

WHAT Do You BELIEVE?

WHY Do You BELIEVE It?

ALBERT JAMES DAGER

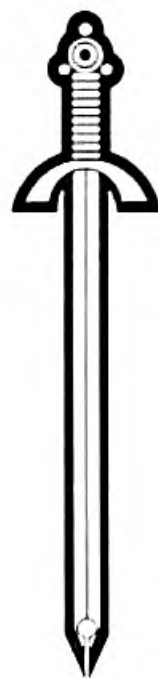
What Do You Believe?

WHY DO YOU BELIEVE IT?

A Challenge to All Religious and Non-religious People
to Examine the Validity of Their Belief Systems

by

Albert James Dager



SWORD PUBLISHERS

Redmond, Washington

Sword Publishers is a division of Media Spotlight Ministries

Cover Art by
Erik Boucher

First Printing November, 2004
Second Printing November, 2007

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Sword Publishers
P.O. Box 290
Redmond, WA 98073-0290

www.swordpublishers.com
www.mediaspotlight.org

Library of Congress Control Number: 2004093558
Trade edition ISBN 0-9626632-3-9

Dedicated to Jean, my wife and faithful companion.

Thanks also to the many friends who have helped in so many ways.

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Introduction

In the universe of ideas—especially religious ideas—everyone has an opinion. There was a time, prior to the invention of the mass communications media and speedy worldwide travel, that religion and philosophy were somewhat confined to particular cultures, engaging one another on a limited basis through difficult and slow travel over land and sea. Within the past century especially, rapid transportation and the influence of the mass communications media have created a climate wherein every form of belief has found itself vying for the attention of many people across cultural and geographic lines. And while strong efforts are under way to bring about a unifying of the world's population for the sake of peace, the fact remains that one's religious and/or philosophical beliefs are integral to one's personal identity.

Many will die for their religious beliefs; many will separate from their families; many will sacrifice their jobs or other means of temporal security; some will even kill

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for their religious cause. Yet few can offer a reasoned explanation for why they believe what they believe, and what drives them to an impassioned defense of their beliefs.

Most people believe what they believe not because of objective, irrefutable evidence, but because of an emotional attachment to their belief system for any number of reasons, such as links to family or friends, or because their beliefs meet certain perceived needs.

The world's five major religions constitute the bulk of humanity's belief systems. These are Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam. Apart from the many nature-centered religions there are few religious systems of any significance that are not traced at least in part to these five. Within each are various sects often at odds with each other.

All the world's major religions have their subsets and sects-within-sects. For example, Christianity is fractured into many diverse disciplines whose religious traditions revolve around a person named Jesus who lived in the Middle Eastern province of Judea some two thousand years ago. Judaism is fractured into several sects which adhere in varying degrees to the ancient wisdom of Hebrew prophets and rabbis, or teachers. Islam is fractured into various sects that view the writings of their prophet, Muhammad, as the primary guiding source for truth, but who are more or less militant in their application of his teachings. Buddhism and Hinduism are likewise fractured into various sects which adhere to the teachings of their particular gurus who cannot agree on every issue of their basic philosophy. Even the non-religious people of the world have their own peculiar way of looking at reality. Out of this mishmash of ideological posturing one would expect to find the truth. Who is right, and who is wrong?

WHAT IS TRUTH?

The eternal question, “What is truth?” was asked of Jesus by Pontius Pilate, the Roman prefect who oversaw the Roman Empire’s rule in Judea at the time Jesus walked the earth. Skeptics still ask this question today. In some respects it is understandable that skeptics would arise in the face of so many philosophies and religions that claim to possess the truth. With all those voices clamoring for the attention of over six billion people, it’s confusing to anyone trying to sort things out for himself.

If there is such a thing as objective truth—reality for reality’s sake, regardless of what men think—then obviously not every religious or philosophical tradition can be true. All may be false, assuming that objective truth about God, man, and nature has thus far eluded mankind, but only one can be true if, in fact, that objective truth has been revealed to mankind. The question is, has it been revealed to mankind? If so, which religious or philosophical position contains that revelation?

It is not my purpose to outline all the world’s belief systems and compare them tenet for tenet. Rather, it is to cause those who read this book to think objectively about what they believe, and to examine in their hearts why they believe what they believe. This must assume honesty on the part of the reader—an honesty that is willing to give up everything and everyone that stands in the way of following the truth.

Why is this important? Because if objective truth (not merely temporal facts) exists, then that objective truth transcends our human experience. In that case there is a high probability that there exists a realm outside of this physical universe—a realm which mankind calls “spirit.” Within that realm must lie a higher purpose to life than we can experience through our five senses. And if there is a

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higher purpose to life, then we must discover life's objective truth in order to fulfill that purpose.

Before we can embark on our quest for truth, we must first of all establish whether or not there is such a thing as objective truth—truth that exists on its own apart from the subjective reasoning of men. Is it possible that things are as they are regardless of how you or I think they are? To know the answer it is necessary to offer absolute proof one way or the other.

Through the ages skeptics have arisen who question the reality of truth. They say that truth is relative to what one perceives it to be; everyone has his own truth, and no one's truth is superior to anyone else's truth. To them I would say, "Prove it."

But no less would I say "Prove it" to those who insist that there is objective truth. How do you know that what you believe is true unless you can prove it to be true? As we address these questions let us keep in mind that we are speaking of truth as it relates to philosophy and religion. This is in contrast to temporal facts observable through the physical senses. Temporal facts are temporal facts: grass is green, or, more properly, emits the green portion of the light spectrum as it reflects sunlight (if it is properly cared for). This is true regardless of how one may view it through shaded glasses, or how one perceives it due to color-blindness, or what name other than "green" one labels the particular spectrum color. It is what it is regardless of how you or I perceive it.

On the other hand, the search for truth through philosophy and religion deals with issues of life (present and eternal) and living (how people behave themselves toward others and their own god, regardless of whom they perceive their god to be—if a god even exists).

I

Relativism

Let us first address the belief that truth is relative, that there is no such thing as objective truth. To do this we must use reason. If someone does not believe in reason there is no use even trying to convince him of anything; he is stuck in neutral trying to head uphill. For those who are reasonable, but who believe that truth is relative, again we say, “Prove it.” As well, we ask, “Why do you believe that?”

Do you know where the idea of relativism started? Do you know the character of those who earlier proposed the concept?

Historically, the first clear statement of relativism was posited by the Greek sophist, Protagoras, as quoted by Plato: “The way things appear to me, in that way they exist for me; and the way things appear to you, in that way they exist for you” (*Theaetetus* 152a).

What Protagoras was saying is that there is no objective truth apart from how every individual sees things. If this is

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so, then that concept itself is an objective truth, which disproves the concept at the outset.

The best a relativist can say about his belief is that he **thinks** it's true, but cannot say for sure. Otherwise he would be stating an objective truth by saying it's true. Actually, by even saying he **thinks** what he believes is true, he's making an objective statement. Thus, a true relativist can make no definite statement about anything.

In the early 1960s, I had occasion in my work at a bookstore to speak to a customer who was a relativist. He and his wife insisted that there is no such thing as objective truth. As much as I tried, I couldn't get them to acknowledge that objective truth is a reality.

Finally, I said to the man, "Then what you're saying is that you can't be sure of anything."

To this he responded, "That's right." My logical next question incensed him: "Are you sure?"

He had no answer, but accused me of trapping him. His wife at least suggested that perhaps I had hit on something they had never considered, and that they should think about it. In spite of her rational suggestion, he left angry and frustrated.

In the area of reason it is impossible to state empirically that there is no such thing as objective truth, for in doing so one acknowledges that what he believes is itself an objective truth. Again, the best he can say is that he **thinks** that what he believes or says is true. But if that is the best he can offer, why should anyone accept his philosophy?

If you are one who thinks that objective truth does not exist, then you have no rational ground upon which to stand. You have bought into the philosophy of Protagoras, and you never even knew the man! Why do you believe him? Because he was a brilliant philosopher? So were, and are, others who disagreed with him throughout the centuries.

Regardless of how many others throughout the centuries have chosen to believe Protagoras, they have done so on no other basis than their subjective reasoning. There is no empirical evidence to suggest that Protagoras was right. In fact, the evidence suggests otherwise: to believe that there is no such thing as objective truth is to believe in nothing. And if one believes in nothing, one has no business trying to convince others that he is right. How can he be right if he doesn't believe in anything being right?

Whether or not the believer in objective truth is right or wrong in the thing he believes, at least he can confidently say, "It's true." But the one who denies the reality of objective truth can only say about what he believes, "I don't know if it's true or not, but that's what I choose to believe." Anyone who follows him is chasing rainbows, never able to find the pot of gold—truth—at the end.

Those who wish to continue in the irrational belief system of relativism reveal an irrational mindset regardless of how wise or intelligent they may think they are.

I would ask them, "Are you really intelligent, or do you only think you're intelligent?" If they answer, "I am intelligent," then that's an absolute, and it destroys their premise that there are no absolutes.

Unless they are willing to objectively examine their own beliefs we must leave them to their own devices.

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What Do You Believe?

Everyone believes something. No one doesn't believe anything. When it comes to religion, even those who say they do not believe in God are religious. Their very conviction that God does not exist forms the basis for everything they do and say. They may not go to a church building to express their beliefs, but they gather in some form of fellowship with others of like mind. These gatherings are support groups which help the unbeliever focus his spiritual (or he may say "soul") energy into channels that assuage his conscience and help him maintain his beliefs.

Among those who say there is no God, some claim they are atheists and others claim they are agnostics.

Atheists make the unequivocal claim that "there is no God," period. They do not believe in any form of supreme being and insist that the only thing they believe in is pure science. However, science continues to reinvent itself as man discovers more and more about the secrets of the

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universe. Much of what science claimed to be true one hundred years ago has been disproven.

When pressed for evidence of his conviction, the atheist will take the defensive by insisting that his challenger prove that God exists. Since it is impossible by normal human effort to prove God exists, the atheist feels he has successfully established his own position. However, he has not proven his position any more than the religious person has proven his position.

The truth is, the atheist can no more prove that God does **not** exist than human effort can prove that God **does** exist. In the final analysis there is really no such thing as an atheist, because the best the atheist can say is that he doesn't know if God exists, being unable to prove his stated position. Thus, the atheist must really place himself in the category of one who doesn't know whether or not God exists. He is really an agnostic.

The word "agnostic" comes from the Greek "*a*" (without) and "*gnosis*" (knowledge). Agnostics are without knowledge that God exists. They believe there is no way of proving God exists, nor can they prove that God does not exist, but they are honest enough to say that they just don't know if God exists.

Interestingly, agnostics take pride in their position, unaware that the Latin equivalent of *agnostic* is *ignoramus*. No one likes to be called an *ignoramus*, but they don't mind being called an agnostic. Both mean essentially the same thing: someone who lacks knowledge.

I don't say this to denigrate the agnostic who stands by his convictions but, really, what conviction can someone have for something that cannot be established by empirical evidence? This is a legitimate question not only for the agnostic and atheist, but for those who claim to believe in God in any form. There must be evidence to support one's beliefs. For even if one's beliefs are true, unless he can

support them by observable evidence his “faith” is nothing more than preference for one belief system over all others.

The myriad religions that exist throughout the world attest to the fact that most people believe in a god in some form or another. Some believe in many gods.

Religion is largely tied to given societies. Often, one cannot reject his societal religion without tearing himself away from that society at a high cost. For example, Judaism exacts a stiff penalty for anyone who becomes a believer in Jesus Christ. Among some Jews funerals are held for family members who convert to Christianity. They are considered dead. Muslims have been known to kill even members of their own families and others who convert to Christianity. In some largely Christian societies there is a price to be paid for straying from the national religion, most notably in societies where Roman Catholicism is dominant. In some Catholic countries, non-Catholic Christians are still persecuted to varying degrees for their faith. And while killing them today is rare, there was a time in history when the Roman Catholic Church administered horrible deaths to Christians who rejected the pope’s authority.

On the other side, certain sects of Protestantism have persecuted Catholics as well as other Christians who refused to submit to the dictates of those sects’ religious systems.

Islam is constantly at war with other religions throughout the world—even among Muslims of different sects. Hindus and Buddhists wage war with one another in spite of their similarities.

Religion has been a major factor in many wars, and no major religion can claim immunity from the guilt. While they all proclaim some form of peace, love and spiritual enlightenment, the end product of their religious systems has often been destruction, or at least alienation, of others. This has occurred even among different sects within the same religion.

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This isn't to say that all religious people, or even religious leaders, are evil. Most abhor the violence enacted in the name of their religion. But it is to say that the very nature of religion is to instill within the hearts and minds of the faithful a fervor that engenders strife. And there are sufficient numbers of people within every religious discipline who are prone to violence.

The real problem arises when religious leaders promote or encourage violence, or at the least remain silent in the face of their violent adherents. Just as wars are not generated by the rank-and-file members of a nation, with the exception of internal rebellion, so religious wars are not generated by the rank-and-file members of religions. People are moved to wars by their leaders who appeal to the alleged ideological superiority of their particular beliefs. Others are seen as a threat to those beliefs, or as people to be conquered in order to be brought under the rule of those beliefs (really, under the rule of the leaders).

So while there are factions within every religion that promote the wellbeing of others, there are also factions within every religion which seek to dominate others, even to wreak violence upon others. The point is that religion does not guarantee benevolence, and the many factions within each religion demonstrate the unreliability of religion to present truth. In that regard there is little difference between religion and skepticism. Neither can present any empirical evidence to prove that it is true.

The best that religion can offer is a sense of community, and comfort in the idea (however false it may be) that there is hope for a better life either in the future here on earth, or in an otherworldly realm vaguely defined as "heaven," "paradise," "nirvana," "the happy-hunting grounds," or some other appellation. Skepticism, of course, differs in that it offers no such hope. Even so, one can rely on religion no more than on skepticism as a reliable source for truth.

We may add to the five major religions various offshoots and modifications which go by many names. Yet, apart from paganism, all find their roots in one of the five major religions. Which of these do you believe? More importantly, why do you believe it?

3

Why Do You Believe It?

Now, for those who at least believe that there is such a thing as objective truth, let us posit some questions that require objective answers: Why should I believe what you say is true? What empirical, or observable, irrefutable evidence can you offer to prove that your belief system is true? Of course, you may ask the same of me. And if you are patient enough to first endure my inquiry into your beliefs I will answer you. What you do with my answer is up to you; you may accept my reasons or reject them. Just be sure you know why you accept or reject them. I have already faced the challenge I am presenting here, so I am comfortable in presenting that challenge to others. Let us start by addressing the major reasons why people believe what they believe.

I WAS BORN INTO MY BELIEF SYSTEM

“I was born a Catholic (Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Mormon, etc.) and I’ll die a (fill in the blank).”

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Why?

“Because.”

Why, “Because”?

“Because I want to be a (fill in the blank). I take it on faith.”

What is faith? And whose faith are you relying upon?

“The Bible (Qur’an, Bhagava Gita, Book of Mormon, etc.) says so.”

Who wrote that book? What makes him/them right?

“The founders/teachers of my religion were given the book by God. It makes sense to me. It seems reasonable.”

Relativism makes sense to others. And every religion makes sense to its adherents. Because something makes sense or seems reasonable does not make it true. What proof do you have that your religion’s “sacred book” came from God?

“It is a highly spiritual book that appeals to the loftiest ideals of mankind.”

So do virtually all spiritual writings, yet they are either silent, or disagree, on the most important issue: your afterlife. Which, then, is true?

“I believe mine is true because it makes sense. I have faith to believe it.”

Fine, but that is no proof to either me or yourself that your religion is true, particularly since people of all religious persuasions could answer the same way.

You can see where this line of questioning can lead: either to a dead end, or to one taking stock of his reasoning processes and embarking upon the road to discovering genuine objective truth.

Arguing that one was born into one’s belief system is characteristic of the majority of those who adhere to any belief system—particularly religious belief systems. But is it sufficient reason to believe the tenets of any of those systems?

I was born into Roman Catholicism. Does that birth make Roman Catholicism “the only true church” as it claims to be? Obviously not; if it is the only true church there must be empirical evidence to support that claim. And any honest Roman Catholic will (or should) admit this.

It is precisely because it lacks empirical evidence to support its contention of being true that any religion or philosophy must indoctrinate its adherents into its unique belief system.

So what if you were born into a Baptist family? More people are born into Buddhism and into Roman Catholicism. If you hold to your traditions merely because your family held to them you are not concerned with truth but with comfort.

I am not saying you are wrong; I am saying that in order to be right with a good conscience and an honest heart you must practice your religion with the absolute knowledge that it is truth, not just because it’s your religion. You must also be able to prove it is truth. What proof do you have?

I WAS CONVERTED INTO MY BELIEF SYSTEM

Who converted you? Why did you believe him? What empirical evidence did he offer to convince you that what you now believe is true?

“It made sense to me.”

So what? Others say the same thing about their beliefs.

“I could feel it in my spirit.”

How do you know you have a spirit?

“Everyone knows you have a spirit.”

Everyone? Are you sure? How do you know you’re not just flesh and blood that one day will die and cease to exist?

“I just know.”

Many Christians say they have a witness in their spirit that they are in the truth. Does that prove that what they believe and practice is true? Mormons say they believe what

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they believe because they have a “burning in the bosom” that convinces them. How do you know they aren’t right?

“Maybe they are right.”

If so, then you are wrong. Are you sure you weren’t converted into your belief system because it just sounded good to you, or because it made you feel good and gave you a sense of security, self-worth, and/or community with others?

Feelings are subjective. While feelings may accompany one’s acceptance of objective truth, the feelings themselves are not proof of anything more than one’s soulish response to what one hears, whether or not it’s true. Everybody from every religion has the same feelings as all others from all other religions. Feelings prove nothing. They are as reliable as a broken crutch.

IT GIVES ME PEACE

Listening to some types of music can give peace. Walking in the woods or along the seashore can give peace. There are many avenues to peace. Every religion offers the prospect of peace, but they cannot all be true because they conflict with one another in so many ways. Such peace is a subjective feeling; it is not proof that what you believe is true. Nor is it an ingrained, lasting experience that transcends circumstances.

What happens when that peace is shattered by circumstances? Accidents, sickness, loss of one’s job, loss of a loved one through death or divorce shatter the peace of many. And while one’s religion may offer comfort, so may another’s religion. Yet they cannot all be true. Also, why do so many who claim to love peace become violent when confronting those with whom they disagree? Violence occurs even within the so-called “peace movement.”

Again, subjective feelings are no measure of objective truth; they may accompany either truth or error.

I HAVE SEEN GOD (LOVE, TRUTH) AT WORK

How has God (or whatever power you perceive to guide you) worked in your life? Have you been “slain in the Spirit,” healed of a sickness, experienced euphoria through the worship music of your religious community?

Experience is a major criterion for belief in virtually all religions. Many even engage their adherents in religious exercises in order to induce feelings of euphoria or an altered state of consciousness that leaves them on a spiritual high. How do you know **your** belief system is true, and others which offer the same experiences are not true? Are you judging by experience, or by some irrefutable, objective truth?

Do you believe your religion has the truth because it teaches belief in supernatural healing or, even more importantly, appears to effect such healing? So do many religions that deny the tenets of your particular belief system.

Does your religion believe in speaking in tongues? So do many Catholics, Mormons, New Agers, Hindus, and adherents to other religions, all of whom disagree on their basic tenets.

What experience do you offer to **prove** that what you believe and practice is objectively true and pleasing to the god (or any other philosophical or spiritual authority) you claim to follow?

In the final analysis experience proves nothing, for the mind is capable of self-delusion, interpreting experiences within the framework of desired consequences. One wants to be healed, and the symptoms of one’s illness disappear (at least for a time); the assumption is that one is healed. But if one believes in supernatural healing, then one must also believe in the spirit realm through which that healing allegedly occurs.

Clinical studies have demonstrated that prayer and meditation are equally effective in speeding up the healing process for the sick or injured regardless of one's belief system, who or what one prays to, or what one meditates upon.

Given the evidence that healings occur within the context of myriad diverse philosophical and religious disciplines, then reason states that truth is not necessary to the implementation of healing (or other seeming miracles, signs and wonders). This does not mean that truth is not evident in some of these phenomena; but it cannot be evident in all. So there must be other factors at work besides a God of truth.

Almost every argument for why people believe what they believe is subjective. Yet there can be only one truly objective reason for belief in any religion or philosophy. **The basis for that religion or philosophy must possess objective character that exists on its own merits apart from what any person perceives as truth.**

It's interesting that subjectivity is so often the basis for believing in something that claims objectivity.

DOES IT REALLY MATTER?

Some argue that it really doesn't matter. A familiar saying is "All paths lead to God." So if all paths lead to God, what does it matter which religion someone chooses to follow?

This claim, like all others, must be proven. If all paths lead to God, and all paths claim that God enlightened them, then the god to whom all paths lead is fractured in his own mind. He is giving different "truths" to different people. He is saying "This is what pleases me" to some, while saying something just the opposite pleases him to others. What kind of god is so doubleminded that he would act in

such a way? It is not reasonable, nor is it provable that “all paths lead to God.”

I DON'T CARE

You might say, “I don’t care about any of this; I have my religion and I’m content to remain in it.”

In that case, I would not argue with you. Remain where you are if you choose. Only consider what the consequences may be if there is a God who cares what you believe and how you live your life, even if you don’t. Eternity is a big thing on which to gamble.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Breaking down the issue of belief to the basics, people believe what they want to believe regardless of their inability to substantiate it as true. Many, if not most, believe in God because they **want** to believe in God, not because they have any proof or even reasonable evidence of His existence. Unfortunately, the god they believe in is more often than not made in an image that springs from man’s imagination, whether their own or that of their religious leaders.

How often do people say, “the god I believe in wouldn’t do” this or that? Or, “My god is a loving god,” or “a tolerant god,” or “an inclusive god.” How can they know what any god would or wouldn’t do, or how “loving,” “tolerant” or “inclusive” he (or she by some accounts) may be if they don’t know intimately the god they profess to believe in?

In such cases the god professed is the god desired. And most people desire a god who thinks and would judge matters as they think and judge matters.

Yet how do they even know a god exists unless they have some empirical proof of His existence—proof beyond their own subjective reasoning or innate desire to believe in something beyond themselves?

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Does God exist? Or are we really left to fend for ourselves in a bleak, meaningless universe? In view of all the conflicting theories and claims of so many religions, could the skeptics be right after all?

4

Does God Exist?

The bottom line of all philosophy is the attempt to postulate reasons for existence and/or to establish whether or not God, or gods, exist. One cannot be a skeptic and at the same time believe in God or anything else apart from what he can observe through his natural senses. But while one's natural senses may usually be trustworthy in addressing the physical universe, they cannot be trusted for assessing spiritual truth.

That is why the skeptic cannot believe in objective truth beyond what his senses tell him. He assumes (subjectively) that man is the highest form of life in the universe (with the possible exception of "aliens" from other planets in other star systems). If man is the highest form of life in the universe (or at least on the earth), then man can determine for himself what he wants his truth to be. In essence, man becomes his own god (which is a tenet of more than one philosophy). Therefore, all forms of "truth" are equal to one another.

Yet, while some insist that all beliefs are equal to one another, even the axiom, “All truth is God’s truth,” cannot be true, because it is predicated upon subjective reasoning (which is nothing more than personal opinion), not upon any empirically provable, objective truth. The equation falls apart when someone else’s “truth” comes into conflict with the “truth” of the believer in subjective truth. If one’s “truth” is that robbing the believer in subjective truth is perfectly alright, his victim would be offended. And if the victim’s “truth” is true, then mankind is at best left to his own devices for determining how his life will be governed. It doesn’t take great intelligence to see the anarchy and chaos that would arise (and has arisen) under these terms.

However, this does not prove the existence of God or any other entity that may be superior to mankind and who may set the rules by which the human race must live. Perhaps religion really is just an invention of man for the purpose of controlling society and perpetuating hierarchical authority. After all, virtually every society throughout history has predicated its moral judgments upon a religious foundation, however true or false that foundation may be.

Ancient Greek philosophy aside, skepticism really gained worldwide popularity only as late as the middle of the nineteenth century, although it had found fertile ground as early as the seventeenth century. It was when books began to be published on a wide scale, and the common man was able to read for himself, that skepticism gained sufficient adherents to influence society. Up until that time there were few non-religious people; skepticism was not a viable force. Still, there were obviously a sufficient number of people ready to receive that new “truth” as evidenced by its spread among the formerly religious communities of Europe and the United States.

With the publishing of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* in 1859, many in the scientific world embraced the idea that

man exists as the product of “natural selection,” through “survival of the fittest.” Even today, after many of Darwin’s theories have been proven erroneous, his evolutionary theory is stated as a matter of fact not only in scientific journals, but in the mainstream press and both public and private education. It is not unusual for the mainstream media to feature articles and commentaries dealing with archaeology or paleontology written as if evolution were an established fact rather than a still unproven theory. Statements such as, “When man’s ancestral primates came down from the trees...” abound as if they are not even subject to question. Yet there has been no indisputable evidence to prove the theory of evolution. Even if evolution were a fact, such treatment of it is dishonest until it is proven to be a fact.

What has caused mankind to largely accept the atheistic/agnostic skepticism of evolution and subjective “truth” while still claiming to be religious and to believe in a god or gods? Could it be that in their hearts the majority of mankind wants the best of both worlds: to believe that a god exists so that man can have the assurance of eternal life or some form of existence in the hereafter, yet be free to live his life as he pleases without having to answer to the god in whom he professes to believe?

So we are still left with the question: does God exist? And if He does, what is the basis of proof for His existence? Or has He left us clueless?

5

Nature

Men often point to nature as proof of God's existence. How can anything as intricately designed as the universe, from the microcosm to the macrocosm, not be the product of a superior being? Jews and Christians quote the Bible:

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the skies show His workmanship. (Psalms 19:1)

It must be admitted by even the skeptic that the balance of nature is incredible. Life on earth would cease to exist were it not for billions upon billions of factors which operate in perfect balance with incredibly minor margins for allowable error. Could this be the product of blind chance?

The odds for that are astronomical. In spite of some trying to put numbers to the odds, there are no numbers sufficient. The best analogy I've heard for the odds of this happening would be that of an explosion in a print shop

producing a perfect copy of any edition of *Webster's Dictionary*—with nothing left over!

In spite of the obvious design of nature, secularists have succeeded in convincing many that creation is the product of blind chance through the process of evolution. The evolutionary model rests largely upon the theories of Charles Darwin in spite of the fact that some of the most staunch proponents of evolution find problems with his theory.

Even Michael Denton, an agnostic medical researcher and author of *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* (Bethesda, Md.: Adler and Adler, 1985) has many problems with Darwinian evolution as it currently exists. He critiques the evolutionary theory with evidence from the fossil record, molecular biology, and other sciences. There are many secular scientists who do not accept Darwinian evolution, yet Darwin stands at the center of public education on the subject of man's origins. This at least proves that the jury is still out on a subject that is taught as fact when nature itself presents evidence of intelligent design.

Yet while nature may offer physical evidence of God's existence, it does not, in itself, give details of His character.

If God exists, ultimately only He can prove His existence. To do that He would have to communicate with man directly. Here we have another problem.

Many men have claimed to speak for God. They tell us that God told them what they are to tell us. Elaborate religious systems exist for that purpose. But how and why should we believe them? Is this not the dilemma caused by the world's religions? Which are we to believe and why?

6

Religion

Religion offers much comfort to people. It offers a sense of community, a sense of belonging to something greater than oneself. Many lifelong friendships are established in religious institutions. The leaders of those institutions are often kind, caring people who command respect from their constituents. It is not my intent to denigrate those people, or to call into question their motives. But while there are many positive elements to religion (particularly from a human standpoint), there is also a dark side to religion. That dark side has less to do with religious people than it does with the nature of religion itself.

The world recognizes what it calls “holy men” and “sacred texts” on the basis of nothing more than accepting what they call themselves or others call them. What makes a person a “holy man,” or a writing a “sacred text”? Should we not be able to demand some reason beyond the subjectivity that the religions present to accredit themselves?

They may offer what seem to be reasonable instructions on how to live life, and some of their instructions, if followed, may offer a semblance of internal peace and harmony. But that still doesn't prove them to be of God; nor does it even prove that God exists apart from the figments of their own imaginations.

People follow their priests, pastors, bishops, prophets, rabbis, gurus, ministers, lamas, imams, shamans, and other religious leaders on the basis of nothing more than a blind trust that these "men of God" are telling them the truth. But each has a different "truth" to tell. And truth be told, none knows the truth—at least not fully.

They know the power that religion gives them over the minds of others. Even the most benign and serving of them is aware of that power. Some do use that power in benevolent attempts to serve the physical and spiritual needs of their charges; others abuse it to recruit spiritual slaves. Some merely find religious service an easy way to make a living. Almost all demand loyalty and financial support to retain their power. Virtually all have undergone religious training which instills a reluctance on their part to question what they've been taught at the feet of their mentors. Their religion becomes their profession and livelihood. Even the most pious may become fearful of losing the financial support that sustains them should they not tow the "party line."

Thus, it behooves these people to create elaborate religious trappings which separate them from the masses. They wear special clothing which identifies them as "clergy" or "holy men." They build grand palaces called cathedrals, churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, or what have you, in which they engage in rituals of their own making in order to impress their adherents. Yet they are merely flesh and blood, subject to the same failures as ordinary men over whom they wield their power. Witness

the scandals that have arisen within the ranks of the hierarchies of every religion.

In view of the manner in which those scandals are swept under the rug, and the evils that are allowed to continue in spite of the detriment to the religion's adherents, it becomes obvious that the institutions do not exist for the benefit of the people, but that the people are manipulated for the benefit of the institutions. The institutions are protected at the expense of the physical, psychological, financial, and, most important, spiritual well-being of the people.

Again, not all religious leaders are overtly evil; many operate with all good intentions. But they are trapped by their belief systems, and those who follow them fall into the same trap.

Obedience is paramount to the religious leaders' ability to retain their power. Thus they demand support and allegiance under the threat of God's displeasure. Fear of reprisals not only from the clergy but from God Himself keep many from escaping the bondage of their religious institutions.

I don't say these things to cast aspersion upon all religious leaders. Many are fine people with kind hearts. It is understandable that they would be loved by those under their spiritual authority. But they maintain that authority only because people give it to them, not because they possess any inherently authoritative nature within themselves. In most cases religious authority is passed down from generation to generation of people who undergo religious training in a particular theological discipline. It is institutional authority, not divinely-given authority. It may claim divine origin, but no institution can prove such origin. Institutions must rely upon a certain amount of gullibility on the part of their constituents in order to maintain their power base.

38 What Do You Believe?

By whatever name it claims its authority, religion places more emphasis on the subjective philosophies of men than it does on any objective, empirical truth.

So religion cannot prove that God exists. The claim by religious men that “God told me” is a subjective statement that cannot be substantiated apart from supernatural evidence coupled with objective truth.

7

What Do I Believe?

It is time for me to tell you what I believe and why I believe it. You may accept or reject what I offer. But you will not be able to say that there is no rational basis upon which I have established my beliefs. If you can prove that what I state is not true, then I am open to receive it. But what you offer to refute my reasoning must be based on empirical evidence that stands up at least as well as the evidence I offer for what I believe.

Regardless of the feeble attempts by men to prove that God does or doesn't exist, only God can prove that God exists (no one can prove that He doesn't exist). And only God can communicate His will to man. But has God done so apart from the "holy men" and "sacred texts" of the world's religions? The answer is "yes" and "no". Yes, He has done so through specific men and specific texts. But He has not done so through the vast majority of men or texts that claim to speak for Him. There is only one text that meets the objective criteria in its claim to be God's Word to man.

THE BIBLE

Of all the writings in the world, there is only one ancient compilation of texts that claims to be the inspired Word of God to man while offering empirical evidence to prove its claim. Some of the writings that the world's religions consider "sacred texts" may claim to be given by gods or angels, but the writings themselves offer no empirical evidence for that claim. The one compilation of ancient texts that meet these criteria is what is known within Christianity as the Bible. Still, this does not prove Christianity to be true, especially in view of all the diverse theological systems that call themselves "Christian." All of these systems' errors and foolish pandering to human weaknesses aside, the Bible stands as a beacon of not only instruction for man, but hope for eternal life.

You might think that I am presenting the religion of Christianity as the source of truth, and might rightly question why it is any better than your belief system. But I am not presenting Christianity; I am presenting evidence that there is objective truth and a God who has offered that truth to us through the writings of certain men who lived throughout history. Because Christianity uses the Bible for its own purposes (which differ according to which sect of Christianity is using it), does not negate the objective truth of the Bible or the reality of the God who gave it to us.

God is not on the side of Christianity any more than He is on the side of paganism. He is on His own side, and it is up to us to bring our lives into conformity with His will. And His will is revealed only in the sixty-six books which constitute what men call "the Bible."

Okay, I admit it. I believe that the Bible is the Word of God to man, and is the basis of proof for not only the existence of God, but for everything that pertains to living in accordance with His will.

I will prove this to you from reason and from science.

Now, when I say I will prove it from science I do not mean that there is a scientific method for proving the existence of God; were that so there would be no need for faith. Yet true faith is reasonable and does not exist in a vacuum; it is compatible with true science. When I say I will prove from science the existence of God and that the Bible is His Word to man, I mean that there are no contradictions between true science and the Bible, which reveals His existence.

Any such conflicts have been between true science and men's religious traditions loosely based on the Bible, or between the Bible and false science. An example of the former is the Roman Catholic Church's censoring of Gallileo for his support of Copernicus's conclusions that the earth revolves around the sun, and not vice-versa. Copernicus and Gallileo did not threaten the Bible, but the accepted wisdom of the Catholic Church.

An example of the latter is the theory of evolution which presents itself as science, but remains unproven and empirically unprovable.

True science is based upon empirical proofs, and is different from what is often commonly accepted as science but is really only theory and speculation.

Of course, if any writing from men is to be considered inspired by God, it must be without error in all respects; there can be no contradictions between it and true science, and there can be no contradictions among its own statements. The only way we can know if the Bible is true is if it is totally without error; otherwise we would be left to our own devices to determine which parts of it are true and which are not.

This is the dilemma in which those who lack a reasoned faith find themselves. Lacking proper understanding of the Bible they make assumptions of error within its pages, or between it and faulty reasoning by scientists, and then rely

upon their own faulty human reasoning to determine which portions they will believe and which they will not believe. This is the foundation for higher criticism which has taken root in most churches today to one degree or another.

The problem with relying upon human reasoning is the fallibility of that reasoning, which leaves us in a position similar to that of the skeptic: each man determines in his own mind what is true. But, again, we cannot all be right.

Admittedly, even with all the evidences to support the truth of the Bible, it is ultimately belief within the heart that determines one's faith. Because of an inherent self-centeredness, men tend to believe what they want to believe even in the face of indisputable evidence to the contrary. Rather than answer honestly the question that would expose their faithlessness, many answer by asking questions in return to throw off the inquirer into their unbelief. They are not willing to admit that they do not have a reasonable answer to support their untenable position.

THAT'S YOUR INTERPRETATION

One of the most common arguments against using the Bible as the source of truth from God is that everyone has their own interpretation of the Bible.

That may be true, but the problem is not with the Bible; it is with men's subjective interpretations based upon what they want to believe. Just as there is objective truth regardless of what anyone thinks is truth, so there is truth in the Bible that is not open to interpretation, but must be taken on the face value of what it says.

Why is it that no one so vehemently questions the interpretations of any book except the Bible? The unique character of this one book that causes people to argue against it without ever studying it for themselves should be a clue to its supernatural origins.

The reason people resist what the Bible clearly says is that they do not want to be held to its truths for fear they will have to alter their way of life. Well, that's true; if believed and acted upon, the Bible will alter one's way of life. But that change will be for the better. We need not fear it.

That said, let us look at the Bible from three premises which support its origins being from the mind of God: science, history, and prophecy.

All Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible, rephrased in modern English, using the Greek Received Text (*Textus Receptus*) as the main source for the rephrasing. The reason for this is that there have been concerted efforts by modern translators to change the Scriptures to be more politically correct, and/or to use so-called "inclusive language," which changes what the Scriptures said as originally written in Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic.

Many modern versions are so far off that they are virtually worthless in conveying what God gave through inspiration to the writers.

The King James Version of the Bible still stands as the benchmark for accuracy, even if much of it was influenced by the 17th-century Church of England. But much of its language has become outdated, and it is therefore difficult for some to understand. Our purpose is to remain true to the Hebrew Masoretic Text and the Greek *Textus Receptus* that formed the basis for the KJV translation, but use more current language to convey the meaning.

8

Science

Science plays an important part in determining biblical truth. The Bible contains sixty-six different writings by numerous men who lived over a span of thousands of years in ancient times. If what they say about the civilizations in which they lived is found to be false, then everything else they say about God and how He wants us to live is suspect. In spite of the best efforts of countless critics to discredit the Bible, none have been able to find any discrepancies between what it says and what science says. For example, nothing the Bible says conflicts with anything the science of archaeology has unearthed regarding the ancient civilizations which are written of. This should impress even the skeptics in view of the fact that even today's academic science texts contain significant errors. Various publishers relying upon the expertise of scientists for their instructional texts offer differing conclusions and points of view based upon scientific discoveries. Many cannot agree as to what some of those discoveries mean.

Of course, through rigorous testing using trial and error, mankind has determined some scientific absolutes that are not open to question: the rules of mathematics, the 118 known (thus far) elements that make up the universe, and all the tools needed to practice science in the first place. But there are areas where mere assumptions are often taken for scientific truth—where theories are accepted as scientific fact.

Now, the word “theory” holds two different meanings within science: (1) a body of knowledge based upon facts used to explain a particular phenomenon; (2) an unproven hypothesis within the realm of scientific inquiry. Within the field of evolution, for example, certain evidences have been used to expound theories that are not provable. The evidences themselves may be matters of fact, but the conclusions drawn are, at best, educated guesses which are called theories. To avoid confusion it would be better if the theory of evolution were called the speculation of evolution. The truth is that while the majority of today’s scientists have been persuaded that evolution is a scientific fact, many have not been so persuaded, and new evidences continually call the speculation of evolution into further question. In short, there is no empirical proof that evolution across species is a scientific fact. Yet assumptions stated as fact abound.

These are particularly found in the areas of anthropology and archaeology. It is especially within these texts that we find disagreements among scientists. Why? Because physical evidence is constantly discovered that contradicts the discrepancies and outright errors within the textbooks of these systems.

What does this have to do with the Bible? While the Bible is not specifically written as an archaeological or scientific textbook, it makes many statements about ancient civilizations, people, places, events, etc. And while the best

scientific books on archaeology contain errors regarding these things, there have never been found any such errors within the Bible.

That's not to say that the Bible contains comprehensive archaeological information. But what it does contain has never been successfully challenged as untrue. This in spite of many attempts by skeptics over the centuries to disprove the Bible. There have been accusations made that certain civilizations mentioned in the Bible did not exist because archaeology has not discovered them. But that is faulty reasoning. Because something has not been discovered does not mean it never existed. The best the skeptic can say about any undiscovered biblical sites is that they have yet to be found. And in spite of the skeptics' best efforts to disprove the Bible with these claims, new evidence is constantly being found to substantiate the Bible and refute the skeptics.

For example, skeptics have long said that there is no evidence that David, king of ancient Israel, ever existed. Thus they assigned him to the category of myth along with the legendary King Arthur of ancient Britain. But just in the month of April, 2003, a 2,800-year-old stone tablet inscribed with a passage describing the renovation of Solomon's Temple was discovered in Jerusalem. It is the first archaeological evidence outside the Bible that confirms the biblical descriptions of Solomon's dynasty and makes mention of David.

If we are to put any stock in the scientific texts that are fraught with contradictions and errors, do we not at least owe the Bible some consideration for not containing any such contradictions and errors? Is it not at least as reliable in that area as the scientific texts so readily cited by experts in the field of archaeology? And considering that it was written over a span of thousands of years by different authors, would those authors not have been closer to the

time of the civilizations of which they wrote? Indeed, they wrote of their own times.

On the first count, we find the Bible absolutely trustworthy in the area of archaeology. As for the rest of science, there have been no successful challenges to the Bible's trustworthiness there either. The Bible may speak in metaphors about nature (e.g., the sun rising and setting, when we know the earth revolves around the sun). But those metaphors are used even by scientists. No true scientist has yet found a scientific anomaly within any **literal** biblical text. And again, this in spite of attempts by skeptics throughout the centuries to do so.

9

History

Just as true science has not found any contradictions between itself and the Bible, so history as determined by credentialed historians offers no contradictions to the Bible. No historical evidence suggests that the history found in the Bible is erroneous. And just as there are errors within the scientific texts of modern man, the same can be said about history texts. This is even more so in view of the subjective nature of history as written and endorsed by the powers that be at any given time. For example, there are at least two or more histories of every war: that of the conqueror, that of the conquered, and that of outside observers. Whose is 100% correct?

Careful study on the part of historians can approximate the truth, and there are some things that are not open to question because of the preponderance of evidence. Yet even the best history texts contain discrepancies and errors due to faulty research, subjective interpretation of the evidence, or outright biased reporting. And while these may

be easily recognized by comparison of the texts of different history books, none have ever been found when comparing the Bible to the historical records of ancient civilizations. Again, that is not to say that everything in the Bible has been verified; that is a work in progress, just as archaeology and other sciences continue to unearth corroborating evidence for the Bible's reliability. But no history found within the Bible has ever been refuted.

Since it deals primarily with spiritual matters, the Bible is not primarily a compilation of scientific or historical writings. Even so, there are no contradictions between the Bible and history, or the Bible and true science.

Granted, some passages are written in an allegorical or a metaphorical vein, but these are clearly allegorical or metaphorical and are not to be taken literally.

There are many examples of metaphorical and allegorical language in the Bible. The key to understanding is first of all an honest heart on the part of the student of Scripture. If one with such a heart prays for understanding, for the purpose of learning the truth in order to follow it, God will give him understanding.

The rules for understanding Scripture are called hermeneutics. The basic rule of hermeneutics is to accept what is stated as literal unless the context clearly indicates that it is metaphor or allegory. Another rule is to keep what is said within the context of the entire message. To whom was it written; when was it written; what is the overall message; etc.? Subjectively applying human reasoning, lifting verses out of context to make Scripture conform to one's philosophical biases, or ignoring what is clearly stated in order to justify one's beliefs, produces nothing but confusion. But subjective interpretations are often used by religious leaders to convince listeners of the validity of their unique "understanding." This is what results in diverse religious sects and even destructive cults.

Where metaphor and allegory are used in the Bible, the context is clearly metaphorical or allegorical, just as we find in many writings today. But do the skeptics reject the principles found in modern (or even other ancient) writings that contain metaphor and allegory on the basis that the writings are “not scientific”? On the contrary, the skeptics often endorse those writings as containing truth.

It may be argued that just because the Bible has not been found to contain any historical or scientific error it doesn't mean it was inspired by God. Men can be accurate in these areas without God's help.

That may or may not be true. I have addressed these two areas merely to answer those who erroneously denigrate the Bible as unscientific or historically inaccurate.

But now we come to the spiritual aspect of the Bible which proves itself to be the truth of God—its total reliability in the area of prophecy: foretelling the future beyond what could reasonably be explained as predictability.

Other so-called “sacred books” may be accurate in their relating of historical events and/or descriptions of ancient civilizations, but none offer prophecy to prove their origins are from God.

True prophecy goes beyond science and predictability, and thus must have a spiritual origin. It cannot be conjured within the material realm or it would fall under the category of science. Also, it must be 100% accurate—no discrepancies are allowed (Deuteronomy 18:18-22). It must also lead the hearer to the true God alone (Deuteronomy 13:1-3).

10

Prophecy

Those who reject or even hate the Bible mock it by focusing on the genealogies (what they like to call “the begats”), in order to make the Bible appear boring. In their ignorance they do not perceive the importance of the biblical genealogies, which give historical credence to the lineage of Israel’s Messiah.

Some quote in sonorous tones God’s commands to Israel to destroy that nation’s enemies. The intent is to portray the God of the Bible as bloodthirsty, unloving and downright evil according to human standards. Again, because of their ignorance they do not perceive that God’s intent was to keep His chosen people free from the evil influences of the nations in their midst lest they become corrupted themselves and fail in their assigned task to demonstrate godliness on the earth and to keep intact the Israelite lineage of the Messiah. God takes no pleasure in destroying His enemies, and He commands His people to take no pleasure in it either (Proverbs 24:17).

At the same time they mock the Bible, its detractors downplay or outright ignore its wisdom, instructions for living, and the blessings promised to those who adhere to its words. And they do not even address the prophecies of the Bible, which prophecies give irrefutable evidence of its divine inspiration.

Fully one-fourth of all Bible verses deal with prophecy. There are thousands of prophecies that could not be the product of astute analyses of probabilities. These prophecies have to do with the rise and fall of nations, written centuries before some of those nations existed, and with the birth and role of people in history centuries before they were born. They have to do with God's intervention in the affairs of mankind—most notably the birth and life of Jesus Christ. There are hundreds of prophecies written about Jesus alone—centuries before He came to Israel—all of which have been fulfilled except those pertaining to His coming again. The odds against even five prophecies being fulfilled are astronomical. They increase exponentially with every one added. For any person to fulfill the myriad prophecies related to Jesus would be impossible except for God's hand in it, just as the odds of the "Big Bang" would be equivalent to the explosion-in-a-print-shop analogy.

HISTORICAL PROPHECIES

There are many historical sources which, although not mentioning the Bible, confirm the prophecies of the Bible. One startling example is the birth of the King of Persia, Cyrus, who was named by the prophet Isaiah over 180 years before Cyrus was born. Within the following few verses two significant prophecies were given which found their fulfillment at a later date in history.

Thus says YHWH [Yahweh], your redeemer,
and He that formed you from the womb, I am
YHWH who makes all things; who stretches forth

the heavens alone; who spreads abroad the earth by Myself; who frustrates the tokens of the liars, and makes diviners insane; who turns wise men backward, and makes their knowledge foolish; who confirms the word of His servant, and performs the counsel of His messengers; who says to Jerusalem, "You shall be inhabited"; and to the cities of Judah, "You shall be built, and I will raise up the decayed places thereof"; who says to the deep, "Be dry, and I will dry up your rivers," who says of Cyrus, "He is My shepherd," and shall perform all My pleasure, even saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," and to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid." (Isaiah 44:24-28)

The Hebrews had copies of Isaiah's writings for centuries, and attributed them to the period between 792-722 BC. This was the first mention of Cyrus's name in Scripture. He is mentioned again where the prophets Daniel and Ezra, who were contemporary to Cyrus, chronicled his decree to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple.

Historians who base their chronologies upon the Greek astrologer/astronomer Ptolemy (whom some believe was flawed in his chronology of the Persian Empire) tell us that Cyrus gave the decree for the Jews to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem around 539 BC. Those who disagree with Ptolemy place the date at around 455 B.C., which would correspond closely even to Ptolemy's dating of 445 B.C. for Nehemiah going to Jerusalem to repair the city's walls. Although widely accepted even by some Bible scholars, Ptolemy's chronology has been found flawed. Even so, with Cyrus's decree two prophecies were fulfilled: 1) the decree would be given by Cyrus; 2) the Temple would be rebuilt in accordance with his decree.

Cyrus was a pagan king. His parents knew nothing of Isaiah's prophecy written almost two centuries before. Even if they were aware of the prophecies, not knowing he would become king of Persia through conquest, they could not control his future actions. It would have been impossible for anyone apart from God to control these events.

There are hundreds of prophecies related to historical events. Room does not allow for a lengthy treatise on them. I advise the reader to search these out for himself. However, one prophecy in particular is unfolding before our very eyes today. It is found in the Book of Daniel and relates to the very last days before the Kingdom of God is established among the governments of the earth:

And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which stands for the children of your people [Israel]. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.

And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

And they that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the heavens, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.

But you, Oh Daniel, seal up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.
(Daniel 12:1-4)

As we consider the tremendous increase in knowledge over the past century alone, we can certainly identify with this prophecy. Man's knowledge has grown at an incredible rate just during our lifetime. Interestingly, the increase of

man's knowledge is evidenced by the speed at which he can move from one place to another. In Adam's day, some 6,000 years ago, man was limited to a very small area in which to move about because he did not have the means to move rapidly enough to expand his borders quickly. His fastest means of travel was the horse. At full gallop, the fastest that man could move on horseback was about thirty miles per hour, and then for only short periods of time. It was only because of an extensive life span that early man was able to migrate to distant lands and populate the earth.

One thousand years after Adam, about the time of Noah, man's fastest means of transportation was still the horse—about thirty miles per hour.

At the time of Abraham—some two thousand years after Adam, man had still achieved little progress in science. He was still able to travel only as fast as the fastest horse—about thirty miles per hour.

Even King David—God's beloved leader of Israel—and his son Solomon, blessed by God with legendary wisdom, were not able to break the bonds of speed limited to that of the horse. Some three thousand years had passed, and man still could not move any faster than when he had begun—about thirty miles per hour.

Approximately one thousand years later, when the Roman Empire was at its pinnacle of power, man had not yet experienced the exhilaration of rapid motion beyond that of horseback—about thirty miles per hour.

In 1776 Paul Revere made his celebrated midnight ride to warn his compatriots that the British were coming. He charged through the streets of Boston on his trusty steed—at about thirty miles per hour.

During the latter part of the 19th century came the Industrial Revolution. The age of technology was born, and man began to make rapid strides in science. During that time the steam engine was invented and man harnessed its

energy to turn the wheels of giant locomotives that spelled the beginning of man's release from time and space. Suddenly he was able to travel at the unheard-of speed of 100 miles per hour!

Only a few decades later man attempted to overcome the earth's gravitational pull through powered flight. When the Wright brothers achieved the first successful powered flight in 1913 it was for a distance of only 110 feet and of only 12-seconds duration. But it demonstrated that man would no longer be held down in his attempt to conquer his environment; he took his eyes off the dust of the earth and turned them heavenward—toward the stars.

But man's nature had not changed. He used his sudden increase in knowledge to fashion greater and more devastating instruments of war. World War I spurred the interest in the new flying machine that would allow men to attack their enemies from the skies. Those flying machines—aeroplanes—were built to fly faster and higher in order to gain strategic advantage. Man could now travel at some 150 miles per hour.

World War II saw the greatest conflict in the history of mankind, and man's depraved nature was manifested at its fullest when Adolph Hitler pulled out all stops in an attempt to use science to conquer the world. By now the airplane was unchallenged as the fastest method of travel. Fighter planes could streak through the sky delivering death and destruction at speeds close to 400 miles per hour.

At the close of World War II a new means of propulsion was just coming into its own. The jet engine was perfected, and by 1948 man had slammed his way through the sound barrier at speeds in excess of 700 miles per hour.

The stars were beginning to look closer.

The year 1958 saw the rocket engine perfected to the point where it could be trusted to carry a human perched inside its nose cone. Shortly thereafter, under millions of

pounds of thrust, rockets left the earth's atmosphere and placed man into orbit. His speed suddenly increased to an incredible 17,400 miles per hour!

In 1968 man increased his speed to where he could actually leave the gravitational pull of the earth and utilize controlled flight to take him around the moon and back. One year later he placed his foot upon the surface of the moon, and the dust of the earth mingled with the dust of its satellite.

Man's dream of the ages had become a reality; he had left the earth and stood upon another celestial body. His journey to the moon was accomplished at speeds approximating 40,000 miles per hour!

From year one to almost AD 1900—a span of almost 6,000 years—man's speed virtually remained at about 30 miles per hour. Less than 70 years later he was traveling in excess of 30,000 miles per hour!

This sudden burst in speed is a good gauge for measuring man's increase in knowledge. Science's greatest achievements have been in the last one hundred years.

The decade of the 1940s was particularly significant, for during that short period alone, jet aircraft came on the scene, and man broke the sound barrier. Many new innovations for the home and workplace were invented. Television, refrigerators, automatic washing machines and many other wonderful, labor-saving devices began to make life easier for millions. And the first atomic bomb was detonated, ushering man into the nuclear age.

Today, computers and hand-held computing and communications devices more powerful than the fledgling computers of just a few decades ago are commonplace. Man is experimenting with artificial intelligence, has unlocked the secrets of DNA, has cloned animals, and accomplished feats of science undreamed of by our parents.

Every day knowledge increases exponentially, and man rushes to and fro over the earth.

Since man has become united through rapid travel and mass communications, it seems as if nothing he imagines will be beyond his ability to accomplish. Is this not striking in view of the Bible's account of why God prevented man from completing the Tower of Babel?

The whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. And they said to one another, "Look, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and they had mud for mortar.

And they said, "Look, let us build a city and a tower, whose top may reach to heaven, and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."

And YHWH came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men built.

And YHWH said, "See, the people are one, and they all have one language. And this they begin to do. And now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Look, let us go down, and there confound their language so that they may not understand one another's speech."

So YHWH scattered them abroad from there upon the face of all the earth: and they stopped building the city.

Therefore the name of it is called Babel, because YHWH confounded the language of all the earth. And from there YHWH scattered them abroad upon the face of all the earth. (Genesis 11:1-9)

Through globalization man is rebuilding the Tower, and the unity of man is the stated goal of virtually all the world's leaders.

The question arises, why this sudden, overwhelming increase in man's knowledge? Why did God keep man ignorant for so many centuries?

It is altogether conceivable that, had God not intervened at the Tower of Babel, man would have been on the moon within one hundred years of that time. And considering the penchant man has for destruction, the human race may have annihilated itself long before man's history could bring to fruition what God planned for mankind and the earth.

Perhaps another answer is that God knew that the greatest bulk of humanity would be living during the end times. It took almost the entire 6,000 years—until AD 1830—for the earth's population to reach one billion souls. One hundred years later—1931—it had doubled to two billion. Thirty years added another billion. In 1976, the official census figures put the total at four billion human beings. Now, less than thirty years later, the world's population has increased another two billion and stands in excess of six billion.

Truly, man's knowledge has increased, and he runs to and fro over the earth. But the result of man's increase in knowledge has not been all blessing; it has also been a curse. With technology has come death and destruction that heretofore had been undreamed of.

The increase in knowledge has not been for the individual's benefit as much as it has been for the benefit of Mammon—the world's system of wealth and commerce.

How could anyone, thousands of years before the fact, have foreseen the increase of knowledge that has exploded upon the world's stage only recently? Just as remarkable, how could he have known that the increase in knowledge

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would result in men running to and fro, obviously in a manner unknown at the time? There had to be something beyond human ability at work.

The next few chapters will deal with prophecies related to Jesus Christ. Since it is not within the scope of this writing to present all the prophecies attributed to the life of Jesus, we will present only a few which were written specific to His future coming to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. As for others, I will leave it to the reader to search the Scriptures for himself to determine the truth. An honest seeker of truth will do so; those who will not believe, will not believe no matter how many prophecies they see fulfilled. Which are you?

II

Exact Timing

In the Bible, the Book of Daniel records a prophecy which pinpoints the exact time that Israel's Messiah would come to Jerusalem. It has to do with one of God's angels (messengers), Gabriel, visiting the prophet Daniel at a time he was seeking to understand God's purposes through prayer:

Yes, while I was speaking in prayer the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening sacrifice.

And he informed me, and spoke with me, and said, "O Daniel, I have come now to give you wisdom and understanding. At the beginning of your prayers the command came forth, and I have come to show you, for you are greatly beloved. Therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision."

“Seventy sevens are determined upon your people and upon your holy city, to end the transgression, and to put an end to sin, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy One.

“Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem until the Messiah the Prince shall be seven sevens, and sixty sevens, and two sevens. The street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times.

“And after the sixty sevens and two sevens Messiah will be put to death, but not for Himself. And the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary, and the end of it shall be with a flood, and until the end of the war destructions are determined.

“And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one seven: and in the midst of the seven he shall cause the sacrifice and offering to cease, and with the spreading of idolatry he shall make it desolate, even until the complete destruction, and that decree shall be poured upon the desolate.”
(Daniel 9:21-27)

This is a specific prophecy regarding the nation of Israel and the Messiah, or “anointed” Messenger of God, who would one day establish a righteous government upon the earth. Verse 24 states that a determined period of seventy sevens (most Bibles say “seventy weeks”) or seventy times seven years—490 years) would pass until God’s dealing with Israel would be completed. To “seal up” the vision and prophecy meant to complete it; to “anoint the

most Holy” meant the coronation of the coming eternal King when He comes into His earthly Kingdom.

The most striking part of this prophecy is found in verse 25, where Gabriel states that the Messiah would come seven plus threescore and two sevens of years ($69 \times 7 = 483$ years) after the decree came to rebuild Jerusalem. It was from the time of that decree that the 490 years would commence. The Messiah would come into Jerusalem after 483 years, or seven years before the end of God’s dealing with Israel. Let us see what history has proven:

The initial decree for Israel to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple came from Cyrus, king of Persia, in the first year of his reign (455 B.C. according to non-Ptolemaic historians). That began the countdown to the coming of the Messiah.

Due to inaccurate historical dating, historians put the birth of Jesus at somewhere between 7 BC and AD 6. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (9th Edition) states:

The course of Jesus’ life and the geographic setting of his ministry can only be given in rough outline. The details are surrounded by many uncertainties. The period within which his ministry and death occurred may, however, be narrowed down with considerable accuracy on the basis of a synchronistic dating of the appearance of John the Baptist in the 15th year of Tiberius (Luke 3:1)—*i.e.*, AD 28/29—which is confirmed by nonbiblical sources. But the year and place of Jesus’ birth are uncertain. Mark and John say nothing about them. The only sources for them are the widely divergent birth and childhood legends in Matthew 1 and 2, where Jesus’ birth and early lot are set in the time of Herod I and the change of regime (4 BC), and the narrative of Luke

2, which links Jesus' birth with the first registration in Judaea under the emperor Augustus (AD 6). There is also historical evidence of a census carried out about 8 BC. With all of this in mind, many sources estimate the year of birth as 7-6 BC. (The use of BC [before Christ] and AD [Anno Domini, or "the year of the Lord"] was not common until the Middle Ages.)

If we allow for the census under Augustus taking place in AD 6, and for Jesus beginning His ministry at about the same time John the Baptist came on the scene according to biblical accounts, then we would add 445 BC to AD 6 plus AD 30 to reach the approximate period of 481 years. Jesus would minister for some three years before being crucified ("cut off" at the end of 69 "weeks").

Jesus came into Jerusalem being hailed as the King of the Jews, or Messiah, a few days before His death. Add three years to 481 years and we have 484 years. This is still one year more than the 483 years according to Gabriel's prophecy to Daniel.

Allowing for man's inaccurate dating of ancient events, one year is a blink of an eye over the span of nearly 500 years. The reasonable question to ask is, who else in the history of Israel—especially at that time—fits the role of the Messiah prophesied in Daniel's encounter with Gabriel?

The dating of Daniel's writing has been set by historians at somewhere between 616-536 BC. It was not written after the fact of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, but at least 560 years prior. Even secular historians do not dispute the events of the last week before Jesus' crucifixion. Thus, Daniel's prophecy is a striking and irrefutable testimony to the truth of Jesus Christ being the Messiah of Israel. Either Israel's Messiah came at the time prophesied, or He is never coming.

But why Israel? What has that nation to do with all of this? Why didn't God reveal these truths to every nation instead of working through only one? The answer is found in the book of Genesis where we read that God chose one man, named Abraham, and promised to reward his faithfulness by giving him and his descendants an everlasting inheritance as a nation of kings and priests upon the earth. That promise included the honor of producing the lineage through which the Messiah would be born.

THE NATURE OF THE MESSIAH

Before we go any further, we should relate just what the Bible says about the nature of Jesus the Messiah. In the Gospel (Good News) written by His disciple John, we read:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God.

All things came into existence through Him, and without Him not even one thing came into existence that came into existence.

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light appeared in the darkness, and the darkness did not apprehend it....

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we saw His glory—glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.
(John 1:1-14)

This is a startling statement. That God, the Creator of the Universe, would take on human flesh and subject Himself to the cruelest treatment by His creation boggles the mind. Later we will be explaining what the Bible says the reason for this is. For now, allow this to simmer while we consider further the reliable prophetic nature of the Bible.

12

The Death

Contrary to all normal human expectations of a Messiah that would conquer his enemies and lead his people to freedom, Daniel's prophecy also states that immediately after His appearance the Messiah would be put to death (most Bibles render it "cut off," a Hebrew idiom for "killed"):

"And after the sixty-two sevens Messiah shall be cut off [put to death], but not for Himself. And the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary, and the end of it shall be with a flood, and until the end of the war destructions are determined. (Daniel 9:26)

So Messiah would come 483 years after the decree was given to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. He would be rejected and put to death immediately. For what purpose, then, did He come? Why would God's Messiah come and then be put to death? Wouldn't that defeat His purpose?

The answer is that He died, “not for himself,” but for those whom He came to redeem for His eternal Kingdom.

From the point of His death, the final “week” (seven years) for God’s dealing with Israel was put on hold, half fulfilled in AD 70 with the three-and-one-half year siege against Jerusalem, and the destruction of the temple which took away the sacrifices. The second half will be fulfilled just prior to Jesus’ return to the earth in the very last days. The Apostle Paul states it this way in relation to Israel’s failure to receive her Messiah, and the Gentiles being grafted into Israel through their faith in the Messiah:

For I speak to you Gentiles inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles. I exalt my service, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my kindred and save some of them.

For if their being cast away is the reconciliation of the world, what will their receiving be but life from the dead?

Now if the firstfruit is holy, so is the lump; and if the root is holy, so are the branches.

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and became a partaker of the root and of the fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you boast against them you do not bear the root, but the root you.

You will say then, “The branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.” Well, by unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be highminded, but fear, for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither should He spare you.

Behold then the kindness and severity of God: on those which fell, severity; and upon you, kind-

ness, if you continue in His kindness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.

And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, shall be grafted in. For God is able to graft them in again.

For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree, how much more shall these, which are the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

For, brethren, I do not wish you to be ignorant of this mystery—that you should be wise within yourselves—that hardness in part has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in.

And so all Israel shall be saved according to what is written, “There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and He shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them, when I shall take away their sins.” (Romans 11:13-27)

The mystery of which Paul wrote is the merging of two diverse people—the faithful of Israel and the faithful from among the rest of the nations—into one new people: the people of God through faith in Israel’s Messiah (Colossians 1:25-28; Ephesians 2:14-22).

The hardness upon Israel is the result of a prophetic curse that those who demanded the death of Jesus placed upon themselves:

And Pilate, seeing that he could not prevail, but that rather a riot was rising, took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this righteous man. You see to it.”

Then all the people answered, and said, “His blood be on us, and on our children.” (Matthew 27:24-25)

Some say these words were not a curse. But history attests to the plight of the Jews as the most hated nation on the earth. This does not justify that hatred, but it does suggest that a curse of some sort is at work against them. The Jews’ rejection of their Messiah has also resulted in a sword Jesus prophesied He would bring upon the nation. That sword would divide families:

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man at variance against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man’s enemies shall be they of his own household.

“He that loves father or mother above Me is not worthy of Me; and he that loves son or daughter above Me is not worthy of Me. And he that does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.

“He that has found his life shall lose it, and he that has lost his life on My account shall find it.

“He that receives you receives Me, and he that receives Me receives Him that sent me.

“He that receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward. And he that receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward.

“And whoever shall give to drink to one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, truly I say to you, he shall in nowise lose his reward.” (Matthew 10:34-42)

This prophecy has come true not only in relation to Jewish households, but in relation to households among the nations where individuals give their lives to Christ.

No person in history has had the impact upon nations and individuals that Jesus has had. And only His arrival on the scene of history matches the specific prophecy recorded in Daniel 9, as well as hundreds of others.

It may be argued that other prophecies attributed to Jesus are “double fulfillment” prophecies that may or may not apply to Him in addition to applying to others. But Daniel’s prophecy could apply to only one man among the billions born throughout history. That man is Jesus of Nazareth, the Word of God made flesh.

It is reasonable, then, to assign to Jesus other prophecies which describe His life, ministry, death, and coming again without any specific mention of His name, but with clear implications of a coming Messiah. We will offer only two, which are the most graphic prophecies regarding the death of God’s “servant”:

Behold, My servant shall deal prudently, He shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. As many were amazed at You (His face was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men). So shall He sprinkle many nations. The kings shall shut their mouths at Him, for that which had not been told them shall they see, and that which they had not heard shall they consider.

Who has believed our report, and to whom is the arm of YHWH revealed?

For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground. He has no form nor comeliness. And when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.

He is despised and rejected by men—a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief—and we hid as it were our faces from Him. He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we considered Him stricken, smitten by Elohim [another name for God], and afflicted.

But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to His own way, and YHWH has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He does not open His mouth.

He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare His generation? For He was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of my people He was stricken.

And He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth.

Yet it pleased YHWH to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When you shall make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of YHWH shall prosper in His hand.

He shall see the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied. By His knowledge shall My righteous servant justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.

Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He has poured out His soul unto death and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 52:13-53:12)

Even secular historians bear testimony to the death of Jesus on the cross. One, Cornelius Tacitus (AD 55-120), a Roman historian, said this:

Christus, from whom the Christian name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus.... (Tacitus, A. 15.44)

Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (AD 38-100), had this to say:

Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works—a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct to this day. (*Antiquities of the Jews*; Book 18; Chapter 3)

Jesus was numbered with the transgressors, crucified between two thieves, yet with no proof of wrongdoing on

His part. Then He was buried in a rich man's tomb. Psalm 22:6-18 is even more graphic, describing Jesus' ordeal on the cross centuries before crucifixion as a method of execution under Roman rule was known to men:

But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people.

All they that see me laugh me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, "He trusted in YHWH that He would deliver Him. Let him deliver Him, seeing He delighted in Him."

But You are He that took Me out of the womb. You made Me hope when I was upon My mother's breasts. I was cast upon You from the womb. You are My God from My mother's belly. Do not be far from Me, for trouble is near; there is no one to help.

Many bulls have compassed Me; strong bulls of Bashan have beset Me around. They gaped upon Me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion.

I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of My bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, My tongue cleaves to My jaws, and You have brought Me into the dust of death.

For dogs have encircled Me. The assembly of the wicked have enclosed Me. They pierced my hands and my feet. I may see all My bones. They look and stare upon Me.

They part My garments among them, and cast lots upon My clothing.

This description of Jesus' crucifixion was written centuries before crucifixion was practiced.

But why did Jesus die? If He was truly Israel's Messiah, and performed all the wonderful deeds the Bible describes, from teaching about the Kingdom of God to healing the sick and raising the dead, who would want Him to die?

Briefly, His Father God sent Him into the world to be a sacrifice for the sins of those who would desire to live righteously—who would believe and obey His teachings.

Jesus had to die in order to be raised from the dead so that those who believe in Him could also be raised from the dead and inherit eternal life. Why? Because God's justice demanded the death penalty for rebellion against His authority. All sin is rebellion against God's authority; it says to God that man will be his own god and live as he pleases without regard to what his Creator commands.

But God loved mankind so much that He provided a substitute to die in our place. Jesus is that substitute. The Word of God, who came forth from God, and who is of the very nature and essence of God, became a man in order to sacrifice Himself for you and me.

The religious leaders of the day, jealous for their authority over the people and perceiving Jesus as a threat to that authority, were the instruments used by God to deliver Him to the Romans for execution. While many of His enemies attempted at times to stone Him for His words against the religious establishment and the traditions of the rabbis which conflicted with the Scriptures, God preserved Him until His hour would come.

But the religious leaders feared the Jewish people because the people perceived Jesus as a true prophet. Thus, they devised a lie against Him and accused Him of trying to make Himself a king in competition with Caesar. That way it would be the Romans who would be blamed for His death, and not the religious leaders themselves. Yet the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate, after examining Jesus for himself, found no fault in Him and desired to release

Him. But God's plan was not to be thwarted. He allowed His enemies to incite the people to the point that Pilate feared a riot, which would threaten his standing before Caesar.

Ultimately, Jesus Himself laid down His own life. No one could kill Him unless He allowed them to do so. As He told Pontius Pilate, "You could have no power at all against me, except it were given you from above. Therefore he that delivered me to you has the greater sin." (John 19:11)

Addressing the religious leaders who hated Him, Jesus likened Himself to a good shepherd who lays down his own life to preserve the sheep:

Therefore my Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.

No man takes it from me, but I lay it down myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment I have received from my Father. (John 10:17-18)

Jesus sacrificed Himself to pay the penalty for your sins and mine. That sacrifice is what demonstrates the true nature of God's love. No religion offers that love to mankind. Only God Himself offers it through His written Word, the Bible.

13

Resurrection

The story doesn't end at the Cross. The central tenet of biblical faith is the belief that after Jesus died to pay the penalty for man's sins He rose from the dead. He now sits at the right hand of His Father, making intercession for those who believe in Him.

Jesus' resurrection paved the way for all who believe in Him to be resurrected as well. The resurrection of our bodies is the great expectation of all true believers in Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us that we will live again on this earth for eternity, ruling and reigning over the nations with Jesus.

This runs counter to Christian religious tradition, which says we will spend eternity in "heaven." It is not within the scope of this book to elaborate upon the biblical faith and what it has to offer. You may read of that in one of my other books entitled, *What Is The True Gospel?* For now, please hold these thoughts as we continue.

Jewish tradition says that Jesus and His disciples plotted to have Him crucified in order to fulfill this

prophecy. It also insists that His disciples stole His body and fabricated the lie that He had risen from the dead. What they are suggesting is that Jesus was some crazy guru who was merely deluded into thinking He was the prophesied Messiah. But considering that no other man has ever fit the many prophecies of the Messiah—the glorious ones as well as the ignoble ones—and specifically the prophecy that timed His appearance on the scene, whom does Jewish tradition offer in His place? No one. The Jews are still waiting for a Messiah who should have appeared two thousand years ago according to their own prophecies.

Those who refuse to believe in Jesus test reason to suggest that His disciples would risk their own lives—and, in fact, surrender their lives in the long run—for a patent lie. I suppose there are a few people in the world who would do this, but certainly not the hundreds of eyewitnesses to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. And certainly not those whose writings contain the most lofty ideals ever embodied in any system of belief. No liars could have written such things. And could **all** the writers be liars? Reason says no.

Reason must conclude that the anti-Christ detractors are wrong on this. And if they are wrong, then the many prophecies attributed to Jesus must be true. In which case we must all examine ourselves to see if we are resisting the truth—if we are resisting what God requires regarding our relationship to Him.

Now it is up to you, the reader, to pursue the truth. I have only laid the groundwork for you to do so. Ultimately, each of us must search out the truth for ourselves. No one can compel God to reveal Himself. And no one, by his own power, can actually prove that God exists. God has chosen to require of us faith that searches for the truth. As Jesus said:

“If you continue in My word, then you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:31b-32)

His Word is in the Bible, which meets the criteria for authorship beyond the mental capabilities of its physical authors. The fact that sixty-six books, written over a span of nearly two thousand years by various authors, would be so cohesive and prophetically sound makes the Bible unique among all the writings of men throughout history. And we are speaking of billions of writings of varying types and lengths. Such uniqueness weighs heavily in favor of the Bible’s claim to be the inspired Word of God:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for all good works. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Add to this the Bible’s unique reliability in the areas of science and history, with no errors found in spite of the best efforts of skeptics to find them, and the question remains why anyone would be foolish enough to place their faith in the fallible pronouncements of men whose glaring errors abound in their works. With that understanding, it is incumbent upon all men to believe the truth of God’s Word and live their lives by its dictates.

But there is something about the Bible that causes men to reject it outright while accepting even the most subjective, faulty writings of human origin. What is it that the Bible contains which puts it in this unique category?

Reason tells us that if all men’s writings are fallible, which no sane person would deny, and that the single compilation of writings found to be infallible in the areas cited above is rejected out of hand by the majority of mankind, there must be something unique about that single

compilation. Why has there been such a concerted effort to disprove its validity? Whom does it threaten that it would cause such consternation? While it is perennially the best-selling book ever, the Bible is also the most reviled, hated and feared book ever.

Could it be that men reject the Bible because it contains the full truth of God which challenges mankind at the core of his being—which causes us to search our hearts and discover how corrupt we really are when compared to the holiness of God? Above all, the Bible is a compilation of books that deal with the spiritual aspect of mankind. It cuts to the heart all who believe that they are intrinsically good and worthy of good things from God or whatever higher power they perceive controls their destiny. Rather than seeing the blessings of God as evidence of His love and mercy, most people see the blessings of God as something they deserve. And few are content with what they have, but are constantly seeking more which they may consume upon their own desires.

Yet in fairness I cannot expect the reader to accept all I've stated without allowing him the opportunity to investigate for himself. That would be a good start for an honest person seeking truth for truth's sake.

14

What Are You Afraid Of?

No doubt, in spite of all that has been stated in these pages, there are those who will not wish to pursue the issue further. They will not accept the challenge to question why they believe what they believe. They will content themselves to think that it isn't really all that important after all.

If you are one such person, please bear with me a bit longer. All I'm asking is that you compare what you believe with what the Bible says regarding Jesus Christ and His offer of eternal salvation. I recognize the difficulty of facing the prospect that you may have been misled for years. I faced that same prospect myself.

Often, fear is the factor in causing us to resist challenges that may require great changes in our lives. Fear that we will lose our friends, family, job, even fear that we may be rejecting the truth to follow another path. Fear is the greatest enemy of truth. It paralyzes and renders impotent one's opportunity for achieving God's blessings.

But God knows the heart, and He promises that He will not reject any honest and contrite heart that seeks to know Him in truth (Psalm 51:17).

You may be one who has rejected the Bible out of hand because of prior bad experiences in some church or other religious institution. You may have many legitimate complaints against Christianity. But what do you have against Jesus Himself? Can you find any fault with Him?

Jesus did not found Christianity. He did not found any “church.” He said He would build His “called out” (Greek: *ekklesia*) believers, and promised that the gates of Hades would not prevail against them (Matthew 16:18). This promise is that Hades, the place of departed spirits, would not be able to contain His people; they will be resurrected in the last days to live and reign with Jesus on a new earth which contains no corruption.

That is nothing to be afraid of. It is worth every price we might be asked to pay in order to follow Him.

I am not asking you to embrace a religion called “Christianity,” or to join any “church.” I am simply pointing you to Jesus as the answer to your spiritual needs both in this life and in the next. I trust that if you seek Him with an honest and contrite heart He will reveal Himself to you, and will lead you into all truth.

That’s not to say you may not stumble along the way, may not get involved in Christian or religious things that are contrary to His Word. But if you persevere in your desire to know His truth by studying (not merely reading) His written Word, the Bible, you will be found in His company at the end of your life on this earth.

Is that anything to be afraid of?

15

Saved From What?

From what are we saved? Most religions ponder the afterlife, and even in many non-Christian religions the concept of eternal torment for the evil person is a basic tenet. In today's more "enlightened" religious climate, the idea of a loving God sending people to a place commonly referred to as "hell" is unpalatable. But the first concept of a loving God is found in the Bible. There we read that "God is love" (1 John 4:8). Prior to the Bible, every religion had gods that were fearful or, at best, capricious. In paganism the gods of "love" such as Eros, Cupid, and Venus, are really gods of eroticism and fertility. Some had beneficent gods who (they thought) provided for their temporal needs. But the idea of a loving God is foreign outside of biblical faith. So those who claim that a "loving God" would not send people to a place of torment must first be asked where they ever got the idea that God is a loving God. It may be a modern euphemism, but it cannot

be divorced from the Bible, since the very concept originated there.

Jesus taught much about a place of eternal torment which, in the Hebrew, is called *Gehenna*. The final place of torment is called “the lake of fire” (Revelation 19:20-20:15), and “outer darkness” (Matthew 8:12). In English it is called “hell”—the place where the unrighteous go after death. It isn’t feasible to go into a long dissertation about hell in this writing. I deal with it extensively in *What is the True Gospel?* The important thing to know at this point is that when a person places his trust in Jesus Christ for salvation he is not only saved **to** eternal life, but he is also saved **from** eternal separation from God which, by its nature, is eternal torment. Jesus calls it “outer darkness,” where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth. In explaining one of His parables to His disciples, Jesus said:

“The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one. The enemy that sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels.

“Therefore, as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which commit sin, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

“Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. Who has ears to hear, let him hear.” (Matthew 13:38-43)

Throughout the centuries certain religious men and organizations have taught, contrary to Jesus, that hell does not exist, or that it is not a place of eternal torment. Some

say it is merely a metaphor for suffering here on earth. Others teach that “hell” is annihilation—a cessation of existence. But the Bible consistently teaches that it does exist as a place of eternal torment, and that the only escape is to have saving faith in Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection. His death paid the penalty for our sins; His resurrection guarantees our resurrection to eternal life with Him and the Father. So we are saved **from** the consequences of our sin nature—separation from God in a place of eternal torment, and we are saved **to** eternal life.

No religion guarantees this. Not even Christianity, except as certain aspects of it conform to biblical faith. We cannot save ourselves by our own works of righteousness:

Now we know that the things the law says, it says to them who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh shall be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

But now the righteousness of God without the law is made known, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God which is by faith in Jesus Christ to all and upon all them that believe, for there is no difference. For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God has set forth to be an atonement [for our sins] through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are in the past, through the forbearance of God. To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness, that He might be just, and the justifier of him who believes in Jesus.

Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? No, but by the law of faith.

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. (Romans 3:19-28)

God's holiness demands that only the sinless be in His presence. God's justice demands that a penalty be exacted for sin, that penalty being the shedding of blood because blood gives life. God's love provided the perfect sacrifice for our sins—Jesus, His only-begotten Son. Those who reject that sacrifice—who reject Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord—cannot enter into God's love, but prove they wish to remain in their sinful state. Those who believe in Jesus and receive His sacrifice for their sins enter into eternal life. From then on, if we do sin, Jesus is our advocate with the Father:

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. (1 John 1:8-10)

Those who insist that they are righteous by their own merits (they say they have no sin) deceive themselves and cannot be saved. This is why Jesus said that He came to save sinners and not the righteous (Luke 5:32). First, there is no one righteous; there are only those who perceive themselves as righteous. Second, the self-righteous do not want to surrender their lives to God because it would mean they'd have to change their lives to conform to His commandments. But for all those who do surrender their lives to God through faith in Jesus Christ and His sacrifice for their sins, He offers salvation.

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What To Do?

What we have presented thus far is the basis for the good news (Gospel) that God presents to us in His written Word, the Bible. It is not the full Gospel, but it is the basis for beginning to enter into His truths. The first step on the path to truth is for a person to question himself as to what he truly believes and why he believes it. Whatever your philosophical or religious inclinations may be, are you willing to seek indisputable evidence to substantiate them? Any beliefs you hold must be confirmed by an authority at least as substantive as the evidence that the Bible gives for its own authority. Anything less would fail in its ability to stand. Anything less would be dishonest.

Next, are you willing to have your beliefs challenged by the Bible? If so, I urge you to examine the validity of the only ancient writings that have proven to be God's inspired Word. I have offered evidences to its reliability and spiritual origins. Check out these evidences for yourself. The best

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way to do that is to read the Bible after having offered a prayer for God to guide you into all truth. If you have no previous background in the Bible you will no doubt encounter passages that stump you—passages that relate to ancient customs, traditions, and the like, as well as genealogies that may test your patience. Do not become discouraged or sidetracked, but set them aside momentarily while you seek the greater truths that relate to your personal relationship to God. Focus on the spiritual aspects of the writings rather than on the temporal aspects. The latter can be sorted out later; the former are the reasons for the writings in the first place.

It is very important to ask yourself, even before you begin to read the Bible, whether or not you are willing to give up everything, if necessary, should you be convinced that you have found the truth. Are your current religious beliefs more important? If so, then see how they hold up under the scrutiny of Scripture.

If you do begin, it would be best to start with the first three chapters of Genesis (the first book), and then move on to the Gospels that begin the so-called “New Testament” portion of the Bible. The Book of John would be the best to begin with there, then on to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and each succeeding book until you’ve finished the Book of Revelation. With this approach you will have a good basis upon which to understand the rest of the Bible. In it you will find what is called the Gospel or “Good News” that God has brought to mankind by which He has opened the way for eternal life in fellowship with Him.

Do not let anyone, even your religious leaders, tell you that you cannot understand the Bible without their interpreting it for you. You may be persuaded that you cannot understand the Scriptures because you are not a Hebrew or Greek scholar, or you do not hold any philosophical or theological degrees. First, it is not

necessary to know everything immediately; we learn truth by degrees. Second, if the Bible really is the Word of God, then it is only reasonable to believe that God will give understanding to anyone who seeks the truth with an honest heart. That's one of His reasons for sending the Holy Spirit:

“But when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all the truth. For He will not speak of Himself; but whatever He hears, that He will speak, and He will tell you of the things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will receive [truth] from Me and will tell you.” (John 16:13-14)

But the anointing which you have received from Him lives in you, and you do not need any man to teach you. But as the same anointing teaches you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it has taught you, you shall abide in Him. (1 John 2:27)

The wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's eyes. This includes the wisdom of all religions.

For the proclaiming of the cross is foolishness to them that perish, but to us who are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Has God not made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom did not know God, it pleased God by the foolishness of proclaiming to save them that believe.

For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified—to the Jews a stumblingblock, and to the

Greeks foolishness—but to them who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

For you see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, and base things of the world, and things which are despised, has God chosen. Yes, and things which are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no flesh should glory in His presence.

But by Him you are in Christ Jesus, who by God is made to us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, so that, according as it is written, “He that glories, let him glory in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 1:18-31)

This is not to impugn the idea of scholarship; we acknowledge those who work hard to gain certain knowledge. But scholarship without the Holy Spirit is foolishness. Consider all the men and women with theological degrees who disagree among themselves on major issues. They cannot all be right. Though every man may be in error, and even a liar, God is true (Romans 3:4).

In the realm of religion, men learn what other men tell them they must believe. In order to receive their degrees they must agree with what they are taught and pass the tests that prove their acquiescence to the belief system under which they are studying. They come to believe in a particular theological system and require that anyone who

will receive their endorsement must also believe in that particular system. This is the bane of theological seminaries and Bible schools. They do not allow for honest academic questioning of their belief systems without punishing with failure those who question them. As a result, the vast majority of people trust teachers who trusted their teachers who trusted their teachers, *ad infinitum*. They propagate religious tradition rather than the truth of God.

Given the choice of learning through honest inquiry with the help of God's Spirit, as opposed to trusting others to interpret the Word of God for me, I would opt for the former. If I merely wished to learn a religious theological system in order to pander to my naturally religious spirit, I would opt for the latter—especially if it offers a liturgical system of sacramentalism which allegedly “guarantees” me God's mercy and pleasure for my obedience to it.

This is something of which we must all be cautious. Liturgy (the rituals of worship established by a church), while pleasing to the senses, gives a false sense of security. Liturgy assumes that much repetitive speaking and worship pleases God by its quantity. But this is contrary to what God tells us. Just before teaching His disciples how to pray, Jesus said:

“And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward.

“But you, when you pray, enter into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

“But when you pray, do not use vain repetitions, as the pagans do, for they think that they shall be heard because of their speaking so

much. Therefore, do not be like them, for your Father knows what things you need before you ask Him.” (Matthew 6:5-8)

Yet rather than taking the Lord’s prayer merely as a model, religious people pray it repetitiously—even superstitiously—contrary to Jesus’ command!

Liturgy also allows us to do religious things and admire the pomp and circumstance of religious systems conducted by people bedecked in religious garb. It conveys the idea that we need priests to intercede for us rather than being able to enter into the presence of God on our own. Some of the most corrupt people wear religious garments. But those garments cannot hide from God the nakedness of their souls.

Do not just believe what men tell you, including what you read here. Everything must be put to the test of Scripture. There is only one way to know truth:

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a workman that need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But stay away from profane, empty babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. (2 Timothy 2:15-16)

As for entering into the presence of God, and to whom we should pray, Jesus instructed His disciples:

“And in that day you shall ask Me nothing. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it to you.

“Before this you have asked nothing in My name; ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full.

“I have spoken these things to you in proverbs, but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in proverbs, but I will show you plainly of the Father.

“In that day you shall ask in My name. And I do not say to you that I will ask the Father for you, for the Father Himself loves you because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from God.” (John 16:23-27)

Jesus came to open the door of fellowship between His Father and us. Religion interposes “priests” who tell us that we cannot have fellowship with God apart from their blessing. Popes, bishops, even Protestant ministers interlope as “priests” to the people of God.

You do not need priests. Priests offer sacrifices and intercede to God on behalf of people who cannot stand before God on their own. We may all intercede on behalf of one another if we are truly disciples of the Lord Jesus. So in that sense we are all priests. And there is one sacrifice—Jesus Christ—already offered for our sins once and for all. He is our High Priest who intercedes for all who would come to God:

For Christ has not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, to now appear in the presence of God for us. Nor yet that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters into the holy place every year with the blood of other [sacrifices]. For then He must have suffered often since the foundation of the world. But now, once at the end of the age, He has appeared to put away sin by sacrificing Himself.

And as it is appointed for men to die one time, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered one time to bear the sins of many. And to them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

For the law, being a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they continually offered year-by-year make those who come to it perfect. For then would they not have stopped being offered because the worshippers once purged should have had no more awareness of sins?

But in those sacrifices every year there is a reminding of sins, for it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.

Therefore when He came into the world, he said, “Sacrifice and offering You would not receive, but You have prepared a body for me.

“In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have had no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of Me) to do Your will, O God.’”

Above, when He said, “Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin You would not receive, nor had pleasure in them which are offered by the law,” then He said, “Lo, I come to do Your will, O God,” He takes away the first so that He may establish the second, by which we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **once and for all**.

And every [Israelite] priest stands daily ministering and offering often the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this man, **after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever**, sat down on the right hand of God, from now on waiting until His enemies are made his footstool. For **by one offering He has perfected forever them that are sanctified**. The Holy Ghost also is a witness to us. For after He had said before, “This is the covenant that I will make with them after

those days,” says YHWH, “I will put my laws into their hearts, and I will write them in their mind, and their sins and iniquities I will no longer remember.”...

Now where remission of these is, **there is no more offering for sin.** (Hebrews 9:24-10:18)

This is the essence of the true Gospel or “Good News”: God sent His only-begotten Son into the world to die for the sins of those who would believe in Him. His sacrifice is a perfect sacrifice that does not require us to do anything more than believe in Him and obey His Word as revealed in the writings of the prophets and apostles, compiled within the Bible.

Does that include you?

Or do you believe that you are a good enough person to stand in the presence of a holy God and defend yourself? Or do you believe that by adhering to your religious institution’s traditions and practices you can earn your salvation? All this, my friend, is self-righteousness. Perhaps, if you compare yourself to other people, you can justify yourself as a “good person.” You never murdered anyone, or stole millions of dollars. But you are not as perfect as God. You sin in your heart every day through pride and self-justification. Jesus said that if we hold hatred in our hearts we are guilty of murder, even if we never actually killed a person.

The comparison God requires is not to other sinful men; it is to Jesus Christ Himself. Are you as good as He? Are you without any sin in your life?

We are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners by the human nature inherited from our ancestor, Adam. No man can stand before God justified. It is the righteousness of His only-begotten Son that the Father sees when He accepts those who believe in Jesus.

Do not be deceived. God is not mocked. And it is a mockery of His holiness to think that you can stand before Him without a covering for your sins.

Here is the essence of reason regarding Jesus: If He is truly the only-begotten Son of God which the Bible tells us He is, proven to be so by the prophecies that relate to His birth, life, death and resurrection, then what He tells us must be true. And He said:

“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes to the Father, but by me.” (John 14:6)

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he that does not enter by the door into the sheepfold, but climbs up some other way, is a thief and a robber.”...

Then Jesus said to them again, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them.

“I am the door. If any man enters in through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.” (John 10:1-9)

Speaking about Jesus, one of His apostles said:

Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

All religions that offer any other way to any god are false and must be rejected. It doesn't matter how old and venerated that religion may be. If Jesus' statements are true, then you **must** make a decision whether or not to act upon them. You either believe in Him as the only true Savior and Lord of your life, or you reject Him. There are no other choices. He cannot be merely a prophet or a good man, or a wise man, or an enlightened man, or a highly-evolved man.

He is who He claims to be, or He is a liar. If you read His words you will be able to make that judgment for yourself. But that judgment must be made.

No religion can save you, not even the Christian religion. No church can save you, even if it claims to be the only true church.

No religious works apart from true faith in the Jesus of the Bible can save you, even if the religion to which those works are attached claim that the works impute God's grace to you for your performing them. There are no "sacraments" which bestow grace, because if there were the result would not be grace, but payment for your works, as the apostle Paul says:

What do the Scriptures say? Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness.

Now to him that works is the reward not considered grace, but debt. But to him that does not work, but believes in him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness without works, saying, "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." (Romans 4:3-8)

Religious works cannot compel God's grace, because grace is unmerited favor from God. To trust that our religious works merit God's grace is to say that God owes us His grace for the work we do. In that case, it cannot be grace, but the payment of a debt. And God owes no man anything.

Grace is not measured out like water in a glass dependent upon how often we repeat prayers or perform

religious works. It does not dissipate as water evaporates, each time we sin. God's Word assures us that as we continue to trust in Jesus Christ's once-and-for-all sacrifice for our sins, and live our lives in obedience to His Word, we are assured of salvation. The works of righteousness which we perform in this life will result in rewards when we enter into His eternal Kingdom. But these works of righteousness are not the religious works dictated by religious leaders; they are service to God and to men through the leading of the Holy Spirit. They must be according to God's will, not our will or the will of other men, or they will bear no rewards:

We are laborers together with God. You are God's farm, you are God's building.

According to the grace of God which is given to me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and others build upon it. But let every man consider how he builds upon it. For no man can lay another foundation than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Now if any man builds upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, every man's work shall be made manifest. For the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire. And the fire shall test every man's work of what sort it is.

If any man's work which he has built thereon lasts, he shall receive a reward.

If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet as if by fire. (1 Corinthians 3:9-15)

This is not addressing sin, but good works. Any good work we do in the name of Jesus (the only foundation for our faith) must be according to His will in order to produce

the valuable rewards that will stand the test of God's fire. Religious works done in His name but according to the will of men will produce fruit that will not stand the test and will be burned up.

Thus, it behooves us to be careful to study His Word in order to know His will:

Study to show yourself approved by God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, correctly understanding the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

We are to study God's Word, the Bible, not men's religious works that cannot prove themselves of divine origin as the Bible can. We may read other works, but anything that conflicts with, adds to, or subtracts from the Scriptures must be rejected.

Do not place your trust in religious men no matter how impressive they seem to you, no matter how pious and "holy" they appear. Do not place your trust in me or this book. Only Jesus Christ Himself offers eternal life and instructs us how to attain it. I seek only to point you to Him.

So what must you do? The first thing is to acknowledge that you are a sinner, separated from God, regardless of your perfect adherence to your religious belief system.

Second, count the cost of following Jesus before you commit to doing so. After you have determined that you will give up everyone and everything to follow Him, then proceed to the next steps.

Third, ask God's forgiveness for your sins and confess that Jesus died and rose from the dead for your salvation.

Fourth, seek His will for your life, beginning by studying (not just reading) His written Word, the Bible.

Fifth, seek out fellowship with other true believers in Jesus.

Sixth, be baptized in water through submersion as a testimony to your being put to death, buried and resurrected with Jesus. Even if you were baptized as a child, it is important that you be baptized with understanding that you are offering a public testimony to the fact that you have been buried with Christ Jesus and resurrected to new life in Him.

* * *

This has been an outline of God's Gospel of salvation for man. There have been many "gospels" proclaimed by many men and religious institutions. Some come closer to the truth than do others, but most have been deficient due to theological biases. Therefore, we wish to assist you further in your quest for truth through our book, *What is the True Gospel?* If you are either a new believer in Jesus, or are still searching for the full truth, we will send it to you free of charge. You may request it by filling out the special order form on the following page.

As with all things, we urge you to test that writing by the Scriptures so you will know whether or not to trust it.

PLEASE SEND A COPY OF WHAT IS THE TRUE GOSPEL?

(TO RECEIVE YOUR FREE COPY YOU MUST CHECK ONE
OF THE FOLLOWING TWO BOXES)

☐ I have just decided to follow Jesus as my Savior and Lord, and would like to know more about what the Bible says regarding the Kingdom of God and my place in it.

☐ I am still trying to decide if what you say about Jesus is true, and I need more information about Him and what the Bible says regarding salvation and the Kingdom of God.

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WHO IS MEDIA SPOTLIGHT?

Media Spotlight brings understanding of the ways in which the world shapes our thinking and lifestyles, particularly through the influence of the mass media, both secular and religious.

Because God's Word exhorts us to "buy the truth and sell it not" (Proverbs 23:23), we do not sell our periodical publications. Nor do we carry advertising in order to avoid outside influences.

When Media Spotlight began in 1977, we were the first ministry on a national scale to specifically address the ungodly nature of the secular media, particularly motion pictures, television, toys, games and myriad other problems that contribute to Christians living no differently than the world.

The mass media have impacted the Body of Christ as much as they have society. Many Christians are so dependent upon the media that they aren't aware of how lukewarm they have become. We have many testimonies from readers who tell us that, because of Media Spotlight, they no longer compromise their love for God with the need to be entertained. They have become aware of the effect the media have on their thinking, and are now more selective in their choices.

But the problem of ungodliness is not exclusive to the secular media. The religious media also present messages contrary to God's Word. We address religious teachers that impact believers in Christ, whether for good or for evil.

It has escaped the understanding of many Christians that what they believe is more often shaped by the teachings and traditions of religious men and institutions than by Scripture. Yet the wisdom of the world is no substitute for God's Word, even if offered from the pulpit or in the Christian media.

Jesus warned us that in the last days false Christs and false prophets would arise and would show great signs and wonders, "insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." He also said that, at the same time, the love of many toward Him would grow cold because evil would increase in the world. If we believe Him, then we would be foolish not to guard ourselves against deception. There is little time to waste in the short span of life granted us by God. We must choose today whom we will serve.

MEDIA SPOTLIGHT

P.O. Box 290 - Redmond, WA 98073-0290

www.mediaspotlight.org

Is what you believe important? Everyone believes something; no one doesn't believe anything. What we believe, whether it has to do with religion or secular philosophy, impacts our lives.

Wars are constantly being fought over ideological battlegrounds, sometimes spilling over into blood-drenched combat zones. Why does mankind think so highly of his opinion that he is ready to kill for it, some even to die for it?

What you believe is important. But can you give a reasoned explanation for why you believe what you believe? Can you say for a certainty that your belief is superior to all other beliefs?

Al Dager challenges you to examine the reasons for your beliefs. At the same time, he offers reasons for why he believes the way he does. You can accept or reject what he has to say, but at the very least you will be able to assess your own belief system and either give a reasoned defense for it, or, perhaps, see the need to reassess what you believe.

Are you willing to take the challenge?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Albert James Dager is founder of Media Spotlight, an analysis of religious and secular media. Founded in 1977, Media Spotlight was the first organization of international proportions to address the issues in the mass media—both secular and religious—that affect the thinking of millions.



Al has appeared on many local, national and international television and radio programs, sharing insights on how the world's philosophies impact us through the mass communications media. He lives with his wife Jean in Washington state.

ISBN 0-9626632-2-0



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SWORD PUBLISHERS
Redmond, WA

ISBN 0-9626632-2-0
Library of Congress No.
2004092184