

THOMAS ALAN WHEELER

WHAT IF IT'S

TRUE?



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THE BIBLE IS A DIFFICULT BOOK TO BELIEVE.

THINK ABOUT IT.

 **OUR CULTURE SAYS** *our purpose in life is “doing our own thing,” but the Bible says God created us for a specific purpose and we can miss our purpose by following our personal desires. Our culture believes God is distant, watching as we act, but the Bible says God is personal, acting as we watch and participate. Our culture generally believes we are guided by random circumstances, either good or bad, but the Bible says there is a spiritual war going on between good and evil, and we are taking sides.*

The overall theme in our cultural belief is our eternal destination of heaven or hell is dependent upon our moral goodness or fate, while the Bible says our eternity is dependent upon our decision regarding Jesus. Our culture believes there are many ways to God, but

the Bible says there is only one. Our culture says God wouldn't send people to hell, but the Bible says it's our choice. Our culture says believing there is only one way to God is foolish, naive, arrogant, discriminating and offensive, but the Bible says this sole belief is necessary in order to satisfy the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man. Our culture considers such thinking arrogant or judgmental, but the Bible delivers that statement as a message of grace and love. The Bible really is a difficult book to believe, isn't it?

But what if it's true?

OUR OWN THING

For most of my life, I lived the way I thought was best. I'm from a middle-class family and have lived a middle-class life. I'm an Eagle Scout, graduated from high school and college, worked for Apple computer, made fairly decent money and then started my own business. I was living what I considered to be the American Dream. And I was a decent person. Sure, I drank a lot on weekends, and used "middle-class" drugs (mostly to fit into the crowd), and yeah, I had premarital sex, but I was a decent person. I just wasn't perfect. But who is? I was just doing my own thing.

Most of us, if we admit it, are doing the same thing. Perhaps that's why there is a struggle to keep marriage between a man and a woman. The same may be true with abortion. They're choices made out of convenience, while people "do their own thing." Doing our own thing is the current spirit in American culture and many of us live in our own version of that spirit, fueling it to become what it has. The Bible

talks about a culture like that. It says:

They did what was right in their own eyes.ⁱ

GOD'S THING

In contrast to that view is the biblical one. It's the one I discovered when I was 33, the one that says we have a higher calling than living for ourselves. God said to the prophet Jeremiah:

*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I set you apart.ⁱⁱ*

God was telling Jeremiah he had a specific purpose for his life, and it was determined before Jeremiah was born. The Bible also implies God has a plan for each of us, as well.ⁱⁱⁱ Incredibly, the Bible says God knew “*each one of us before we were born, knitting us together in our mother's womb and ordaining all of our days before any one of them came to pass.*”^{iv} God says even the hairs of our head are numbered!^v Furthermore, the Bible says, “*We have different gifts, according to the grace given us,*” which sheds light on why many of us are talented in certain areas while others are not.^{vi} God never intended for us to “do our own thing.” Truthfully, if we are doing our own thing, we are likely *not* doing what God planned for our lives. Hard to believe isn't it? Maybe.

But what if it's true?^{vii}

IS GOD DISTANT, WATCHING AS WE ACT?

It's easy to believe God isn't active in the world today – or that he doesn't care. All we have to do

is turn on the news and see all the suffering in the world. If God were truly involved or truly cared about us, wouldn't he put a stop to all the pain and suffering? A scene from the movie "Bruce Almighty" illustrates that.^{viii} Bruce Nolan (played by Jim Carrey) is a charismatic newsman who wants to be a news anchor. He keeps being passed over. Bruce has just made a negative comment about God to his wife, Grace (Jennifer Aniston).

Grace: Bruce, don't talk like that.

Bruce: Oh, don't worry, he's not listening (referring to God). If he is, he doesn't care. Have you seen the news lately? We got gangs, we got drugs, we got corruption. What kind of God lets that happen? Every time we cure a disease he comes up with a new one!

Bruce: (pretending to have a conversation with God): "Yeah, is this the lab? Yeah, it's God. They've just come up with a treatment for syphilis down there. I think it's time to release the tainted monkey. Oh, and there's a guy in Ohio who's praying for strength and wisdom. Blind him and cut off his legs."

Grace: So God is torturing us?

Bruce: Think about it, Grace. God is all-powerful. He could fix everything in five minutes if he wanted to. But he doesn't want to. He doesn't like me.

Sound familiar?

Perhaps we've all questioned God's activity in this life or the doubt brought up by Hollywood,

writers of fiction or the suffering in the world. The Bible, however, is clear about God's activity on earth.

GOD IS PERSONAL, ACTING AS WE WATCH AND PARTICIPATE

According to the Bible, God has always been active and still is in control of his universe. The first verse of the Bible reads:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the Earth.

Following that, the Bible states: “*God said,*” and we had light, land, morning, evening, vegetation, the sun and moon, the sea, animals and people. Although Charles Darwin’s “Origin of the Species” tells us life randomly evolved over millions of years, 90 percent of us, according to statistics, believe in a God who created the heavens and the Earth.

It’s not surprising.

If the Earth were 1 degree closer to the sun, we would all burn up. If the earth were 1 degree farther from the sun, we would all freeze. The earth is perfectly designed for life to exist as it does. Miraculous! The second law of thermodynamics states the natural order of all change is to create a greater degree of disorder and randomness, opposed to cohesion and order.^{ix} Put differently, if life were random, we would have total and absolute chaos. Anarchy would exist if we did not have rules to control society. Consider what would happen if you left your children in charge of your household? Or what would happen to an organization whose competent leaders stopped

leading? Chaos! So why would the universe be different? Perhaps it's easy to take God's grace (our very life) for granted until we really think about how miraculous it is that we're alive in the first place. God is at the helm and uses us to achieve his purposes. Do you still find this hard to believe?

But what if it's true?

THE SPIRITUAL WAR

So then what is going on down here on Earth? If God truly is good, loving, in control, and things are not as random or circumstantial as suspected, why are all these bad things happening? Again, the Bible is fairly clear. We know from the Bible there is an invisible war raging between good and evil. Look at this passage:

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.^{xi}

Although our culture may make fun of the devil, *he is the enemy*, and he wants to steal, kill, and destroy you and your family.^{xii} Consider how our culture is trying to rid schools and our government of anything related to God – especially to Jesus. Why else would Brittany McComb, former Valedictorian of Foothill High School, have been cut off during her speech for thanking her “Lord and Savior?”^{xiii} What's right is becoming wrong, and what's wrong is becoming right because of the evil one called Satan. Oh, don't believe Satan is involved in the mayhem we see in our lives?

But what if it's true?

I'M A GOOD PERSON

From the world's perspective *I am a good person!* Compared to a murderer, I am great! Perhaps you view your life the same. We all know nobody's perfect, so we're not saying we are, but we're just not as bad as the really bad guys, right?

"If there is a God, He will take that into consideration when I die. Furthermore, if God is good and loving, He will cut me some slack. I'm a good person. I really and truly believe if there is a heaven; I'll be going!"

Sound familiar?

Perhaps that is why a 2004 Gallup survey indicated 77 percent of Americans believe they are headed to heaven, while few believe they are hell bound. In comparison to others, perhaps we are good enough to make the cut. But the Bible totally contradicts this comparison approach, at least the comparison of one person against another. The Bible says only God is good.^{xiv} Specifically, it says God is perfect and all of us fall short of his glory.^{xv} In other words, he is the standard to which we are compared. Therefore, if we compare ourselves to other people, believing we are competing amongst ourselves in order to get into heaven, we may think this way straight to hell and be separated from the God who created us, forever. That is what the Bible says. The true comparison is against God. We are imperfect.

That's why God sent Jesus – to satisfy his perfect justice by paying for our shortcomings. Don't believe it?

But what if it's true?

MANY WAYS TO GOD

Consistent with the aforementioned theory is one that believes there are “several ways to the top of the mountain.” Many believe there are numerous ways to God. It appears easy to believe that, since there are thousands of world religions. Could only one be correct? That doesn’t sound too fair. We all probably know the other arguments. For instance, could someone raised Buddhist, Hindu or Jewish be condemned for not following Jesus when their traditions do not believe in him? What about those who have never heard of Jesus – would God send them to hell for not believing in something about which they had no knowledge? While we all may have good questions for God’s chosen method to get to him, the Bible simply does not say there are many ways to God. It says there is only one— through Jesus. And the Bible explains why.

‘THE WAY’

The Bible says,

For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past; for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this

present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for He himself is fair and just, and he declares sinners to be right in his sight when they believe in Jesus.^{xvi}

Did you catch that? We are declared “righteous” or “made right” with God when we believe in Jesus because God paid the penalty for our sin by sending his son to die on the cross. The implication is we are not right with God apart from Jesus. The Bible calls us enemies of God because of our sin or imperfections, no matter how slight or egregious.^{xvii} A holy God simply cannot allow our sin into his presence. Consider this analogy.

When germs enter our bodies how does a healthy body’s immune system respond? It attacks the germs, right? It does so for our survival since, left along, germs can kill us. Perhaps germs are to us as sin is to God. Because of his nature, his very essence, he has to deal with our sin or he is in contradiction with himself, which is impossible for a perfect and holy God. So, rather than wiping us all out, which is what we deserve because of our sin (see the verse previously quoted), he sent his son to pay the price for our shortcomings.^{xviii} God put all of our sin on Jesus who was then the sacrificial lamb, for all those who believe. He did that because he loves us. So, if there were many ways to God, there is no need for Jesus. Why have him die on the cross if all we have to do is follow this mysterious “God” with different methods of satisfying his justice? It becomes clear how black and white this matter is.

God had to deal with our sin, our faults, and he did that by sending Jesus Christ to die on that cross so that we would be absolved. Otherwise, we’re

trying to work our way to heaven that then obviates Jesus and puts all the emphasis on us, which is what every other religion promotes. Still don't believe it?

But what if it's true?

CAN THERE REALLY BE ONLY ONE TRUTH?

You and I are getting older – that is the truth. And if you have been eating too much and not exercising enough, you are probably getting larger despite attempts to prove otherwise. It is also a fact that we all die physically. So who on Earth is leading the movement that suggests truth is determined by each of us individually? Truth is.

O.J. Simpson was found not guilty of murder – but he still may have done it. Regardless of what we know about any given subject, the truth remains. Consider the Titanic, the supposedly unsinkable ship that sank. Or how about New Orleans? Politicians knew that if a category 5 hurricane hit New Orleans, the entire city would be underwater. They did nothing, and a category 5 hurricane named Katrina hit, proving the experts correct. Denying absolute truth is to deny our own intelligence. I'm certain there are those who still want to argue with my point, but they too would be arguing their own truths, thus reinforcing my point. Can you be absolutely right telling me I'm absolutely wrong?

Some might quickly correct my assumption by saying although the truth does exist, we cannot know for sure what it is. The Bible disputes that argument:

Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth

and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.^{xix}

According to the Bible, Jesus is the truth, period. This same Bible tells us its words are the very words of God. God gave us the holy Bible to answer the question of eternal truth. Don't believe it?

But what if it's true?

GOD IS NOT SENDING ANYONE TO HELL

According to the Bible, God does not send anyone to hell; we are making that choice ourselves based upon our decision regarding Jesus. Unlike what many believe, God does not force his way on us. We all probably realize true love demands a choice; so God, our loving creator, must give us one. Can you make your spouse or your children love you? Of course not. It is their choice!

Remember the movie Bruce Almighty? Bruce desperately wanted Grace to love him but could not make her – as hard as he tried. He extends his arms toward Grace and tells her to love him while using his godly powers. She tells him she had loved him and then walks away from his foolish gestures to have that which he lost. We cannot make another person love us, we can only freely choose to love another person. This is the biggest difference between Christianity and all other religions.

Other religions say it is up to you and me to “earn” our love. All say you need to get hustling so you don't end up in hell or be reincarnated as an ant because you haven't done enough. But the Bible reiterates God is not sending anyone to hell. Those that

choose to ignore Jesus are choosing to disregard the only ticket out because of the perfect and holy nature of God.

Still don't believe it? But what if it's true?

WHO CAN WE TRUST?

The Bible is a difficult book to believe – at least all of it. So many people lie about so much it can be hard for the best of us to decipher truth. The front page of the *Charlotte Observer* read “*The Man Who Lied about Everything*”. It was the story of David Race Bannon, who wrote “Race against Evil: The Secret Missions of the Interpol Agent Who Tracked the World’s Most Sinister Criminals – A Real-life Drama”. Evidently, this “true story” was all fiction. It fits right in with author James Frey’s supposedly nonfiction memoir “A Million Little Pieces”, which sold more copies in the U.S. in 2005 (1.77 million) than any other title but was not factual. And, of course, we know politicians lie, probably more than we know. Former President Bill Clinton, January 26, 1998: “I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky.” August 17, 1998: “Indeed, I did have a relationship with Miss Lewinsky that was not appropriate. In fact, it was wrong.” We remember Lance Armstrong’s 10-year denial of the use of enhancement drugs to win seven Tour de France races, then the admission he had. It is hard to trust anyone anymore.

WE CAN TRUST GOD

Regardless of our distrust, truth exists. And we

all do trust something, regardless of whether we have completely figured that out. What differentiates us isn't whether we have trust (or faith), the determining factor for us is *where* we put our trust.

Truth, although it may appear to be hidden, doesn't disappear. Doubting truth is like doubting existence. Recently, a friend told me the story of his Thanksgiving holiday. After his family had eaten its dinner, one of his family members collapsed and stopped breathing. My friend began saying "In the name of Jesus, in the name of Jesus, in the name of Jesus!" His friend eventually came back to life with a sudden breath of air. Family had called 911, and the patient went to the hospital while everyone else went back to their business, some questioning whether he really had stopped breathing – even though he clearly had.

After the fellow returned from the hospital, he pulled my friend aside and said he saw his life flash before him in fast-paced images. He said he had left his body and was headed "somewhere." All he recalled going on inside this physically unconscious but spiritually conscious state was hearing my friend say "in the name of Jesus."

Upon hearing that, he said he asked God for another chance at life. Immediately, he woke up with that sudden breath of air the family witnessed but has since questioned. At that point he asked my friend what he had to do to be saved – a line right out of the Bible, by the way. My friend told him what the Scriptures say in the book of Romans:

⁹ "... if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and

are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”

On the spot, this man accepted Christ. The question of whether the message of the Bible and Jesus is true had, for him, been settled. He believes it – but it took a near-death experience.

What about you? Do you doubt the Bible? Are you still finding parts of the Bible difficult to believe? Do you still think Jesus is one way to God among many or just a “good guy?” He sure didn’t agree to that ... but is that what you believe? Have you pursued God and the Bible enough to have an intellectual basis for what you believe, or do you just disbelieve the Bible because of your opinions? Because, when it is all said and done, our opinions – no matter how much we might believe them – will not matter, and the truth will stand firm. According to the Bible, every man, woman and child will ultimately be in heaven with God for an eternity or in hell, separated from God for an eternity – all based upon our decision about Jesus.

STILL DON'T BELIEVE IT?

BUT WHAT IF IT'S TRUE?

- i. Judges 21:25.
- ii. Jeremiah 1:5.
- iii. "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11). It goes on to say that "he who began a good work in you will carry it to completion" (Philippians 1:6).
- iv. Psalm 139:13/16.
- v. Matthew 10:30.
- vi. Romans 12:4ff, Ephesians 4:11-13.
- vii. NLT-Ephesians 5:17.
- viii. Carrey, Jim, perf. Bruce Almighty. Dir. Tom Shadyac, Universal Pictures, 2003.
- ix. Second Law of Thermodynamics - ChristianAnswers.Net. Does this basic law of nature prevent Evolution? www.christiananswers.net/q-edn/edn-thermodynamics.html.
- x. Ephesians 6:10-12.
- xi. 1 Peter 5:8.
- xii. "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).
- xiii. Valedictorian Thanks God; Speech Is Cut Short, posted June 20, 2006. Las Vegas Review-Journal.
- xiv. Mark 10:18, "No one is good – except God alone."
- xv. Romans 3:12 & 3:23.
- xvi. Romans 3:23-26, NLT.
- xvii. Romans 5:10.
- xviii. Romans 3:25.
- xix. John 14:6.

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THE BIBLE IS A DIFFICULT BOOK TO BELIEVE.

THINK ABOUT IT...

OUR CULTURE THINKS:

- We are physical bodies that have souls.
- We can define "God" by personal experience and opinions.
- Our purpose is living for ourselves so we can all be happy.
- Jesus was a good guy and role model.
- All good people are headed to heaven!

MEANWHILE THE BIBLE SAYS:

- We are souls that have physical bodies.
- There is one true God that we can and must know.
- God knew us before we were born and created us for a specific purpose.
- Jesus was and is God and was crucified for saying so.
- There is nobody good but God. Therefore nobody is headed to heaven without Jesus!

This pamphlet discusses the truth as defined biblically. It is not meant to be about religion either; rather, it is about truth. And truth is never waiting for our opinion about itself ...it is waiting for our acceptance.



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