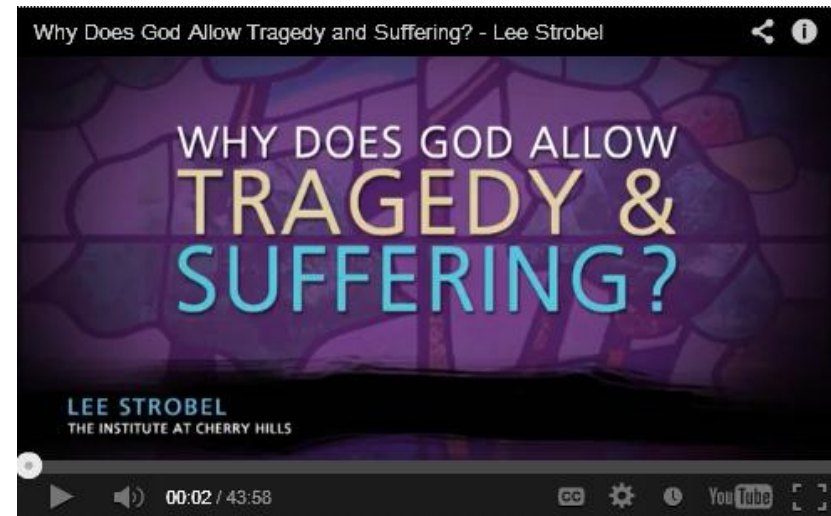
1. First, God permits suffering.
2. God gave us free will, without which love could not exist.
3. With free will we have all chosen to serve ourselves before serving God.
4. Jesus said that we would have tribulation (suffering) in this world.
5. Jesus promised peace in heaven, not on earth.
6. Jesus suffered on our behalf, as the ultimate solution to the problem of mankind's rebellion.
7. We only have an incomplete picture now—but one day we will understand.

Gary Habermas has four short videos that address suffering on the One Minute Apologist channel.

Lee Strobel gave a moving sermon just after the Aurora, Colorado massacre in July 2012.

Nick Vujicic has an incredible perspective on asking God 'Why?'—and has used his suffering to transform the lives of others. God can and does use suffering for good. Isn't that the point of the crucifixion?

These sources can help us understand why God allows evil and suffering, but if I was really hurting, the place to begin putting the pieces together would be Dick Woodward's posts on suffering.



Heaven

Contrary to what most people might believe, the Bible has a *tremendous* amount to say about heaven.

- There are two heavens: the Intermediate (or Present) heaven and the new earth (the heaven to come).
- One reason life on earth can be so difficult is that we were not designed or intended ultimately for life on earth—earth is not the final destination.
- Earth is a testing place. Jesus described earth as a place of trials and tests and persecutions. He offered rewards in heaven (not on earth).
- All of this is part of God’s plan to redeem fallen humanity.
- Hell is a place and heaven is a place (although we probably don’t fully understand the idea of ‘place’ in this context).
- We can take some clues from our world here on earth what the new earth might be like. Beautiful mountains, sunsets, pastoral scenes, laughter, love—all hint at God’s glory and power to create.
- God creates new worlds constantly (look on [astronomy web sites](#) at the nebulae and galaxies he is creating). So it will be with the new earth.
- Our acceptance into heaven does NOT depend upon our works, only upon our faith in Jesus Christ.



The Ecstasy of St. Paul (Johann Liss, 1648)

- There is continuity from our lives on earth to our lives in heaven. We retain our identities in heaven.
- We will have glorified bodies in heaven, and most probably physical and mental capabilities that we do not possess on earth.
- We will know our (believing) family and friends, and be able to spend time with them.
- We will have jobs in heaven, and will rule with Christ. We will not float around on clouds all day and play the harp.
- Our jobs and servant roles will bring us great pleasure. We will NOT be bored. We will learn, and we will achieve.
- We will not be married as on earth—our spouse will be Christ, and everything that we seek to do will be centered on loving and honoring him.
- The focal place of the new earth will be the New Jerusalem.
- The afterlife is an eternal proposition—we have a very hard time even imagining how long eternity is.
- When a believer dies, they face the “Judgment of Faith.” Based on their acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior during their life on earth, they immediately (no soul sleep) are in the presence of Christ, where Christ dwells in the intermediate heaven.
- Our relatives and friends in heaven are aware of what is happening on earth, and can pray for us.
- There’s no free pass—you can’t believe on someone else’s behalf. This is great motivation to fulfill the

Great Commission. Ultimately the Judgment of Faith does not depend upon how good a person we were—only on our faith in Christ.

- When Christ returns, he will bring with him the new earth, as the Apostle John described in Revelation.
- There will be a “Final Judgment,” and in this respect the decisions and activities in a person’s life matter (*beyond* our acceptance and trust in Christ).

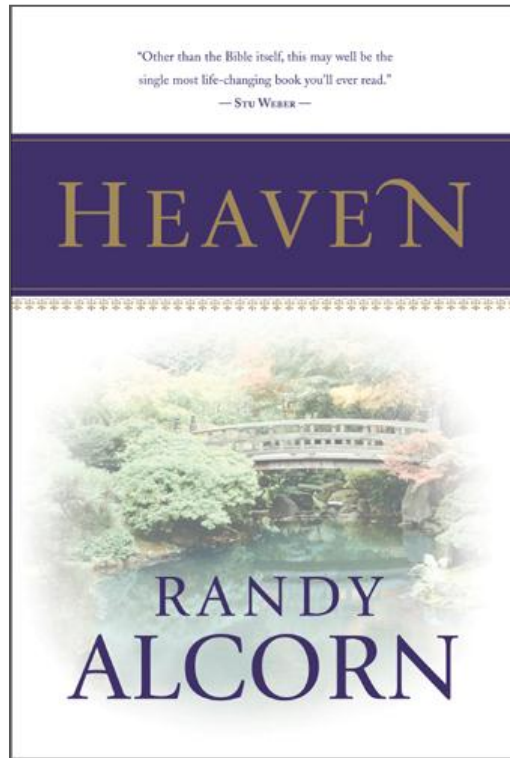
Scripture leaves room to debate the order and duration of the events of end times. This is called ‘eschatology’, and you’ll hear terms like premillennial, postmillennial or amillennial depending upon specific beliefs. Ultimately, debates about eschatology are not as important as understanding that you are saved by faith in Christ.

As Dick Woodward says, your destiny does not depend upon how you will do at a final exam in theology.

Where do these ideas come from? Largely from Randy Alcorn’s *Heaven*, a well researched text based on biblical, theological, and doctrinal references. The book jacket contains this quote by a reviewer: “Other than the Bible itself, this may well be the single most life-changing book you’ll ever read.” If you are interested in the topic of heaven, this text is a great place to start.

In some respects it’s ridiculous to even try to bullet-list basic ideas about heaven. There is a lot that can (and should) be debated, and much is up to interpretation.

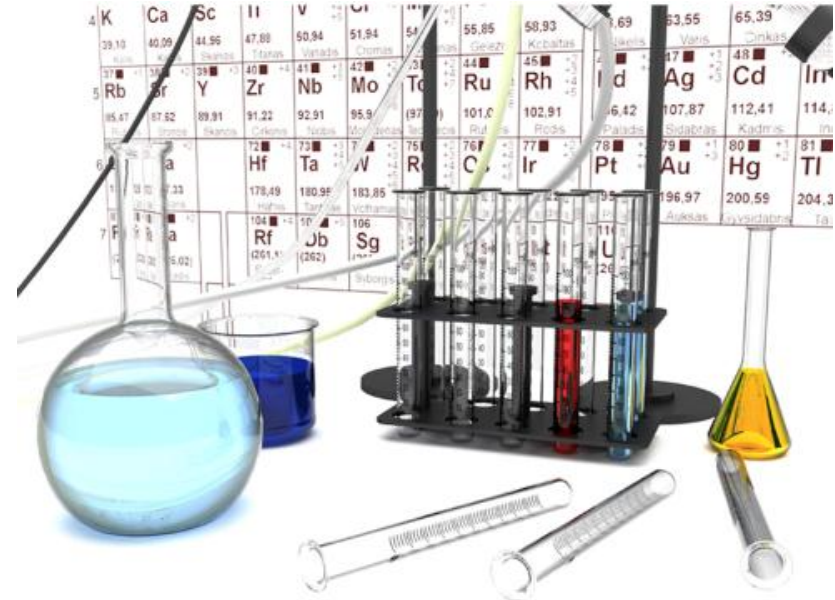
Granted. But what if you only had a few minutes to tell someone about heaven? What would *you* say? We asked



Randy Alcorn's Heaven

Pastor Bill Warrick just that question. Bill had some very profound and personal answers, including some different perspectives on the above list. Watch for that video soon on Veracity. And by all means, spend some time figuring out *what* you believe and *why*.

What Will Heaven Be Like?



Continuing with our Heaven theme, here's a very interesting take from apologist Dr. Richard Deem. He paints a biblically consistent picture using the lens of science. Click on the superscripts to see his references, and then use your browser's 'back' button to return from the GodandScience.org website. All of the following text in this post is from that website. (Thank you Dr. Deem for your work and permission to reblog!)

What Will Heaven Be Like? by Rich Deem

Introduction

People often ask the question, “What will heaven be like.” Although the Bible discusses heaven, it is not possible to understand the full nature of heaven from a human perspective. Since heaven is where God lives, it must contain more physical and temporal dimensions than those found in this physical universe that God created. We cannot imagine, nor can we experience in our current bodies, what these extra dimensions might be like. Even so, we are given enough information in the Bible to understand many of the things that will be different in heaven compared to our lives today. Some of the information on this page is speculation (with alternative possibilities), but is based upon what the Bible says about heaven.

The end of the seventh day

Genesis, the first book of the Bible says that God created the universe in six days.¹ By examining all the passages of the Bible that describe the creation of the universe, one can conclude that the six days of creation are six periods of time or ages that God created the universe, the earth, and life on it. The Bible tells us that we are currently in God’s seventh day of rest² and encourages us to enter into that rest.³ God’s plan for the universe is to allow a large number⁴ of spiritual beings (both angels and humans) to choose to spend eternity with Him.⁵ At the appointed time, God will call an end to the present universe⁶ and judge those who reject His invitation.⁷

The eighth day

On the eighth day God will create again – this time an entirely new universe.⁸ The new universe will have entirely different physical laws. Here are some of the differences that stand out:

- The new earth will have no sea⁸
- There will be no Sun or moon⁹
- Gravity will be absent or greatly reduced¹⁰
- No more death, suffering, pain¹¹
- Believers will receive a new body¹²

Heaven’s characteristics

The characteristics of the new creation tell us that it will be vastly different from what we are used to on earth. Probably most noticeable difference will be the lack of gravity. The New Jerusalem is described as a 1,500 mile cube. Structures of this size would automatically become a sphere in this universe, because of gravity.¹⁰ Therefore gravity will either be absent or significantly reduced in the new creation. There will be no Sun or moon. This makes sense, since there will be little or no gravity. Without gravity, the new creation would not be bound to its source of heat and light. The lack of the Sun is not a problem for the new creation, since the Bible tells us that the glory of God Himself will provide illumination.¹³ The illumination provided by God¹⁴ is probably not the same kind of electromagnetic radiation (photons) that we call light. The illumination provided by God certainly involves the wisdom and knowledge that He possesses.¹⁵ With this kind of light, there would be no need to visually see things, since this would severely restrict our ability to “see” everything as God sees them. There will be no oceans, which means that there will be no water cycle. It would be difficult for a water cycle to operate without

gravity. There will be the river of the water of life, which flows from the throne of God.¹⁶ Given its source, it seems likely that it may not be liquid water as we know it.

The laws of thermodynamics seem to be absent from the new creation, since the Bible tells us that there will be no heat.¹⁷ In this universe, the second law of thermodynamics controls virtually everything that happens. The law states that heat flows from hot bodies to cold bodies. Stars cannot shine, animals cannot consume food to produce energy to move, and chemical reactions cannot occur, since all these processes require the exchange of heat. This law is also called the law of entropy or decay, since the ultimate result of heat flow is that the universe continues to become more and more disordered. Science tells us that the universe, as we see it now, is temporary. It has a moment of creation, and without God's intervention, will eventually expand to produce a collection of cold, lifeless matter. Obviously, such a universe would not be acceptable for housing eternal beings, such as those described in the new creation. As discussed previously, the processes requiring heat flow seem to be absent from the new creation. These include the Sun, the sea and a water cycle, and growing old and dying.¹⁴ Although there is described a tree (the tree of life) that bears fruit in heaven, it doesn't seem to be there for eating. In fact, the Bible says, "the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations."¹⁸ Given all the violence and genocide that has been perpetrated on the earth over the centuries, there will be need for healing among all the people groups. The lack of eating in heaven¹⁹ goes along with the idea that thermodynamics will be absent there. Finally, the Bible says "the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption,"²⁰ suggesting a release from the laws of thermodynamics.

Some Christians believe that there will be eating in heaven. They cite the great wedding feast of the Lamb. Is this meant to be taken literally? Of course, the most important part of the wedding is not the feast, but the marriage. Are we going to be married in a literal physical marriage to Jesus Christ? I think most males would feel uncomfortable with this concept. We will be with our Savior and our Father in heaven and see Him face to face. I believe that the Jewish wedding was chosen to represent the celebration that will happen in heaven, since it was a most joyous and lengthy event known to the people for whom the message was given. One can be certain it will be a great celebration, whether or not we actually eat food.

The new creation will be a place of awesome beauty and is described in terms of precious jewels and metals. Although the description may not represent literal earthly jewels, it is intended to represent the amazing beauty of its appearance, as John, the apostle, saw it. For a preview of the description, see Revelation, chapter 21.

Heaven's timelessness

Heaven exists outside the dimensions of both space and time. The Bible says that God exists outside of time and created time, probably as the means of implementing cause and effect. Without cause and effect, actions don't have consequences and choices don't have repercussions. So, the universe was created temporally for people to choose to love or reject God. Once the choices have been made, there is no longer a need for time to exist at all. So, when the Bible says God destroys the present universe, that includes the universe's dimension of time. So, in fact, it does not matter when you die, you will end up in heaven with all the other people you know who went to be

in heaven—either before *or* after you (relative to this universe’s time scale). This includes your ancestors and descendants. Since we are not restricted by time in heaven, could you look back at your life on earth and watch it happen? Probably not, since the Bible says that “the former things will not be remembered or come to mind” (Isaiah 65:17). When God destroys the present universe, it will have been as if it had never existed. Not even God would have access to it (Isaiah 43:25). How do things happen in the absence of time? Good question! Obviously instantly! There will be no more waiting for anything. Everybody will be able to talk to Jesus for an infinite “amount of time” all “simultaneously.” The English language doesn’t even have the proper words to describe how things will be in heaven.

Where is heaven?

Asking where heaven exists is a little like asking where the center of the universe is. In fact, the universe doesn’t have a center, since everything is moving away from every other thing. The Bible indicates that heaven does not exist in this universe, but is God’s abode. In fact, the Bible indicates that even the highest heavens (of this universe) cannot contain God.²¹ Since we human beings are restricted to the space time dimensions of this universe, we can never go in a spaceship and find heaven, since it is not any place to which we can travel. However, there is a way to get there.

What will people be like in heaven?

With physical laws being so different in heaven, it is apparent that our current bodies would not be acceptable in such a place.²² The Bible poses the question, “But someone will say, “How are the dead raised? And with

what kind of body do they come?” (1 Corinthians 15:35). The answer to the question is given in a series of comparisons:²³

Mortal vs. Heavenly Bodies	
Mortal Body	Resurrection Body
perishable	imperishable
dishonor	glory
weak	powerful
natural	spiritual

To a certain degree, we will be given some of the characteristics of God in heaven, since we will be like Him and the glorified Jesus.²⁴ Without at least the dimensional characteristics of God, we would not be able to see Him, which the Bible says we will do.²⁴

Contrary to the Mormon view of heaven,²⁵ it doesn’t seem that people in heaven will be either male or female. Jesus was asked a complicated question about heaven by the Sadducees (a religious sect that did not believe in the resurrection of the dead) that directly leads us to this conclusion.²⁶ The Sadducees gave a scenario of a woman who married 7 men (sequentially, since they all died prematurely) in her lifetime. They asked whose wife she would be in heaven. Jesus answered:

“You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures, or the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.” (Matthew 22:29-30)

In other words, there will be no marriage or sexual differences among those in heaven, since reproduction is unnecessary. This concept is supported by other biblical verses that indicate that males and females are spiritually equal.²⁷ The same concept applies to the races.²⁸ I doubt that there will be racial differences in heaven.

The idea that we will no longer be married is disturbing to some people. Personally, I like to be married. From an earthly perspective, the dissolution of marriage in heaven doesn't sound like a good thing. However, in heaven, we will be "married" to Jesus, who will be our spiritual "husband."²⁹ If you are not currently a follower of Jesus Christ, you cannot understand what this will be like, and it will probably not have any appeal for you. However, if you have experienced the "highs" of following Jesus as He leads you, you will have a glimpse of how awesome this experience will be. God would not take away something good if He did not replace it with something better.

Besides receiving a new body, those who enter heaven will be given a new name³⁰ and will be incapable of committing sin.³¹ Therefore, all the problems we have by being mean to each other will be gone. We will be able to enjoy each other's company without the fear of being hurt by anyone. It will be great to be physically and morally perfect and to have fellowship with others who have been likewise transformed.

What will we do in heaven?

People have the impression that heaven will consist of people sitting around on clouds, playing harps. However, the Bible does not describe clouds, although some of the angels and the 24 elders and some of the saints are described as having harps in heaven.³²

One of our first acts in heaven will be to help judge the world – specifically the angels.³³ Why do the angels need to be judged? Before God created the earth, He created the angels, who, initially, all worshipped God,³⁴ being led by the most beautiful angel, Satan.³⁵ However, Satan (aka, the devil) became jealous of God and sought to take His place.³⁵ Satan managed to convince one third of the angels to join him in rebellion.³⁶ At this point, there was war in heaven, as the rebellious angels of Satan fought against the archangel Michael and the angels of God.³⁶ Satan and his angels were cast from heaven onto the earth,³⁶ where they attempt to persuade humans to follow him in rebellion against God.³⁷ These rebellious angels are now referred to as demons.³⁸ Since there are no rebels in heaven, the angels who rebelled against God will be judged by God's people and cast into the lake of fire.³⁹

Besides acting as judges in heaven, the Bible says that we will reign with God in heaven.⁴⁰ Exactly what this reigning entails is not defined. However, we will also be serving God directly.⁴¹ Although this may sound boring at first glance, it obviously won't be, since we will have direct access to the Creator of the universe. The book of Revelation specifically says that Jesus will be our shepherd, who will personally lead us.⁴¹ Paul in 1 Corinthians says that we will see Him "face to face" and "now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known."⁴¹ In essence, this verse is telling us that we will have the full knowledge of God, even as He currently knows each of us. This is amazing! Why atheists would not want to be part of this baffles me. Hebrews describes heaven as consisting of "thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly."⁴² So, heaven will be a big celebration. However, we know it will also be a place of righteousness and peace.⁴³ The Bible says that we cannot imagine what heaven will be

like, but that it will exceed our expectations. Each of us in heaven will be “revealed in glory.”⁴⁴

Who will be in heaven?

Obviously, since heaven is God’s kingdom, He will be there. What is remarkable is that we have the opportunity to be there⁴⁵ and see God as He is.²⁴

Who will be in heaven with God? The angels will be there,⁴⁶ and have been there since God created them. The Bible gives several lists of people who will *not* be in heaven.⁴⁷ A summary of the activities that keep people out of heaven is listed in the table below.

Sins That Keep One From Heaven			
sexual immorality	idolatry	adultery	prostitution
homosexual offenses	theft	greed	drunkenness
slander	swindling	impurity	witchcraft
hatred	discord	jealousy	fits of rage
selfish ambition	dissensions	factions and envy	orgies
abomination	lying	cowardice	unbelief
murderer	sorcery		

The list is fairly extensive and includes some things that all of us have done. At the end of the first creation we will

appear before the great white throne of God.⁴⁸ God will go through the “books” to see if we have committed any of the deeds listed in the table above.⁴⁹ In addition, our names will be checked to see if they are in the “Book of Life.” Anyone whose name is not found in the “Book of Life” will be thrown into the lake of fire, based upon the unrighteous deeds that they had done in their lives.⁵⁰ God does not grade on the curve, so all people who have been guilty of any one of the violations above will be sent to the lake of fire, which is the second death.⁵¹ However, those who trust (believe) in Jesus escape judgment and inherit eternal life in heaven (see below).⁵²

How do we get to heaven?

So how can we enter into heaven and into the presence of the Holy God? What we cannot do for ourselves, God has already done for us. Jesus said, “unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”⁵³ Jesus went on to explain that the second birth is to be “born spiritually.” Those who are born just once will die physically then will die spiritually at the second death,⁵¹ following the Great White Throne judgment.⁴⁸ Those who are born twice (both physically and spiritually) will die physically, but will live spiritually forever.

How are people born again spiritually? Jesus said:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. (*John 3:16*)

Belief in Jesus removes us from the White Throne Judgment,⁵⁴ because Jesus took the penalty (death) for our sin at the cross.⁵⁵ Those who accept Jesus as Lord and Savior are justified (declared righteous on the basis of

faith)⁵⁶ before God and can come before Him boldly⁵⁷ through the grace⁵⁸ that He has offered to all.⁵⁹ By accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior, we give Him permission to change us into perfect beings (“the spirits of the righteous made perfect,” [Hebrews 12:22-23](#)) in the new creation.⁶⁰ Those who reject God’s provision for sin will be judged on the basis of their sin and will be separated from God forever (the second death⁵¹), since God cannot allow sin into the new creation.

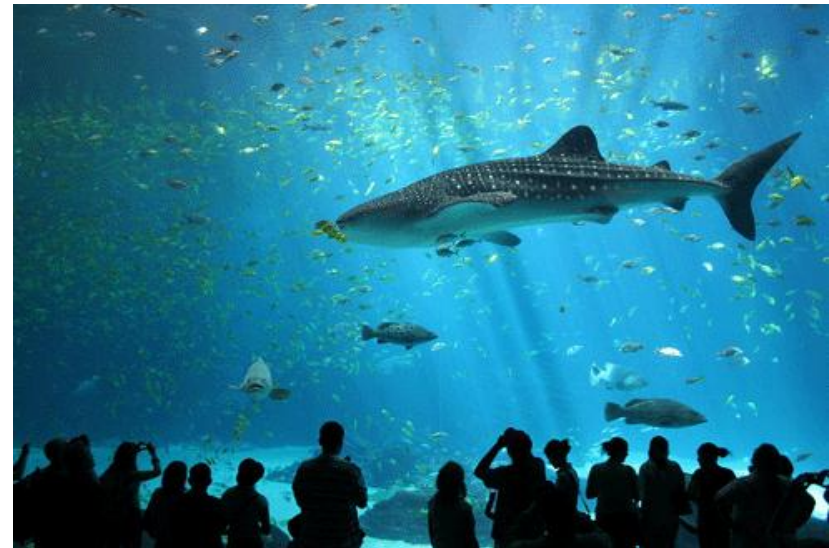
How do we enter into a relationship with Jesus Christ? We do this through belief in Him:

1. Repent of your sin and selfishness. Repentance is agreeing with God that you have been wrong and being willing to turn from that old life to a new life⁶¹ in Christ.
2. Receive Jesus Christ as your Lord (God and Master) and Savior (who takes away your sin).
3. Receive the Holy Spirit as the promise⁶² of what God will do in your life.
4. Thank God for His grace and the free gift that He has given you.

Once you receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, you should walk with Him every day. Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” ([John 14:15](#)). Talk to Him every day in prayer and do what He says. Find a good Christian fellowship (church) and read from your Bible every day. These things are not required to keep your salvation, but they will help you to grow in your faith and obedience and to experience more joy in your walk with Christ. When we come before God’s throne in the new creation, it will be good to hear the words...

...Well done, good and faithful servant...enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.⁶³

Accordion Word at the Aquarium



Whale Shark at the Georgia Aquarium (photo credit: Zac Wolf)

During a family visit to the [Georgia Aquarium](#) last weekend, for no particular reason I started wondering if they might have a clown triggerfish on the premises. Clown triggerfish are part jaguar, part piranha, and part Peter Max—among the most colorful and striking of all animals.

Eventually I asked a docent in the Tropical Diver exhibit if there were any triggerfish around (leaving off the word ‘clown’ so as not to appear star-crossed with only the most beautiful fish). He was very knowledgeable—probably a professor or teacher of marine biology just

gazing at beautiful fish and waiting for someone to ask a question. He led me around the exhibit, describing the three triggerfish they had (no clowns), where they normally hang out, their swimming patterns, and a whole host of interesting fish facts. He said there was a triggerfish in the surf above our heads (go figure), and if we were patient the fish would eventually come into full view. It did, he spotted it, and let me know right away so I could get a couple of pictures. Then he said, “The evolution of their tails is really quite interesting.”



Tropical Diver Exhibit at the Georgia Aquarium (photo credit: <http://azuki1977.cocolog-nifty.com/>)

I was caught a little off guard. I wondered if this kind man was an atheist, a naturalist, a neo-Darwinist, or a proponent of scientism. Could he appreciate how all those beautiful fish came to be? I thought about saying something, but it was easier to just move on and enjoy

the rest of the aquarium—sometimes we think too much. But I thought about what might have been said the rest of the day.

As William Lane Craig and evolutionary biologist Francisco Ayala point out, ‘evolution’ is an accordion word that can be expanded or contracted to mean things that are obviously true, or things that are highly debated. From an apologetics viewpoint, we don’t have anything to fear in these discussions, but it takes work to keep up with developments in genetics and biology, and to understand just what someone is getting at when they use the word ‘evolution’. Here is a podcast by Dr. Craig that sheds some light on the use of the word.



According to Dr. Craig—from the standpoint of an analytic philosopher—when someone brings up evolution it’s important to determine how far they are stretching their accordion. Do they mean that:

1. Present-day organisms are descended from organisms that lived earlier, with modifications;
2. Biological complexities can be explained through genetic mutation and natural selection; or
3. The reconstruction of the evolutionary tree of life shows all of the branches going back to some common primordial ancestor?

The first point is obvious and not objectionable to even the strictest creationist. (Otherwise how would you explain diversity among races, “goldendoodles” from golden retrievers and poodles, etc.) However the second and third points are the subject of much debate and contention, and are not accepted as ‘facts’ among all scientists.

Biochemist Dr. Fazale Rana has written extensively about evolution, and recent developments in genetics in particular. His posts on evolution are available at the [Today's New Reasons To Believe](#) blog. Dr. Rana provides technically competent commentary on recent developments in the study of unitary pseudogenes (so-called “junk DNA”), intelligent design, and many other evolution topics. As stated previously, it takes work to be a good apologist. The good news is that science and truth favor apologetics. If you're not familiar with [Reasons To Believe](#), they are an amazing group of scholars who probably do more to demonstrate the accord between faith and science than just about anybody.

If you prefer something more for the man in the street, I can recommend David Work's [Reasons for the Hope](#) blog, as he is doing a great job with his current series on the [topic of evolution](#).

Take a little time to woodshed on evolution, and by all means don't get caught “off guard.”

Sea Dragons

Possibly the most intriguing and bizarre creatures at the Georgia Aquarium are the [weedy sea dragons](#). Watch the following video and see if you can conclude that all that beauty and complexity is the result of presumptions 2 and 3 above. Could it better be explained as the intelligent design and joyful expression of a creator?

Enjoy!



Weedy Sea Dragons



Respecting Disagreement

Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

1 Corinthians 13:12 (NIV)



Two Apostles by Carlo Crivelli, 1475

The apostles Peter and Paul had some famous disagreements. Ultimately however, it was their shared, unswerving love for Christ that propelled their ministries.

I recently attended a lecture by Dr. Ian Hutchinson, a scientist with impressive technical credentials—and a Christian. His topic addressed science-faith issues, and

concluded with his belief that a Christian worldview is consistent with, and complimentary to, a scientific worldview. I agree and am thankful that there are scientists of Dr. Hutchinson’s caliber who are willing to share their faith in public forums. (Let’s be real—who am I to *disagree*?)

The first question from the audience at the end of the lecture involved the age of the earth and the six ‘days’ of creation. Dr. Hutchinson’s response was along the lines that the universe is very old (13.7 billion years, again I agree), and that he believes we should not take the creation account in Genesis too literally—that the text is ‘figurative’. And here we have a fork in the road. I think it is somewhat dangerous to give up on the text in Genesis too easily, and to ascribe a figurative intent on the part of the author (Moses) when in fact there may be more to the inspired text than meets the eye.

In addition to his work at MIT, Dr. Hutchinson is also a lecturer for the BioLogos Foundation, founded in 2007 by another prominent Christian, Dr. Francis Collins. These brothers and sisters in Christ adhere to the idea of theistic evolution, which—rather than have my take on this topic—you can read about directly from the BioLogos website. There are many wonderful Christians who ascribe to the ideas of theistic evolution.

I’m just not one of them. After studying the matter in detail, I have a different understanding. I ascribe to old-earth creationism.

Dr. Hugh Ross and his colleagues at Reasons To Believe have a great deal to share on this topic. First, Moses never wrote that the universe was created in six *days*. Excuse my provocative statement, but I did it to make a

point— ‘day’ is an English word. Moses did not write in English (which has a million or more words), he wrote in Biblical Hebrew (which only had a few thousand words), and the word that was written was ‘Yom’, which clearly has multiple meanings including the idea of an epoch or age.



Hugh Ross came to faith in Jesus Christ not by anyone’s witnessing efforts, but by independently reading the foundational texts of the world’s religions as an astrophysicist. He discarded them one-by-one based upon their scientific inaccuracies, until he came to the Bible. In the creation

accounts in Genesis Dr. Ross discovered 14 scientifically accurate statements about the initial conditions and cosmology of the universe, *in the correct sequence*. He computed that even if Moses had been given the correct events, the odds of him getting just the *sequence* correct are one in six billion. Pretty compelling prima facie evidence for the reliability of the Bible. And a long way from the idea of theistic evolution or a *figurative* off-ramp.

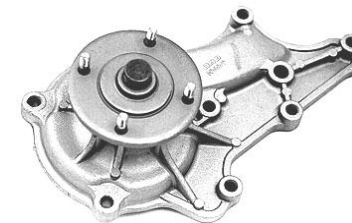
Dr. Ross has a very interesting and unusual testimony which you can read here, or listen to here. He has spent his life thinking very deeply and technically about the Bible and concludes that it is inerrant and infallible. There are many of us who support the Chicago Statement, but few—if any—can bring such impressive scientific study to bear on the old-earth creationism position.

My point in writing this post is twofold: first, we should not throw rocks at theistic evolution or those who may

hold those views (these debates are not essential to the Christian faith). And secondly that there is a wealth of incredible teaching we should consider before coming to the rather easy out that the historical text in Genesis is figurative.

As Tim Keller noted in this 2008 interview, opinions are all over the map. He concludes, “I don’t have to figure this out before I figure out if Jesus Christ raised from the dead.” All those who would enter into the debate on theistic evolution versus old- or young-earth creationism would agree.

Or as the apostle Paul wrote, “Now I know in part; then I shall know fully.” How we disagree says much about what we believe and whom we serve.



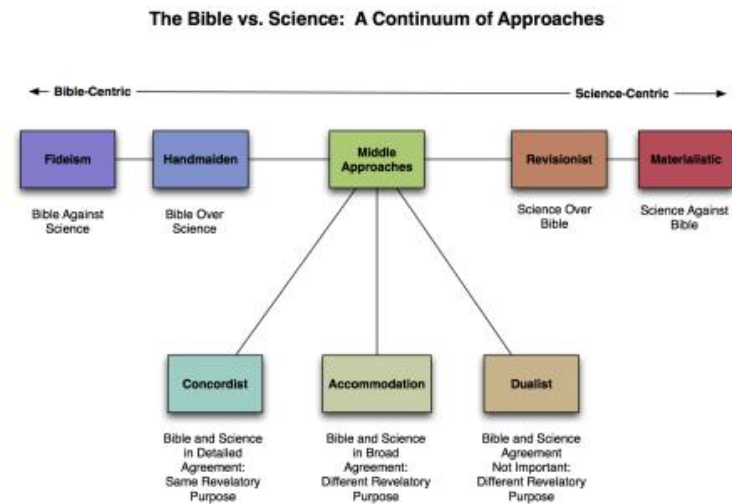
Bible vs. Science: Seven Approaches

John Paine has invited me from time to time to offer a “guest post” on some topic of interest on the Veracity blog. This is a real “step of faith” for John as you don’t always know what you are going to get when you allow a guest to post! That being said...here we go!

The Bible vs. Science. Is there an eternal conflict between the two, or is the warfare between them nothing more than a modern myth? Is belief in the Bible simply a matter of “blind faith”, contrary to contemporary scientific thinking? Should the contributions of modern science have any impact on how we are to interpret Scripture? These are important questions, and different Christians have arrived at different answers. The type of answers we adopt will have an impact on how we explain our faith to a non-believing co-worker, neighbor, or family member. So how do we make sense of the Bible vs. Science debate within the church and contemporary culture?

A few years ago, I shared in our Williamsburg Community Chapel small group a model of how different people have responded to these types of questions. After having worked as a computer engineer at NASA for 15 years and now at the College of William and Mary for 12 years with a lot of “scientific” types of people, I would suggest that there is a continuum of seven basic positions in the Bible vs. Science debate.

This continuum moves along a spectrum ranging from a purely biblicist view that opposes Science to a purely science-only view that opposes the Bible. In the middle are various views that seek harmony between the Bible and Science or that view the Bible vs. Science debate as a distraction to what really matters (click on the picture below to enlarge the diagram, if you need to see it better):



At the ends of the spectrum are two extreme positions. On one end is the Fideist approach. The term “fideist” is derived from the concept of having faith at the expense of reason. A Fideist approach argues that science is completely irrelevant to matters of biblical faith. It is a type of “blind faith” in Scripture. The Bible is the only real source of truth, and so the only purpose for Science today is to give us a means for predicting future events. Science does not tell us much about God’s actions in Creation, nor can it really tell us anything about God

Himself. While an approach like this is common among church-goers who show very little interest in science, it is not a view held by that many serious thinkers. About the closest serious thinker that I know of who advocates a position close to this is the recently deceased John Robbins of the in Texas. Robbins' intellectual hero was Gordon Clark, a popular philosophy professor for many years in the mid-20th century at Wheaton College.

On the other end is the Materialist approach. A Materialist approach argues that science is well on its way to fully describing all aspects of reality and human experience. At best, biblical faith is a relic of the pre-modern past. At worst, the propagation of biblical faith to future generations is nothing more than a form of religious "child abuse." Obviously, this is not a Christian approach, but it is an approach advocated more and more by people who grew up in the church but who have eventually abandoned their faith with great disdain. Intellectual celebrities who champion this view include the "New Atheists", such as Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and the late Christopher Hitchens.

Most people today in America interested in these matters fall somewhere between these two extremes. Nearest the Fideist is the Handmaiden approach. The idea of "handmaiden" is derived from the medieval idea that the sciences should be employed to further aid the Christian in the traditional understanding of Scripture. In other words, Science is a handmaiden that helps us to better understand the Bible. However, the study of Science does not really exist as a field independent from the study of Scripture. One cannot make an appeal to alter an interpretation of Scripture on the basis of extra-biblical data; that, is scientific data coming from "outside" of the Bible. The prime example of this approach is the Young

Earth or Creation Science movement, the most popular today being Ken Ham's Answers in Genesis. In this view, the literal six-24-hour-period of the "days" of Genesis has been the dominant interpretation of Genesis 1 throughout history, and we should therefore dismiss any supposedly scientific ideas that could be used to refute that interpretation. However, it is acceptable to promote any scientific views that might support a Young Earth view.

Going back in the other direction, near the Materialist is the Revisionist approach. A Revisionist argues that modern science has made it impossible to accept the authority of Scripture without seriously revising some of the essential teachings found within the Bible. For example, the concept of scientific evolution should force us to reconsider the whole notion of the Fall of Humanity. Humans did not Fall from a perfect state but rather have slowly evolved over the centuries and will eventually overcome "sin" as humanity progressively develops. The Revisionist view therefore uses biblical language but changes the content and meaning of biblical language to make it more palatable to materialist concerns. This approach is popular among many mainline or liberal Christian groups that seek to redefine the Christian faith to make it more "relevant" to contemporary people. Evangelicals who honor the full trustworthiness of Scripture protest against this view as something that abandons core elements of the Gospel. In other words, a Revisionist approach throws the baby out with the bath water. The former Episcopal bishop of New Jersey, John Shelby Spong, exemplifies the Revisionist approach.

In the middle are three approaches that are somewhat close to one another, but they differ in some important ways: the Concordist approach, the Accommodationist approach, and the Dualist approach. All three

approaches commonly advocate what is called the “Two Books” model regarding revelation; that is, that God reveals truth to us in two distinct ways, through the book of Holy Scripture and also through the “book” of Creation. The “Bible vs. Science debate” is really a contemporary myth. In fact, there is no conflict between these two ‘books’. The Bible and Science are in harmony with one another. However, these three approaches differ in exactly what this harmony looks like.

The Concordist approach suggests that God fully reveals Himself in both Scripture and through Creation. We study Scripture to know God but we also study Creation through the principles of modern science to also know God. Furthermore, since God does not lie there must be a full “concord”, or “agreement”, between what these two books say to us about Himself. A Concordist makes a distinction between the authority of the Bible and our interpretation of the Bible. The same logic also applies to our view of science. So if we find something in the Bible that does not match up with something in modern science, it means that there is some problem in interpretation. We may need to reconsider our interpretation of the Bible, or we may need to reconsider our interpretation of the scientific data, or we may need to review both. Reconsidering our interpretation of the Bible does not mean that the Bible itself is wrong. God is fully inerrant, but because we are limited humans, our interpretations of God’s book may in fact be wrong and in need of godly correction. Advocates of this point of view include the Old Earth Creationists, such as Hugh Ross and his organization, Reasons to Believe.

A good example of the Concordist approach is with Psalm 113:3, “From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the Lord is to be praised” (NIV). If you

take the passage literally, it suggests that the sun revolves around the fixed earth. However, Copernicus and Galileo famously made the case that it is the earth, not the sun, that moves. The Concordist approach is that a sun-centered solar system is indeed the proper scientific way of looking at things. However, the Psalmist is merely figuratively expressing the phenomena of how the sun appears to move in relation to the earth. From the viewpoint of a person standing on the earth’s surface, the sun only appears to rise and set. The Concordist concludes that we should not interpret Psalm 113:3 in a literal fashion but instead understand it phenomenologically. This demonstrates the agreement between the Bible and Science.

The Accommodationist approach is very much like the Concordist view, but it differs at a significant point. Just as God accommodated to the limitations of humanity through the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the same can be said of how God accommodated Himself to the limitations of the human biblical writers in Holy Scripture. God’s intention in the Bible is to reveal Himself and His character, so we can look to Scripture as the infallible guide to faith and Christian practice. But we should not expect the human writers to fully conform to a modern, 21st century understanding of science. From our 21st century viewpoint, perhaps the writer of Psalm 113:3 is merely giving us a phenomenological description of how the sun appears to move. But did the biblical writer himself really think this way, or did he actually believe that the sun literally moves about a fixed earth? An Accommodationist would argue that he probably did literally believe in a fixed earth universe with everything else moving around it, just as most everyone else did in the ancient world. To argue otherwise, as the Concordist does, is really an attempt to force the Bible to somehow

fit into the details of modern science, and take the biblical text out of its original God-given context. However, this need not deter us from having confidence in how God uses the biblical writers to reveal to us God's character and truth of salvation. The science as presented by the human writers in the Bible may be "erroneous" when compared to modern standards, but it is not fair to subject those ancient writers to a standard which is not relevant to God's purposes. God uses the Bible to reveal to us the essential matters of faith and practice, but He uses science to reveal to us those matters that are non-essential to salvation. In Scripture, God inerrantly uses the limitations of the biblical writers to reveal his inerrant truth, even when those writers may get things wrong in relatively minor, scientific areas not essential to salvation when compared to modern scientific standards. Advocates of this point of view includes many scientists and writers for the BioLogos Foundation, the think tank started by Frances Collins, one of the mappers of the human genome.

As opposed to the Concordist, the Accommodationist would instead argue that there is broad agreement regarding what Scripture says about scientific matters in a very general way, so we need not quibble over the details. The sacred writers were using the best available science of their day when they wrote the sacred text. But we who live in the 21st century "stand on the shoulders of giants," as Isaac Newton famously argued even in his century. With Science we have an advantage that the sacred writers simply did not have with hundreds of years of scientific research behind us. When you consider the ancient writers' point of reference and the assumptions that they made, what they wrote regarding scientific matters was true in their original, ancient context. The "rising of the sun" is not technically precise language to

the contemporary scientist, but it is close enough for God's purposes. The biblical writers were not trying to deceive, nor was God. These ancient agents of God's revelation were simply using the known science of their day to proclaim God's unchanging Truth. The Lord's name is to be praised whether you adopt the ancient earth-centered universe model or the 21st century sun-centered model. Both models are compatible with the biblical doctrine of God as Creator.

The Dualist approach differs from both the Concordist and Accommodationist in that it finds any attempt to reconcile the Bible and Science as inherently problematic and unnecessary. Comparing truth between the Bible and Science is like comparing apples and oranges. The Bible and Science serve very different purposes in God's purview, and so there is no need to cross the lines between the study of the Bible and scientific study. The Bible does not really tell us about scientific truth, but likewise, science does not tell us anything directly about the saving God of the universe. Putting it simply, we look to the Bible to find God, but not to gain scientific knowledge. In like manner, we study science to learn about the nature of God's universe, but we do not observe the scientific details of the sun "rising or setting" to find God Himself. This type of dualism leaves the Bible to the theologians and the observations of the Created order to the scientists. Exemplars of this approach include the 20th century theologian, Karl Barth, and perhaps the famous late Harvard paleontologist, Stephen Jay Gould.

Wow! That is a pretty detailed spectrum. But it shows that resolving the Bible vs. science debate is anything but simple, even among Christians. Nevertheless, if we are engaged in conversations with others who are confused about the relationship between the Bible and Science, it is

our responsibility as Christians to think through this issue in a manner than honors our Lord so that we can be faithful ambassadors for God's Kingdom in our response. Trying to find out where you are along this continuum is a great place to start the conversation.

For His Name's Sake,

Clarke Morledge

Wideness of God's Mercy: Pluralism #4

I like playing soccer. But playing pick-up soccer is pretty difficult when you do not have any goals. Sometimes you have to improvise with a pair of shoes, a few backpacks, or if you are really lucky, a set of orange highway department cones.



Mmmm...those look like some mighty fine cones...perfect soccer goals!

If you want to mess with the opposing soccer team, just move those improvised goals when they are not looking. When on the opponent's side of the field, sneak that one cone farther apart from the other one to make that goal wider. Then just wait a few minutes. Pretty soon, you'll be hearing, "Morledge! What are you doing messing



around with the goals?! You cannot make the goals wider for you!”

There is always a temptation to try to widen the goals. But it does not just happen in soccer. It also happens when we think about God and salvation. How wide is God’s mercy when we consider who will be saved and who will not be saved? What a troublesome question! In an age drawn more to the love of God as opposed to His justice, does human sentimentality confuse us in our understanding of the parameters God has set for salvation?

This is the final blog posting in this series that examines religious pluralism. We are addressing the primary question: do not all religions teach basically the same thing? In considering this question, other “questions behind the question” arise. In the first posting in this series, we considered this: Is there a way to account for much of the goodness and piety in the Great World Religions if one holds to an exclusive understanding of Christian truth? Biblically speaking, a theology of common grace helps us to make sense of that. In the second posting, we considered this: how do we deal with the differences among world views, and are those differences really that significant? As it turns out, the differences in various approaches to religion are greater than the things that are shared in common. In the third posting, we looked at what is it that makes Christianity so unique? Simply speaking, the Christian faith is unique because of the person and work of Jesus Christ and his saving grace. **Note: as with the other posts in the series, this last one is somewhat lengthy, as I found it difficult to break up such a significant topic without losing too much continuity...so have your beverage ready 😊**

Salvation for Non-Christians?

However, if we are willing to accept that Jesus Christ is truly *the Way, the Truth and the Life* (John 14:6), and there are no shortcuts, how is God’s saving grace applied to humanity?

Here is one of those “questions behind the question” for those troubled by a pluralistic society. If there is no salvation apart from Jesus Christ, what about that nice Hindu lady who lives down the street? Is there no salvation for her?



I don’t think this gal is from Southern Virginia. Does she say “How are y’all?” or “How are you all?” ...or is she more likely to say ‘Namaste’ a customary Asian Indian greeting?

There are roughly four basic positions taken by people who have some affinity for Christian belief. The first position is substantially different than the other three positions. Non-Particularism sets itself off by rejecting

the doctrine of Christian ‘exclusivism’. In this approach, Jesus Christ is not the only way of salvation. In addition to Christianity, all of the Great World Religions are valid paths for salvation. As we have surveyed in previous blog posts, this is not a biblical view of salvation. It is logically contradictory, and it misrepresents and redefines core Christian doctrine. Without repeating what was said previously, we can dismiss this as a legitimate option for the Christian.

However, if one embraces “particularism”, which affirms the uniqueness of Christ and the uncompromising message of saving grace, there are three differing positions to consider along a spectrum. Aside from John 14:6, the key proof text to support all three of these positions is Acts 4:12:

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. (NIV 1984)

If Jesus carries the only authority for extending saving grace to people, how far does that saving grace extend? Is it just for Christian believers only?

Strict Particularism

At the opposite end of the spectrum from Non-Particularism is *strict particularism*. In *strict particularism*, Jesus Christ is affirmed to be the Only Way for salvation. The saving grace that Jesus offers can only be secured by making a conscious profession of faith. The supporting proof text is typically Romans 10:9:

Salvation for Non-Christians?? – Four Positions

Non-Particularism

The doctrine of Christian "exclusivism" is to be rejected. Jesus Christ is not the only way to salvation. All of the Great World Religions are valid paths for salvation.

Semi-Particularism

Jesus is the Only Way, but God may use other religions as vehicles for His salvation.

Open Particularism

Jesus is the Only Way, but we can only be assured of salvation for those who consciously profess faith in Christ, but trust that God is open to granting grace to others in ways known only to Him.

Strict Particularism

Jesus is the Only Way, and requires a conscious profession of faith in Christ to secure that salvation.

“That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. “(NIV 1984)

The strength of this position is that it is unyielding in supporting the uniqueness and authority of Jesus Christ. It is firm in making an appeal to the Scriptures.

However, the weakness of this position is that I do not know of anyone who actually holds this position to the extreme when challenged. Inevitably, when such a position is put forward, any number of objections are raised and qualifications are usually given.



“Whoops. Looks like someone needed to move the cone to make the road wider...or maybe the car was too big?”

Within the context of considering religious pluralism, the typical challenge is with respect to those who live in far away lands who have do not have a Christian witness available to them. They could be living in a country closed to Christian missionaries or they could simply be a part of cultural group that does not have the Bible available in their native tongue. The hardness of *strict particularism* implies that such people are without redemption and lost forever. Tough words.

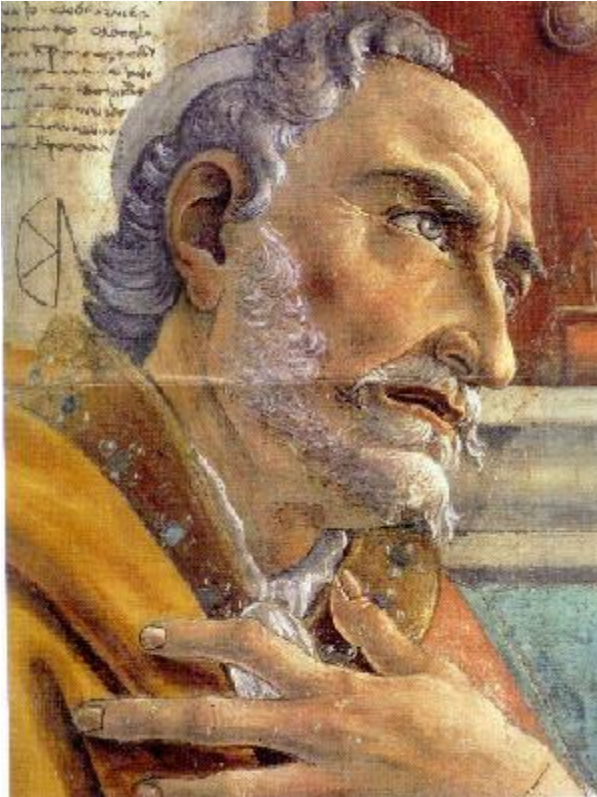
However, the problem is larger than the religious pluralism context. It is not just about “Buddhists in Bangladesh.” It is also about “Babies in Boston.” Human infants at an early age lack the cognitive ability to understand or comprehend biblical theology. Making a conscious profession of faith for a newborn infant is just as problematic as it is for someone in a far away land who has no exposure to the Gospel message proclaimed by missionaries. The same problem exists for other categories of peoples, including persons who suffer from some physical or mental impairment, where cognitive thinking and theological understanding is a serious challenge. In each special case, the commonality is that

there are people, who through no fault of their own, who do not have the opportunity to respond to the Gospel by making a conscious profession of faith that can be observed by others.

The anxiety introduced by such a stark situation is a plague for many, even within the Christian community. However, though the context of religious pluralism is perhaps a recent challenge in the history of the Christian movement, the larger issue being considered has actually a very long history. For example, Saint Augustine in the early medieval period argued that since all humans are sinners, without the grace of baptism such people are eternally lost. This would include any unbaptized infants. Augustine argued positively that the saving grace of God is extended to an infant through baptism. Many in the church during and since Augustine’s time in the 5th. century have raced to the baptismal font with their newborns to secure this grace. Yet in an age with high infant mortality rates, parents might not make it with their dying newborns to receive the sacrament within time. As a result, some have questioned Augustine on theological grounds in a debate that has embattled believer and non-believer alike for centuries.

Without going further into Augustine presently, defenders of Augustine have argued that there are exceptional cases or other qualifications. As an example, the concept of the “age of accountability” has been a useful theological idea to distinguish between children who are spared eternal lostness due to their prematurity and others who have grown to the age where they are responsible to God. Presumably, God saves the infant if they have not reached that “age of accountability”, but once reaching that age, they are fully responsible to

respond to God’s gracious act of redemption in Christ ([look here for more on this issue](#)).



Saint Augustine. Champion of the biblical doctrine of Grace...but a thorn to many regarding the damnation of unbaptized infants.

Does thinking about “Babies in Boston” help us to better consider the question of “Buddhists in Bangladesh?” This is where we get several other variations of particularism that attempt to moderate the extreme position taken by *strict particularism*.

Semi-Particularism

Standing farthest away from *strict particularism* is the view that affirms the uniqueness of Christ and His saving message on one hand while seeking to give a firmer hope to those who, through no fault of their own, do not have the opportunity to respond to the Gospel message proclaimed by a Christian missionary. This *semi-particularism* argues that while Christ is the only means of salvation, there is a way to find salvation for those who do not know of Christ. In other words, there is a “Plan A” and a “Plan B.” Plan A is that the Gospel message be proclaimed and that those who truly respond in faith will know Christ’s saving grace.

However, what about others who do not have such an opportunity? This is where “Plan B” comes in. If someone under Plan B is a follower of a different religious tradition, and if that person follows the teachings of that tradition in the best way they know how, then that person too may inherit eternal life in Christ. In other words, it is possible that under certain conditions, one can be a “good Muslim”, a “good Buddhist,” etc. and receive saving grace just like any other Christian.

Advocates of positions that lean towards *semi-particularism* claim support from such sources as the classic 19th century hymn by Frederick Faber, *There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy*, which has verses including:

*There’s a wideness in God’s mercy,
Like the wideness of the sea;
There’s a kindness in His justice,
Which is more than liberty.
There is welcome for the sinner,
and more graces for the good;*

*there is mercy with the Savior;
 there is healing in his blood.
 But we make His love too narrow
 By false limits of our own;
 And we magnify His strictness
 With a zeal He will not own.
 Was there ever kinder shepherd
 Half so gentle, half so sweet,
 As the Savior who would have us
 Come and gather at His feet?*

There is much to appreciate with this view, in that it seeks to find a concrete way to give hope to as many as possible. However, the basis for why the hope is given is deeply problematic. While “Plan A” rightly argues for the primacy of God’s grace as opposed to human efforts to someone earn God’s favor, “Plan B” does just the opposite. By affirming that religious devotion, even in ignorance, can somehow demonstrate to God one’s sincerity and worthiness for saving grace, such a position completely undermines the whole concept of grace. As we explored in the [last blog post](#), if it is possible for even one person to earn salvation through human efforts, or “works”, then grace becomes totally unnecessary. It makes the work of Christ to secure our salvation meaningless. Why would we even need Christ if all we need is pious religious devotion driven by our own efforts?

We simply cannot perform any action that can somehow trigger God, or dare I say it, manipulate God, to extend saving grace. Such a “grace” is no grace at all.

This is what makes *semi-particularism* rather ‘semi’. There is a tendency in this school of thought to try to have particularism in a non-particularistic way, and it

does not really work. Furthermore, by suggesting the existence of a “plan B”, the tendency is to make a serious overstep in our knowledge of the mind of God.

“Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?” (Romans 11:34 NIV 1984)

In the interest of extending hope, it is possible to say a lot more than can really be said. What it comes down to is that the individual Christian or any church body simply does not have the divine authority to make any statement that can extend salvation to someone else. To argue that any particular non-Christian is somehow saved is something beyond our knowledge from what Scripture teaches. According to the Bible, only God can make such a determination. Anything other than that is only speculation at best and presumption at worst.



I play pick-up soccer at the College of William and Mary (I’m on the right). Soccer attracts folks from all over the world. On the left is my friend Mustafa. His family left Afghanistan to get away from the Taliban regime several years ago, and he has grown up in Williamsburg ever since. ‘Mustafa’ is Arabic for “the Chosen One,” a traditional Muslim name. When I consider these issues concerning salvation, I think of people like my friend, Mustafa.

Open Particularism

Open particularism is a mediating perspective between *semi-particularism* and a *strict particularism*. In *open particularism*, Jesus Christ is uniquely the only way to salvation, but we must be open to the possibility that God will reach people with the Gospel in ways that we can never know. So while there are those who lack the opportunity to respond to the Gospel with a conscious profession of faith, it is not impossible for God to reach them. Unfortunately, we from our limited human perspective have no ability to discern the working of God's grace in those cases.

The Bible presents a number of passages that challenge a *strict particularism*. For example, in Romans 4:3, the Apostle Paul argues that *Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness*. But wait a second. How can he be a recipient of the Gospel of Jesus Christ hundreds of years before Jesus came on the scene? How could he have made a conscious profession of faith before anyone knew about Jesus of Nazareth? Nevertheless, the Scriptures clearly affirm that Abraham and his spiritual descendants have a share in saving grace.

Also, what about this obscure priest, Melchizedek, who appears briefly in [Genesis 14:18-20](#). He pretty much comes out of nowhere into Abraham's life and vanishes right away. Was he a pagan perhaps? Was he a Jew? All we know is that he was a priest of the "God Most High." And yet, the New Testament Book of Hebrews champions Jesus Christ as being in the order of the Melchizedek priesthood!

One other example comes straight from Jesus in [Luke 13:22-30](#). When He was asked if only few people are

going to be saved, Jesus responded by saying that there are those who think they will be with Jesus but will be disappointed when they are not allowed into God's presence. Nevertheless, God will draw in many from the "east and west and north and south" to take their places at the Great Feast. We will be surprised to find out who actually is in God's Kingdom and who is not.



I do these types of bicycle kicks... but only when I dream in the middle of the night...otherwise, I think I'd hurt myself.

These texts demonstrate that merely making a conscious profession of faith does not limit how God extends His grace. How then do we answer the question of the possibility of salvation for the non-Christian? On one hand, we simply have to say that the workings of grace remain a mystery to us, but perhaps this is part of God's

purpose. There will always be an anxiety regarding the state of those who are lost as far as we can know, and this is by God's design. This anxiety should spur us on to pray for our neighbors, our friends, our coworkers, our family members, and those in faraway lands who may or may not know the Gospel. Without such tension, it is altogether too easy to become apathetic about the spiritual condition of people who live in our world today. If there is a possibility for salvation, there is another possibility that our neighbor could be spiritually lost and separated from God forever. If we truly have the purposes of God on our hearts, then we need to respond in obedience to God's calling and pray for our neighbor's salvation and work earnestly for extending the proclamation of the Gospel. Pray for that friend and ask God for the opportunity to share your faith with them, for we simply cannot be sure 100% about our friend's spiritual state. Pray that God might have you be a part of His plan to make disciples of all of the nations, either by supporting missionary efforts to reach others or even going yourself!

Vigilant Pursuit of the Lost

A few months ago, our little Italian greyhound ran away from our home at night. Our old, little dog had very little hair and the night was very cold. I searched for over an hour calling his name across the woods in our neighborhood. I called off the search in the wee hours of the morning, resigned to the fact that our beloved canine was lost and could not survive the night. I could not sleep that night. So I got up at daylight, and searched another hour for him. All was quiet. He was indeed lost. Most probably dead. I talked to some of my neighbors, but I questioned whether or not I should refer to our greyhound in the present tense or the past tense. Early

that afternoon after he had disappeared, another neighbor of mine appeared in our driveway chasing our spunky and shivering little greyhound. I was completely shocked that he had survived, but I was thankful that he had been found.

What a lesson for me about God's intention to save the lost. I was so discouraged that I could not find our dog, but unknown to me he had been rescued by our neighbor. God has called His people to be His witnesses, pursuing them with the message of hope, but we should never underestimate what God can do to rescue those who are perishing.

What then is the purpose of making a conscious profession of faith? Here it might be helpful to draw a distinction between *saving grace itself* and our *assurance of having that salvation*. There are several schools of thought with respect to the assurance of salvation, but this *open particularism* makes it clear that the grace of salvation and our assurance of it are different. Making a conscious profession of faith that is truly rooted in saving grace is what leads us towards the assurance of salvation. The gift of having a conscious faith experience is that it can help to give us assurance of saving grace in a way that those who do not have the opportunity to respond to the Gospel simply do not have. In other words, while it is possible for us to have an assurance of salvation for ourselves, assurance remains elusive to those who have not yet heard the Gospel. Without Christ, they are indeed lost, but God might still reach them with the mystery of His saving grace, but such knowledge is known only to God Himself and the deepest regions of the human heart. So while it is possible for someone with a conscious profession of Christian faith to have the assurance of salvation, it is **not** possible for

others to have the assurance of salvation, though it remains possible for the Lord in some unknown way to still reach them. Part of what should motivate us to share the Gospel with others is a desire that our neighbor might experience that assurance of salvation consciously themselves.

Ultimately, we must put our trust in God that He will do that which is right. Following [Genesis 18:25](#), our prayer can be that God will extend his saving grace to others in a way consistent with God's righteous character and universal love for humanity. God has given us promising signs that He can reach people even when there is no tangible Christian witness available. For example, there have been a number of [documented stories where Muslims living in countries closed to Christian missionaries are seeing visions of Jesus in their dreams](#) and coming to faith after these types of experiences.

The challenges to *open particularism* are based on several criticisms. First, *open particularism* is claimed to substitute a firm understanding of the eternal lostness of a spiritually dead humanity with a vague agnosticism regarding the spiritual state of non-believers. Critics charge that this vague agnosticism takes the urgent edge off of Gospel proclamation.

However, a defense of *open particularism* argues that there should be no practical difference in how we view the critical task of the missionary enterprise. For example, if you *definitively know for sure* that you will die tomorrow, would it really make any difference compared to being *perhaps unsure* if you are going to die tomorrow? Either way, you must accept at least the possibility of death tomorrow. That possibility alone should be sufficient enough for you to take action. As the

New Testament tells us, Christ will return like a “thief in the night” (1 Thessalonians 5:2). We simply do not know when Jesus will return, but we should be living our life as though He might be coming back at any moment. Just the mere possibility that He could return at any moment should be motivation for us to be prepared for His coming. Likewise, the mere possibility of eternal separation from God should spur us on to declare the Truth of God's unending love to all most urgently!

Another criticism is that *open particularism* drives a wedge between the experience of saving grace and our assurance of salvation in a non-biblical way. Some insist that only those who have an assurance of salvation are truly among the saved.

However, a defense of *open particularism* objects that this criticism simply confuses having the assurance of salvation with making an intellectual assent to Gospel doctrine. In other words, if we mistakenly think that just by giving intellectual assent to the Gospel that this alone gives us an assurance of salvation, then we are missing the point that Jesus is making in answering the question, “*Will only a few be saved?*” in Luke 13:22-30, the story of the Narrow Door, mentioned earlier. Jesus is quite clear that there are some who think that they have seats at the Great Banquet just by making some intellectual assent to God, and yet the Lord responds they He does not know them. Intellectual assent is indeed important, but it does not serve as an absolute guarantee of salvation assurance by itself. Intellectual assent is part of having a conscious faith in Christ, but conscious faith also requires a deep abiding relationship with the Saviour that goes beyond merely reciting the “sinner's prayer.”

Moving Soccer Goals and Having Confidence in God

OK. So I was caught moving the orange cones a little wider on the other side of the field to make it a little easier for me to score. There is something else challenging about playing soccer with orange cones as opposed to playing with real soccer nets. If the ball shoots just above the orange cone, how do you tell if you have made a goal or not? This is where it is important to have some impartial referee who can make the call.



“Hey, what are you guys doing? Those are not hats. Those are soccer goals!”

As you might guess, I lean towards an *open particularism*. When it comes to the question of the potential salvation of non-Christians, we ultimately must leave things in God’s Hands while we earnestly seek to be obedient to the Great Commission and proclaim the

glorious news of God’s gracious act in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God is that impartial referee. We need to trust that God will move in the hearts of the hearers of the Gospel and trust that God will use us to be agents of reconciliation to as many as possible. We need to follow every lead God has for us to tell the story of Jesus Christ and trust God will do the rest. We do not need to try to move the “orange cones” regarding salvation. He is perfectly capable and trustworthy to do what it takes to reach a spiritually lost world.

I can pray for that nice Hindu lady down the street. I can follow the Spirit’s direction to find the right opportunity to share the Gospel with her, and then place my confidence in that the God of Mercy will work the wonder of His saving grace to rescue those who would otherwise perish.

Additional Resources:

For A Deeper Look at These Issues:

A detailed look at the question of salvation in a pluralistic world is found in one of the Zondervan Counterpoint series of books, [Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World](#). It covers much of the same arguments presented in these blog postings regarding how God applies saving grace within the context of religious pluralism. Different authors present different perspectives on these issues following a similar taxonomy that I have presented. A [nice book review](#) summarizes the main arguments.

Saint Augustine, Infant Baptism and Grace

Theologians going back to Saint Augustine in the 5th century have wrestled with the question of infants (and

others) who die early before making a conscious profession of faith. This topic is probably worth a separate blog posting, as it touches on a whole wide range of related issues: including baptism, the nature of the sacraments in general, and the concept of original sin. The debate in church history that Saint Augustine carried with the arch-heretic Pelagius, and Pelagius' successor, Julian of Eclanum, over the nature of sin and grace provides a valuable context for understanding all of the issues involved. A classic extended essay that expounds on these rather complicated topics comes from the scholarly pen of Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield, the great Princeton theologian of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Grab yourself a large beverage and a good chunk of time before you read it, but Warfield is very rewarding for the diligent.

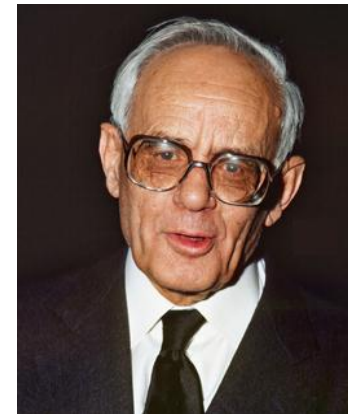
Assurance of Salvation

Much of what is put forth in the *open particularism* argument is based on a particular view of the assurance of salvation. This is another complex topic that seeks to understand the relationship between faith, works, and grace (another blog entry??). The issue has received attention in recent years in the controversy regarding "Lordship salvation". Numerous books and articles by such authors as J. I. Packer and John MacArthur on the one side and Charles Ryrie and the late Zane Hodges on the other have laid out the different positions within the controversy.

Apologetics Extra: Roman Catholicism and Religious Pluralism

It is worth looking at how Roman Catholicism in particular addresses the issue of religious pluralism and the potential salvation of non-Christians.

An intriguing proposal was offered by the great Roman Catholic 20th century theologian, Karl Rahner. Rahner, a major influence at the Second Vatican Council, following some of the thought expressed in the principal document, *Lumen Gentium*, makes a case for *anonymous Christianity*. For Rahner, there is a possibility that one can attain the grace of salvation outside of explicitly constituted Christianity without necessarily knowing it. In other words, someone from another religious tradition may indeed be a Christian somehow in an anonymous way.



Karl Rahner. 20th century Roman Catholic theologian famous for his concept of "anonymous Christianity"

Critics from the non-particularist school argue that Rahner's anonymous Christianity is paternalistic. It is

essentially the rough equivalent of extending an “honorary degree” on someone who has absolutely no expressed desire to receive such a degree. Would a rabid North Carolina basketball fan be excited about receiving an honorary degree from Duke University? Perhaps not.

To the credit of the Roman Catholic tradition in recent years, the Catholic Magisterium has sought to resist efforts that undermine a robust particularism. In the more recent papal document, *Dominus Iesus*, the Roman Church has expressly denied any doctrinal changes that would take away from the particularist claims of orthodox Christian faith. The Catholic Church remains committed to the formula articulated by Saint Cyprian of Carthage in the 3rd century. From the Latin *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* we get “outside the church there is no salvation.” The real question then is how you unpack that formula.

Unfortunately, there are many lay people within the Roman Catholic Church who do not understand or follow this clarified teaching of the Magisterium. For example, many have read the following in the Catholic Catechism (Part One, Section Two, Chapter 3, Article 9, Paragraph 3) under line 841:

The Church’s relationship with the Muslims. “The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Muslims; these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind’s judge on the last day.” (quoted from Lumen Gentium 16)

Some have understood this to say that the Magisterium believes Christians and Muslims worship the same God without any qualifications. However, as Robert Spencer

points out, this naive and simplistic reading is not the intention of the Church of Rome. Robert Spencer, the founder of JihadWatch.org, is admittedly very controversial regarding many things about Islam, but his analysis here is in accordance with the definitive doctrinal statement expounded by *Dominus Iesus*.



Cherry Picking Kierkegaard



“La tertulia del café de Pombo” by José Gutiérrez Solana, 1920

Generally I’m more apt to hang out with grill-in-the-driveway, figure-it-out-yourself, change-your-own-oil, workaday kind of guys than intellectuals. When I was younger and thought I knew what was important, I developed an anti-intellectual prejudice that continues to the present day. But as Tim Keller says, “You cannot be a Christian without using your brain to its uttermost,” so game on.

Many of us have a tendency to read Bible passages simplistically, without empathizing or thinking beyond

the sacred page. Teachers like Michael Card encourage reading “at the level of our imaginations,” but that takes time and work.

Take the story of the testing of Abraham in Genesis 22 for example. Danish philosopher, theologian, and Lutheran ethicist Søren Kierkegaard thought about the anguish that Abraham felt while walking for three days to Mount Moriah to sacrifice Isaac. To Kierkegaard this is not a simple story to be read dryly or mechanically from one punctuation mark to the next. Kierkegaard thought about the huge weight being placed upon Abraham’s conscience, and posited ideas about the teleological suspension of the ethical. This isn’t (actually) a post about Kierkegaard, but just to help set the background, here are a few of his quotes:

- The function of prayer is not to influence God, but rather to change the nature of the one who prays.
- Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.
- Once you label me, you negate me.
- When you read God’s Word, you must constantly be saying to yourself, “It is talking to me, and about me.”
- Our life always expresses the result of our dominant thoughts.
- You cannot have the truth in such a way that you catch it, but only in such a way that it catches you.
- People demand freedom of speech as a compensation for the freedom of thought which they seldom use.
- Faith is the highest passion in a human being. Many in every generation may not come that far, but none comes further.
- The tyrant dies and his rule is over, the martyr dies and his rule begins.
- It is so hard to believe because it is so hard to obey.
- The self-assured believer is a greater sinner in the eyes of God than the troubled disbeliever.



Søren Kierkegaard,
1813-1855

Kierkegaard used the testing of Abraham as the subject for his work, *Fear and Trembling* (1843). When you read the Bible like this, Christianity is—as [Ellen Vaughn](#) says—“Alive, dangerous, and exciting.” *Fear and Trembling* was praised as the lynchpin of the [existentialist movement](#), and Kierkegaard is recognized as the first existentialist philosopher. Actually I find that to be a bit ironic in that the starting point for existentialism is the *individual*, and the essence of Christianity is

subrogation of the individual for the benefit of others. That a theologian would be the father of existentialism seems absurd. Those philosophers and writers who followed—whether they accepted the existentialist label or not (Kierkegaard never heard the word ‘existentialism’)—were largely self-absorbed and cynical.

Not that I have any credentials to argue the points, but I prefer the hard-hitting, crisp analytic philosophy of a [William Lane Craig](#) to the continental philosophy of the existentialists. (Apologies for making such a pretentious statement, I *do* change my own oil.) But...we don’t have to agree with everything that someone else believes to find really good material to support our personal discipleship.

Kierkegaard was constantly at odds with the church, relentlessly criticizing the effects of ‘Christendom’ on Christianity. He argued that, “The idea of congregations keeps individuals as children since Christians are disinclined from taking the initiative to take responsibility for their own relation to God.”^[1] While I’m all for congregations (more importantly congregations

were modeled for us throughout the New Testament), I do get what Kierkegaard was fighting against—and for.

“Kierkegaard perceived among his fellow Christians a kind of complacency, an assumption that faith was something easy—it was something that one is simply born into, really, by virtue of growing up in a nominally Christian society and perhaps going to church and going through the motions of being a Christian. And Kierkegaard wants to challenge that kind of complacency—the assumption that people had that they were already Christians—because Kierkegaard thinks that assumption is something that blocks the project of becoming a Christian. If you think you’re one already you don’t think it’s something that’s any kind of existential task. So Kierkegaard is trying to unsettle people who might have had a fairly uncritical, unquestioning acceptance of the story of Abraham.”
[Claire Carlisle on Kierkegaard’s Fear and Trembling](#)

To write Kierkegaard off as a sour, ax-grinding philosopher and theologian would be to miss some great thinking about the value of personal discipleship (the actual subject of this post). At the risk of cherry picking his work, we could all benefit from working a little harder at imagining what is really happening in the verses that span the pages of our Bible. Or as the Apostle Paul wrote, we are called to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. It involves work, and it’s not merely a run-on suggestion.

Enjoy!

HT: [Travis Simone](#)

Personal Discipleship



The Life Line by Winslow Homer, 1884

Personal discipleship has been a lifeline for me between what had become a comfortable and complacent Christian experience, and one that became vibrant, exciting, and very real.

If you search for “personal discipleship” on the Internet, you’ll find a variety of not-very-standardized definitions. So up front, here’s my homegrown definition: personal discipleship is the process in which a believer or seeker takes personal responsibility for investigating the claims and content of the Bible.

While we all appreciate hearing a well-turned sermon in a moving worship service, sitting in a pew is a passive experience. None of us would get very far academically if all we ever did was attend lectures. We have to read,

study, work some problems through, write, engage others in discussion, apply ourselves, and prepare to be tested. And so it is with our faith.

Kierkegaard argued that Christians should take the initiative to work out our own relationship to God.^[1] But this wasn’t Kierkegaard’s original idea, it came from the Apostle Paul.

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or questioning,”
Philippians 2:12-14 (ESV)

Here the more literal ESV translation of the text leads to great doctrine. This is not the Talmud instructing students to “Find thyself a teacher.” It’s the author of half the New Testament telling disciples to **work** out our **own** salvation with fear and trembling. Not to make up our ideas of God, but to reverently and humbly work on our relationship with him. Not to have anyone do the work for us, but to do it ourselves.

If you want a good example of personal discipleship, listen to the Mini Bible College lessons where Dick Woodward talks about his father. Dick vividly remembers his dad sitting in a rocking chair studying Peloubet’s select notes on the International Lessons in the 1930’s. During the Depression Dick and his siblings paid \$1.25 per copy for their father to have these commentaries to help him teach Sunday School. While he rocked and read, Dick’s father repeatedly exclaimed, “Oh this is wonderful...oh, this is so wonderful!” Those

exclamations made an impression upon Dick that was ultimately passed from generation to generation in the Woodward family.



Advertisement for Edison Mazda Lamps by Norman Rockwell, 1920

And they made an impression upon me. That’s exactly how I feel when I study the Scriptures. When I asked Dick what triggered his father’s interest in the Scriptures he said, “No one would take him seriously when he said he wanted to study the Bible.” Ultimately Dick concludes, “God showed up.” I wish I understood the providence of God well enough to better understand this profound reality, but all I can do is say I think I know exactly

how he felt. (Maybe if we ask nicely Dick might write a related post on [his blog](#).)

Personal discipleship is like playing a musical instrument. It takes work and perseverance to produce something good, but for those who are willing to put in the time, the results can be amazing. After a little initial effort, things start coming together—like music. Then

instead of studying the Bible passively, you get hooked and can’t wait for a quiet time.

The Coming Evangelical Collapse

(I should probably quit writing at this point, but there is pressure to meet Clarke’s *Saturday Evening Post* content standards so here we go.)

Recently I listened to a Reasonable Faith podcast entitled *The Coming Evangelical Collapse*, in which the topic was a provocative [essay by Michael Spencer](#) predicting a “major collapse of evangelical Christianity” within ten years. For many of us, such a collapse would be quite disappointing to say the least. But listen (below) to what William Lane Craig and Kevin Harris have to say in reply to the essay.



“I am deeply concerned with the superficiality that exists in the evangelical church. My colleague J.P. Moreland has called this ‘empty selves,’ and he describes in his book [Love Your God With All Your Mind](#), the kind of church that we seem to be building in the evangelical community—a church that is filled with what he called empty selves—people who are non-reflective, who don’t value the interior life of the mind, who are sensate and go for pictures and visual arts and music rather than intellectual reflection and study and careful discipleship. And I do think that J.P. is right when he says that a church which is filled with these empty selves will be a church that is impotent to resist the encroachment of secular culture, and will ultimately accommodate itself to secular culture. Moreland predicts that in the next generation this kind of church

will become its own gravedigger, because through its accommodation to secular culture it will become indistinguishable from it.

...It is the burden of this ministry to provide an intellectually credible and articulate voice for biblical Christianity in the public arena and to train Christians to be similar, articulate and intelligent defenders of the Christian faith.”

William Lane Craig, *The Coming Evangelical Collapse* podcast

Good apologists do not deny problems, but *work* instead to attack them. Their answer is not to make church more attractive, but to promote **personal discipleship**—to help prepare each of us to be “intelligent defenders of the Christian faith.” I am pleased to report; personal discipleship has a huge payoff.

HT: Dick Woodward



Why I Believe

“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,”
1 Peter 3:15, NIV

So why do *I* believe? **Because the more I study, the more it all makes sense, and the more I find veracity in the wonderment of the Scriptures. That veracity substantiates Christ as Lord.**



Eiffel Tower Carousel, 2009

Personally, coming to faith is a lot easier if you're somewhat of a thinker. For example, take a moment to study the above photograph. How much do you see?

People, a carousel, an interesting vignette? A mother caring for her infant, an artist sketching a little girl, a father holding his small son on the ride, a man taking a picture of the Eiffel Tower at nightfall, people out in the late spring air? Go a little deeper. A street-corner amusement ride, yellow horses, lights, inertia, centripetal motion, commerce? A woman enjoying a chocolate gelato—thermodynamics? Barely scratching the surface. A woman wearing a Palestinian scarf—the struggles of displaced people. What about the sounds and smells? Music, emotion, soulful awareness? A bunch of energy holding together particles interacting with their environment bound by the laws of the physical sciences bathed in photons? All of this is happening in three-dimensional space and time. Deeper still. What might each of these people be thinking and feeling? Love, loneliness, heartache, guilt, helplessness, grief, a moment's rest, *joy*? Now we're getting somewhere.

Two overarching questions:

1. *Where did all of that come from, and*
2. *Why is it there?*

Intellectually speaking, this is where a lot of people just stay on the merry-go-round. For whatever reasons they get lazy or distracted in their thinking and just try to enjoy the ride. But that approach to life ultimately leads to the back end of where you were.

Conversely, if you think that picture through to a logical conclusion you can find Jesus Christ. If you want to check the underpinnings of my faith, go to the [Kaqexeb](#)

[page](#) of the [Veracity blog](#) and start reading. I would recommend beginning with the [Judge for Yourself](#) post because it frames some really interesting facts that support Scripture, and because it challenges you to think about your burden of proof. Specifically, it may be important to check your biases with objectivity.

But if you want me to give a reason for the hope that I have, here are just 50 of the reasons (in bulleted form).

Observation and Science

1. The universe is far too finely tuned to be anything less than divinely created.
2. Recent discoveries about subatomic particles continue to demonstrate this amazing fine tuning.
3. The Big Bang is a scientifically verifiable, widely accepted event. (How light and radiation from distant planets, stars, and galaxies are analyzed to support the creation accounts in the Book of Genesis and the Book of Job is a fascinating study indeed.)
4. The Big Bang Creation demands a Creator.
5. Our universe could not have come into being without intelligent design.
6. Science and Faith are completely—actually wondrously—compatible.
7. Genetics supports the biblical accounts about the history of the human race.
8. God is still creating wonders in the heavens. A simple Internet search on discoveries from deep space quickly leads to an undeniable realization that God is indeed more awesome than we can begin to imagine.
9. If you need reasons to believe, check out Reasons To Believe. (These folks are *very* smart, and quite kind and wise in their approach to apologetics.) Christianity is not for dummies.

Archaeological & Historical Evidence (the Bible is tied to the ground—it didn't happen in a fairy tale)

10. The blood red moon in Acts 2.
11. The tomb is indeed empty.
12. The Erastus Inscription.
13. The Carcer (Mamertine) prison. I have had the privilege of standing in this dungeon.
14. Catacomb uncovered with the image of Peter in Mamertine.
15. The Bema in Corinth, the Synagogue in Corinth, the Gallio Inscription.
16. Peter's house and other archaeological discoveries in Capernaum.
17. Machaerus.
18. The Temple Mount and the City of David.
19. Extra-Biblical accounts: Josephus, Tacitus, Thallus, Pliny the Younger, the Talmud, Lucian.
20. Discovery of the Pool of Siloam.
21. Hezekiah's tunnel.
22. The Golden Gate.
23. Luke's "Politarchs".
24. Archaeoastronomy—mathematical and astronomical explanations of the Star of Bethlehem? Check out Rick Larson's explanation. Even if you don't accept Larson's explanation—which I do—it does throw open the door to astronomical possibilities.

The Bible

25. God reveals himself in Scripture (Special Revelation) and nature (General Revelation) as stated in the Belgic confession, and by the Apostle Paul in Romans 1:20, and by David in Psalms 19.
26. The Bible was written by 40 inspired authors over 1,500 years—far too great a span for a conspiracy.
27. The New Testament builds historically upon the events recorded in the Old Testament. The New Testament authors, and Jesus himself, quote heavily from the Old

Testament Scriptures. Jesus' cry on the cross "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" is an Aramaic translation of the words in Psalms 22. The two testaments are inextricably linked.

28. So very much of what is recorded in the Bible deprecates the authors and pillars of the faith. Their shortcomings, self-centeredness, poor judgment, and treachery are painfully recorded—not as with heroes in other ancient literature. The first century church was so inept that apart from God it could not have survived.
29. Among ancient documents the Bible has no peers in terms of manuscript evidence.
30. The accuracy of the Scriptures is being studied and quantified by the Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts. Their findings demonstrate a very high degree of reliability through Textual Criticism.
31. The Dead Sea Scrolls demonstrated amazing accuracy in the reproduction of Old Testament manuscripts, providing manuscripts that were 1,000 years older than anything that had been seen previously by modern man.
32. Paul's words in 2 Timothy, and his enduring suffering (recorded by Luke and others) only make sense if indeed he "knew whom he has believed."

Logic, Faith, and the Veracity of Scripture

33. Too much Scripture is written contrary to our worldview for the Bible to be made up. If the writers wanted to appeal to our sense of self this isn't the way they would have done it.
34. The Ascension was not enough—it takes God before us and God within us.
35. Jesus never promised us earthly rewards—in fact he taught the opposite.
36. The unlikelihood of Saul becoming Paul and being accepted first by the early Jerusalem church, then as the super-apostle.

37. Jesus also came down very hard on his followers. Nowhere is he making a sales pitch. The Bible is not written as an attractional document.
38. Jesus said that if we didn't believe him, we should believe the miracles. How long would it take to discredit him on that statement if he didn't deliver? Likewise, consider why he said to believe the miracles (to give credit to the Father—another central tenet of Jesus Christ).
39. God has a purpose for our lives. For reasons only he knows, God wants a relationship with us, his creatures.
40. God calls us to service in this life *and* beyond.
41. God values sincerity. Rather than make us all robots, he gave us free will. As difficult and painful as it can be to accept evil and suffering, it makes sense in the context of sincere love and a bigger picture than what we can see and understand here and now.
42. God played by his own rules, suffering torture by Roman crucifixion to prove his love for us.
43. God works by processes.
44. The entire focus of the Christian faith is on *others*, not on self.
45. The price Paul was willing to pay for his faith. His willingness to suffer so much for so long proves his motivation. This suffering was widely recorded by others, not just Paul.
46. The fate of the apostles.

Prophecies (events in Scripture happened according to God's plan, which he made known in advance)

47. The blood-red moon in Acts 2, prophesied by Joel.
48. Daniel prophesied the year that Jesus would be crucified. Other facts lead to a crucifixion date of Friday, April 3rd, 33 AD.
49. Jesus' unique fulfillment of prophecy.
50. Here's a list of key Old Testament Prophecies and their New Testament fulfillment.

That should provide plenty of material for starters.

Enjoy!



So What Now?

If you've made it to this point you might have more than a passing interest in the Christian faith—and a better appreciation for what can be accomplished with a little personal discipleship. As you may have noticed along the way, Tim Keller is right—you cannot be a Christian without using your brain to its uttermost. This is heady stuff, **but you don't have to pass an intelligence test to appreciate how much God loves you.** Nevertheless, if your faith is challenged on an intellectual basis, you've got lots of material to make your case.

We pray that you will discover the same joy that we have found by putting the pieces together along a path of personal discipleship, and we hope that you will follow the Veracity blog at <http://sharedveracity.net> and explore the abundance of materials that corroborate the Bible.

You certainly *can* have confidence in Jesus Christ (and in presenting Him to others). As a matter of fact He's the *only* person you can completely trust. But figuring out how much we can trust Him is only the beginning. Ultimately we have to act upon that trust. Everything hangs in the balance.

Drop us a comment on the blog. We'd love to hear from you.

Chi Rho!

