

A miracle is a natural occurrence.

There is actually no difference between the natural and what we call the supernatural worlds. The only difference is in our level of awareness. The so-called physical universe is actually immaterial in nature, and may be regarded as an outward manifestation of our inner collective thoughts. The experience of it is real, but there is no substance to it. If we "continually" focus our thoughts on what we would like to see happen in our lives, and "pretend" that it is happening, we eventually will convince our sub-conscious mind that it actually is happening. When we reach that point in our thinking, miracles occur.

A Rebellious Son

Deuteronomy 21:18-21

¹⁸“If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and, though they discipline him, will not listen to them, ¹⁹ then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gate of the place where he lives, ²⁰ and they shall say to the elders of his city, ‘This our son is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.’ ²¹ Then all the men of the city shall stone him to death with stones. So you shall purge the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear, and fear.”

If you believe the Bible is the inerrant word of God, how do you deal with the above? Do you really believe those were the actual words of God to the nation of Israel? Do you believe they were the words of man written under the inspiration of God? Or do you believe they were the misinformed words of a religious community who believed that killing a rebellious son was acceptable to God?

Should all the words of Scripture be regarded as “inspired” by God? I myself have frequently used the term “inspired by God” with reference to the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. Although the Scriptures contain many genuine truths of God, they also contain many factual and theological errors. Are “all” of the Scriptures inspired by God, or only those portions that we would regard as the “good stuff?”

I would say that individual portions of Scripture, such as Deuteronomy 21:18-21, were inspired by God only in the sense that they were included in the biblical narrative for a good purpose. The entire biblical narrative, which contains much truth and error, I believe, was intended by God to reveal a progression of thought. It is a story of how a nation, through a very painful process of trial and error, gradually transformed its theology from one based on the strict rule of law to one based on the rule of love.

The best way to learn spiritual truths is through actual positive and negative human experience. God doesn't just hand us all the truth on a silver platter in a “second-hand” fashion. He wants us to learn these truths “first-hand” by allowing us to learn from our mistakes. This crucible that we call life purifies and cleanses our thinking through a painful, yet gratifying, process of trial and error.

Answering the problem of suffering and evil

A major argument against the existence of God is the problem of suffering and evil in the world. Why would a loving and kind God permit atrocities to go unchecked on such a massive scale? Why would God allow so many innocent children to be born into extreme poverty and/or suffer so many horrible abuses? Why are there so many natural disasters? Why do extreme forms of evil seemed to go unchecked nearly everywhere. If you believe in reincarnation, what possible good reasons would there be for so many billions of spirits in heaven choose to incarnate into such vile and miserable circumstances? What possible lessons could be learned that would make this kind of existence worthwhile, no matter how temporary or transitory it might be from an eternal perspective? When God created this world, did He not foresee what would happen? If you want to blame it all on Satan, why would a loving and caring God permit such a vile creature to dominate the earth and wreak such extreme havoc on nearly everyone in existence? Why would a just and loving God answer my prayer for good health and prosperity, and at the same time completely ignore the miserable plight of billions of poor, needy, and abused people in third world countries?

I'm 72 years old, and I have been a committed Christian for all of my adult life, and remain so today. I have heard every possible answer to the above questions, including the most common answer, which is that we aren't supposed to know. None of the other answers are very satisfying. The "we are not supposed to know" answer is probably right. It must be true that God doesn't want us to know, or else He would clue us in.

Here's what I think might really be going on. It is very possible that the scary world out there actually does not exist and that our experience of it is nothing more than a vivid dream, a grand illusion, or simulated reality, designed by ourselves, or God if you will, for the purpose of teaching us valuable life lessons and broadening our life experiences in a perfectly safe, virtual environment. In my book I have gone to great lengths to describe the true nature of reality, as described by many physicists, as well as religious mystics of all faiths. The world we live in technically does not exist, except in our minds, or consciousness, if you will. Please take time to read the chapter entitled, "The Nature of Reality." Or you can watch in in video format.

The best way to learn how to fly an airplane is in a flight simulator. Because the experience seems real, the lessons learned are very real indeed. The only thing that is truly real about flying in a simulator is the false perception that we are actually flying. The nice thing about a simulator is that we are in a perfectly safe environment. When we look down on the simulated runway, from the simulator, we see people milling around who don't actually exist. The real reason God doesn't want us to know that we are living in a simulated reality is that this would destroy the "illusion" and defeat the purpose of the experience.

Here's the question I have been asking myself. Is this simulated reality that we call life a "shared" reality in which all those people out there also exist. Or, are they only simulations? Perhaps only a few of the actors in our life are real, our soul mates as it were, and all the others not real? This would of course resolve the question of why God allows so much suffering and evil to exist. They don't actually exist.

Am I absolutely sure about all this? Of course not! That would be the height of arrogance. None of us knows for sure that these speculations are true, although you can find a lot of supporting evidence for them in certain scientific and religious communities. If we did know for sure, that would completely defeat the purpose of the simulation.

Please don't accuse me of not caring about the poor and needy. I do what I can to help the poor and feel just as guilty as the rest of you that I don't do more.

Culpability vs. Accountability

I like to make a distinction between culpability and accountability. Our actions are for the most part predetermined by our genetic make-up, the circumstances of our lives, and the way our brains work. None of these factors are self-caused. Actually, nothing at all is self-caused. On the other hand, we still must be held accountable for our actions for the sake of our own growth and development, and in order to mitigate the negative affects of our actions on others. An extreme example of this would be a schizophrenic psychopath, who's brain was damaged from birth, not being held legally responsible, or "culpable," for his crimes due to mental incapacity. That psychopath still needs to be held "accountable" and needs to be incarcerated for the sake of the safety of others and also in his own best interests. We are all, in a manner of speaking, not technically responsible or culpable for our actions, as they were not self-caused, but we still must be held accountable. God understands this. We do not deserve God's love, nor do we deserve His chastisements. God loves us unconditionally because it is His nature to do so. He chastises and corrects us, not as objects of His wrath, but instead as the objects of His love.

Does God's nature include both good and evil?

If God is all that exists, and if nothing exists outside of the presence and consent of God, does that mean that God's nature includes both good and evil?

In my view, yes, it does. It is troubling that my definition of God includes both good and evil aspects. The alternative is a separate omnipotent spiritual entity who created the circumstances in which both good and evil thrive, apparently without lifting a finger to alleviate suffering and evil on earth, at least not any time soon.

Both alternatives are troubling to me. However, under both scenarios, suffering and evil must serve a "good" purpose, if God is good and if God is omnipotent. No matter how you define "God," the problem of evil remains, unless you regard both aspects of God's nature to be necessary in order to achieve or demonstrate a "higher good." I believe, as the Bible attests, that God's "dominant" characteristic is Love. In order to reveal and enhance that aspect of His nature, God's love needs to be contrasted with suffering and evil. Otherwise, love could not be love, at least not as the Bible defines love. "Agape" (self-sacrificing) love cannot possibly exist in a world devoid of suffering and evil. How can sacrifice be possible in a world where sacrifice is not needed? For the love of God to be adequately defined and appreciated, people must first find

themselves in circumstances where that love is most needed. If evil is one aspect of God's nature, then I would assume that it serves the purpose of revealing and enhancing the dominant characteristic of His nature, which is love.

As odd as this might seem on the surface, good and evil are two sides of a single coin.

Take the story of the prodigal son in the Bible. In this story the father symbolizes God, and the far country, where the son experiences suffering resulting from wrong choices (sin), symbolizes a negative situation the son must experience before being able to fully appreciate the love and forgiveness of his father. The son who did not "do evil" and leave home, was not able to fully understand and appreciate his father's love and forgiveness.

If you disagree, please take time to think really hard about this. Why is it that you personally appreciate God's love for you? List the reasons. Do some of those reasons result from the suffering and evil you have experienced? Do some of those reasons result from various sins and bad choices you have made in life?

Don't throw out the baby with the bathwater

Over the past few years, I have been on a journey of discovery which involved repudiating some of my prior core Christian beliefs and replacing them with what I believe is the actual truth. In the process, I was set free from the negative aspects of popular Christianity, while at the same time hanging onto the "good stuff." As it turns out, the good stuff is even better than I had anticipated, and far more "believable." Unlike the aspects of my belief system which I discarded, my new belief system fits very nicely with the latest findings of science, Biblical criticism, psychology, para-psychology, mysticism, intuition, reason, and just plain old commonsense.

I believe that Christian Conservatives resist attempts to discredit the negative aspects of their theology, because they are convinced that if their version of Christianity is disproved, then nothing else remains. We've all heard the platitude, "if you can't believe all of the Bible, then there is no basis for believing any of it." For them, the choice is between being a Christian or a non-Christian. Most conservative Christian evangelicals arrived at their belief system through a long process of intense indoctrination, which affirmed the "good stuff," and rationalized away the bad stuff with seemingly impeccable logic. This belief system was continually reinforced with highly inspirational real-life experiences, captivating music, and preachers who spoke convincingly and authoritatively.

Orthodox Christianity has stood the test of time. Who are we to argue with 2000 years of tradition? If we believe that our eternal destiny would be in serious jeopardy, were we to question those firmly held beliefs, then we would be very reluctant to question our faith or look for a more believable alternative.

I personally believe the best approach to "converting" conservative evangelicals to a "better way" and a more inclusive theology, is to show them how they can have their cake and eat it,

too. Show them how they can retain a fundamentalist view of Scriptures at the same time embrace a more modern and inclusive theology.

Christianity has stood the test of time because Christianity's core beliefs, values and lifestyle are timeless and equally valid and applicable in all times and cultures. If we are to persuade Christians to successfully "update" their traditional theology, we must begin by affirming the positive aspects of their current belief system. The Bible is a remarkable collection of documents. It can be interpreted in ways that support a more modern, inclusive theology, even when understood as "infallible" and "inerrant."

For example, the "fires" of God's judgments may be interpreted as symbolic of purification and cleansing, rather than retribution. The apocalyptic imagery of the Book of Revelation can be applied exclusively to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Many theories of the Atonement, besides the substitutionary theory, are fully supported by Scripture. The Greek word "eternal," when applied to judgments in the afterlife, literally means "age-during," not everlasting. God's desire and intention to "save" all mankind, not just a lucky few, is clearly taught not only by Jesus, but also the Apostle Paul.

So here's the challenge. If we are going to reach evangelicals with the true Gospel of Christ, we must begin by affirming the "substance" of their current beliefs and then carefully make our case while we have their attention and trust. We must be careful not to throw out the baby with the bathwater. Once the fear is gone, people might be more open to a revision of how they view Scripture.

Entering the Kingdom of God

I believe there is one God (consciousness) of which we are all a part. God "perceives" His creation from many different vantage points "as individuals." We are currently experiencing what it is like to be unaware of (or "separated" from) our "higher consciousness" which is God. This does not mean that God is somewhere else or distant from me. I am an "individual" aspect of a "greater whole" which is God. You could say that God "experiences" new things by "expanding" His consciousness by means of dividing Himself up into many smaller parts and viewing creation from many different "vantage points." When we die and return to spirit, we do not lose our "individuality." Instead we "expand" our conscious awareness to include that of many others. This process of consciousness expansion and contraction (ie. birth, death, resurrection, and rebirth) is the means by which God "grows" and experiences "newness" and "novelty." God may be likened to the ocean and we are individual drops of water. God is like the hive and we are the bees.

While in the flesh, we remain "one with the Father." We are just not all aware of this connection. The degree to which we become aware of and experience this "oneness" is the degree to which we have "entered the Kingdom of God." The Kingdom of God is not a place but a state of mind or awareness.

Exactly who or what is God?

The concept of God that we mostly see described in the Bible is that of an external, human-like being, who exists separately from the world that "He/She/It" created. Based on my understanding of physics, the true nature of reality, and the testimony of those who have briefly experienced the "other side," I now view God, not as an individual "person," but as "all that is." Consciousness is all that actually exists, of which we are all a part. My best definition of "God" would be the "universal consciousness" that comprises all that exists. Interestingly, even atheists, if pressed, would have to admit that "consciousness" exists, albeit as an artifact of the physical brain. Would that make them theists without knowing it? God "personally" relates to us when taking the "form" of another conscious being. When we are loving another human being, we are loving God. Jesus used metaphorical language when talking about God, and he talked in parables when discussing the ways of God. That is also the best we can do when trying to describe the indescribable.

Genocide in the Bible

One way of looking at the issue of genocide in the Bible is to understand that everything that happens is permitted to happen by God. Since God is the beginning cause of everything you could correctly conclude that God caused the Genesis flood and caused all forms of genocide in the Bible. Because God is love, there must be a loving purpose behind all the tragedies of life, not only the genocide. The law of sowing and reaping, I believe, is a universal law of cause and effect and its purpose is to steer humanity in the right direction. This law applies to nations as well as individuals. The writers of the Hebrew Bible viewed God as the direct, rather than the indirect, cause of human events and incorrectly viewed God as a big man in the sky making things happen, when the actual truth of the matter is that God merely oversees what mankind is doing to itself, feels their pain, and tends to our wounds and heals us. I don't believe that the history in the Bible is accurate literal history. Some is accurate, but a lot of it is myth and legend, man's attempt to understand how God operates in history.

Getting saved

God always was, still is, and always will be everyone's loving heavenly Father. For most Christians, "getting saved" is a process of becoming aware of this and accepting the Lordship of Christ in one's life and changing one's attitudes and behavior to conform to the teachings of Christ. In order to "get saved" one does not necessarily need to know or acknowledge Jesus by name. Jesus did say in the parable of the separation of the sheep and the goats that many would be entering the Kingdom who apparently did not realize that they were serving Christ when they showed compassion and kindness towards their fellow human beings whom Jesus regarded as His brothers and sisters. "Getting saved" is a process, not a single event. A sudden and defining "conversion" experience is a significant part of that process for some, but not most. "Entering the Kingdom," I believe, would best be interpreted allegorically as "entering into a relationship with

Christ," whether one knows Him by name or not, and presently experiencing the warmth of God's love and acceptance, and receiving intangible rewards in Heaven after death. Those rewards are not things like fancy mansions. I personally believe that the greatest reward we will receive in Heaven will be hearing those wonderful words, "well done, my good and faithful servant."

Do you believe in Santa Claus?

Unconsciously, most of us tend to view God in the same way we view Santa Claus, as some kind of magical being in the sky who watches over everything we do with a critical eye, deciding who's naughty and nice, and then withholding his gifts when we are naughty, and rewarding us when we are nice. When my children were young, my wife and I decided not to teach them about Santa Claus. We reasoned that if we lied to them about Santa, maybe they would be reluctant to believe us when we told them about God later on. Then, we unwittingly substituted the actual truth about God with a view of God that bears a striking similarity to Santa Clause.

Eventually, children discover that Santa is not real. They become suspicious that Santa's existence and behavior just doesn't seem to line up with known facts. How could one man, even with supernatural powers, visit billions of homes in a single night, and keep track of millions of individual requests for gifts? How could he be in so many different department stores and malls at the same time? How could his workshop at the North Pole be big enough, or sophisticated enough, to make billions of toys in a single year? How could those little elves be taught how to make those highly sophisticated electronic devices? Why hasn't anyone actually seen the real Santa? The only Santas people actually see are ordinary men dressed up as Santa in order to fool us. By the way, how come rich kids get more gifts than poor kids? It doesn't seem to be based on merit at all. Eventually, children figure out, through common sense and logic, that Santa doesn't actually exist.

The same thing happens when we teach children that God is like Santa Clause. We teach them that God lives in a far-away place called Heaven, and hides from us most of the time. We teach them that God keeps track of everything we do and hands out rewards and punishments accordingly. We teach them if they want something, they need to ask God for it, and God will give it to them if they deserve it. If trouble comes, often God gets the blame, and they think it's because they have been bad. We teach them that what they want out of life is something that is given to them by someone other than themselves.

There is the story about the dog and the cat. The dog's master was very kind, loving and generous towards him, and the dog thought to himself, "My master must be God." The cat was treated the same way by his master, and thought to himself, "I must be God."

What did Jesus believe? Was Jesus more like the dog or the cat? He was accused of blasphemy because He talked and acted like He was God. He believed Himself to a representation of God on this earth. Jesus also taught us that we also had divine natures (ie. children of God) and were equally capable of working the same miracles, if we exercised the right kind of faith. When

asked if He believed Himself to be God, Jesus quoted an Old Testament passage which affirmed that we are all gods.

Is God like Santa Clause? If so, how is He able to be in a billion different places at once and watch over billions of people all at once? God is not like Santa Clause. He is not even a single person. He is more than just one person. He has divided His spirit impartially among all of us and given each of us the ability to act on our own behalf, with the power of the universe behind us. I am an individual aspect of God, an aspect of God that is focusing uniquely on me and my immediate surroundings. When I pray to God the Father, I am actually praying to my own “higher nature,” or that aspect of God which is me. God literally loves me as I love (or should love) myself, because God is me. No one loves me, or knows and understands me, quite as much as my “higher self.” My true home is in Heaven. A small portion of my spirit, or true self, resides in a physical body and views my existence through the lens of a physical brain. My “higher self” resides in Heaven (with Christ) and views my life from an eternal vantage point. While in the flesh, I have lost the memory of who I really am. When I transition out of the flesh, I will awaken to my identity in heaven (in Christ).

Does this mean that I am alone and isolated from God, or should I say, from all other manifestations of God? Of course not. We are all parts of the same spiritual body, and we work together, not in isolation from one another. My “higher self” is not alone in the heavenly realms, nor am I alone in this earthly realm. Jesus Christ, in the person of many others, walks with me, not only in Heaven, but also here on earth. But that is a topic for another day.

How does one best describe the indescribable?

When describing God, I like to use the same language as Jesus, who frequently made use of metaphors, similes, and parables. It is grammatically awkward to use generic pronouns to describe God. There is no generic, non-gender specific, substitute in the English language for "His" and "Her." I wish there were. No Christian, not even a fundamentalist, believes that God is limited to the male gender. When I call God my “Heavenly Father,” or use the pronoun “He,” everyone knows that these terms are not meant to be gender specific. Using the pronouns “she” or “it” when referring to God would be an immediate “turn-off” for most people. If one uses the term “she,” as some do, many people would view this as a sign of rebellion or disrespect towards God and/or the Scriptures.

Technically, God is not a person at all, at least not in the way most of us understand the term. God is a genderless Spirit. The “person” we call God encompasses and includes every single thing and every single person in existence. In God, everything lives and moves and has its being. God becomes "personal" to us only when taking the form of an individual person, sometimes male, sometimes female, sometimes bi-gender, sometimes transgender. We are all God's children, created in His/Her/It's spiritual likeness. When incarnated in the flesh, God takes on many different fleshly forms and genders.

When praying, most of us find it helpful to “visualize” God in our minds, most often as a He, because that is the way we have been conditioned to think. It is helpful for some to visualize God

as a she. Many visualize a spiritual, genderless being up in the sky somewhere, or within their souls. Some, who have been abused by their earthly fathers, might have trouble with the term “Heavenly Father,” while other victims of abuse might be comforted to know that not all fathers are abusive, especially not their loving Heavenly Father. I personally love to visualize God as my Heavenly Father, because that says so much about how God loves and cares for me. Jesus went even a step further and used the word “abba,” which corresponds to the English word “daddy.” The point to keep in mind is that all descriptions of God are imperfect and incomplete. How does one actually describe the indescribable?

How to game the system

I personally am finding it helpful to view my life from the perspective of the player in a video game or virtual reality. As many physicists and religious mystics have discovered, the world in which we live is spiritual, not physical, in nature. It exists only in our minds. Our real home is in Heaven, and we are experiencing our current life in the flesh as in a dream through the filter of our quasi-physical brains. As with any virtual reality game, we are somewhat able to manipulate what happens with those metaphorical buttons and toggle switches in our minds. No matter what happens, or what choices we make, however, we are completely protected from permanent harm, because, after all, the game is not real. It is only a simulation. In reality, we are completely safe, “back home,” so to speak, in the loving embrace of our Heavenly Father. We might for a while become “lost” in the game, and take many wrong turns, resulting in what seems like hopeless situations. But, in the end, we all eventually wake up from the dream having been made better or worse for the experience.

So, is it possible to “game the system” and take full control of what happens? Is it possible to learn all the “tricks” and “secrets” that will allow us to “win” the game and achieve our heart’s desires while still in the game? Yes, I believe that is possible, but only if we play by the rules. And therein lies the rub. Jesus pretty well laid out those rules for us. First seek God’s kingdom, and then all those “other things” will be added unto us. Do unto others what we would have them do to us. What we sow we will reap. Love God and your neighbor as yourself. Love your enemy and return good for evil.

Here’s why the rules are necessary. If everyone could easily manipulate the game, those who are evil would wreak even more havoc in the world than what is already happening. Have you noticed that religious mystics, who seem to have achieved a very levels of “consciousness” or “self-awareness,” tend to be loving and forgiving by nature? They tend to be non-violent and in sync with the loving vibrations of higher planes of existence. Have you noticed that the most unselfish and loving people you know tend to lead successful lives and be very happy and joyful?

While it is true that the system can be partially “gamed” by the “think and grow rich” crowd, the resultant material wealth might come at the cost of one’s soul. In the end those riches don’t bring permanent happiness. Some of the richest people in the world are either unhappy or unsatisfied. By that I mean even though they have much wealth, they continually crave even more and are never satisfied.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.” Matthew 5:6

“Take delight in the Lord, and He will you the desires of your heart.” Psalm 37:4

It’s all about semantics

Sometimes people who disagree with us are actually saying the same thing, using different semantics. I believe we are witnessing the gradual merging of science with religion, the secular with the sacred. Physicists are now exploring the nature of reality and the role that human consciousness plays in the shaping of that reality.

Here are some examples of some ancient Biblical concepts that have been modernized by Progressive Christianity, as well as the New-Age, and New Thought movements:

God = universal consciousness, an intelligent, self-aware, supreme non-physical being who exists everywhere.

Son or child of God = individual consciousness emanating from the universal consciousness.

Death = the illusion of separation or estrangement from the universal consciousness.

Life = enlightenment, or the experience of oneness or communion with the universal consciousness.

Sin = negative attitudes, and the harmful things we do to one another as a result of our perceived estrangement from the universal consciousness and from one another.

Eternal = the nature of the current existence of our individual consciousness outside of the time-space universe.

Heaven = where our “higher consciousness” currently resides.

Hell = the pain and suffering that results from our perceived estrangement from the universal consciousness, and our resulting negative attitudes and actions towards others.

Condemnation = being accused of negative or harmful attitudes or actions.

Punishment or chastisement = naturally occurring corrective actions intended to bring our physical consciousness into alignment with our higher consciousness.

Resurrection = the replacing of our physical bodies with spiritual or immaterial bodies.

Judgments of God = honest self-evaluations conducted by our higher selves.

Love – the word most commonly used to describe the fundamental nature of the universal consciousness.

Creator = the source of all that is, including our individual consciousness.

Communion = our oneness with the universal consciousness and with one another.

Jesus didn't give up His life for our sins. He only gave up his weekend.

If the penalty for sin is eternal damnation in Hell, Jesus certainly didn't pay that penalty. He only remained in the grave over the weekend, and rose from the dead on Sunday morning. The death penalty for sin is not a permanent condition, and it has nothing at all to do with dying physically. Both Christians and non-Christians die physically, including Jesus. The so-called death penalty for sin has mostly to do with our perceived estrangement from God. Jesus died for us in the sense that He died for our benefit, in order to prove to His followers that there was life after death, which most Jews of His day did not believe. In the New Testament, the word "death" was mostly used metaphorically and referred to a condition of estrangement or isolation from God, which results from living selfish lives and forsaking God's ways. Jesus taught that God's way of living is the way of love, not the way of selfishness, hatred, animosity, and retribution. Jesus came to save us from the "Hells" of our own making whereby we reap what we sow. Jesus taught that there is life after death for all of us. Heaven is a place where the lives we lived on Earth are judged and evaluated by God in a fair and equitable manner, and where rewards are given to us in direct proportion to our deeds. For those who receive no rewards, there is forgiveness and mercy. Our God is a God of second chances. God loves all of us unconditionally, and it is His sincere desire that eventually all be fully reconciled with Him and His ways.

My theology in a nutshell

1. Ironically, the main tenet of my theology is that theological correctness has nothing at all to do with our standing with God. It is the acting out of our faith through acts of human kindness that makes all the difference. When we are loving others, that is exactly the same as loving God, whether we realize it or not. God always was, still is, and always will be everyone's loving Heavenly Father. Christian salvation is a process of becoming aware of this and becoming more like Christ.
2. God loves all of us unconditionally, and everything that God does, even His harshest judgments, are an expression of that love. God chastises those whom He loves, and the purpose of those chastisements is to bring us to repentance and help us find our way back to Him. Most of those chastisements take the form of the natural consequences of our actions.

3. The Hebrew and Christian Scriptures are a historical record of mankind's evolving and improving ideas about the nature of God and how we should be interacting with Him. The Scriptures are inspired by God, and full of God's truth, but they are definitely not infallible and inerrant.
4. Heaven and Hell are not places, but states of mind, both in this life and the next. Technically, "Hell" is not a Biblical term. A literal Hell, similar to Dante's Inferno, does not exist at all. The "flames" of Gehenna, the Lake of Fire, and the fires of God's judgments in the Hebrew Bible are not literal. They are symbolic of purification and cleansing, not retribution.
5. Christian salvation is not an instantaneous event, but a series of events, beginning in ages past and culminating with the eventual perfection of everyone in the heavenly realms. Salvation is not about who goes to Heaven or Hell after they die. Jesus did not come to save us from God, but from our ignorance of how loving God really is, and from our unwillingness and/or inability to live Godly lives. He came not to condemn us but to save us from the Hells of our own making.
6. Jesus has a divine nature, as do we all. He would be best regarded as our "elder brother," rather than as a God who is separate from us. We are ALL quite literally the "children" or "offspring" of God, created, so to speak, from God's own spiritual DNA. God and Jesus' "higher nature," the "Logos" of John 1, are one and the same. The Spirit, or "higher nature," of Jesus resides within each of us, and is identical in many respects with our own "higher natures." Individually, we are like drops of water existing as part of an ocean which we call God. We are separate and distinct from God, and at the same time a part of God. That is what the Bible is talking about when speaking of God as being in Christ, Christ being one with the Father, Christ in us, and us in Christ. When Jesus was accused of blasphemy, He quoted from Psalms 82:6 *"Ye are all gods, sons of the Most High."*
7. On Calvary, Jesus died for us in the sense that He died "for our benefit." He did not die "instead of" or "in place of" us. I do not believe in the "substitutionary atonement." Calvary did not change the way God relates to us. Instead, it changed the way we view God. He became sin for us in the sense that He identified Himself with our sinful condition. He saves us from sin, not in the sense that He artificially removes our sin, but in the sense that He carries us on His back and by His Spirit helps us overcome the sin in our lives and become more like Him.

My view of the Scriptures

Dearest friends, Christian Universalists come in many varieties. Some have what I call a "progressive" view of the Scriptures, while others hold to a more "conservative" view. Universalism is strongly supported by Scripture, regardless of which view you take. I personally would not equate the Scriptures with the actual "word" or "words" of God. They were written by

fallible men under the inspiration of God. I don't believe in the infallibility or inerrancy of the Scriptures. I believe that the true "Word" of God is the "Logos" of John 1:1, or Jesus' "higher nature." I believe the Scriptures should be regarded as true or authoritative only to the extent that they reflect the beliefs and original teachings of Jesus.

Jesus, as do I, had great respect for the Scriptures, and believed that everything in them should remain, and not even one jot or tittle removed. At the same time, He did seem to "cherry pick" the Scriptures, and He highlighted those passages which supported his teachings. He spoke and taught on "his own authority," which shocked and amazed the rulers and elders. On some occasions, especially in the Sermon on the Mount, he contradicted and/or changed and amplified many Scriptures.

Many years after He left us, people began to write down, to the best of their recollection, His sayings and what they were told about His life and ministry. These writings, which we call the Gospels, are not deadly accurate with respect to everything that Jesus taught and did, but I do believe they capture the spirit and intent of those teachings.

I do believe that many truths and refinements to Jesus theology were communicated to His followers after the Resurrection, especially to the Apostle Paul.

I would describe my personal theology as an amalgam of the teachings of Jesus and the Apostle Paul. I believe they are complimentary and not contradictory to one another.

As a Christian Progressive, I believe the Scriptures should be regarded as the "perfect," but not "inerrant," vehicle by which God "progressively" reveals to us His true nature and how we should be relating to Him.

Nothing is self-caused

If you think you caused yourself to become a Christian, or do good, or do evil, you have another think coming. Nothing is self-caused. Your decision to act on your desires might be the "immediate" cause of your actions, but your desires themselves are not self-caused. Our current desires were caused by a bewildering variety of prior thoughts and events which have combined to shape our wills.

If you back up the entire chain of events which have combined to create the uniqueness of your thoughts and desires, you arrive at the first cause of everything, which is God. Because God is good, everything He causes to happen, including all of the smart and stupid decisions you make in life must at some level have a good purpose.

Most Evangelical Christians, except for the Calvinists, believe that your actions are self-caused, thereby making you deserving of eternal punishment in Hell, unless you are saved by Christ. If it is true, however, that God is the first cause of everything that happens, including whether or not you decide to receive Christ, it would follow that you should not be held ultimately responsible

for your actions. It would make no sense at all for God to punish you eternally for sins that He caused you to commit.

According to the Bible, the chastisements of God are not eternal and their purpose is not retribution. The literal definition of the Greek word “aionios” (commonly mistranslated “eternal”) is “temporary” or “pertaining to an age or succession of ages.” It does not mean “unending.” God chastises those whom He loves. The purpose of those chastisements is to mold you into the likeness of Christ and teach you to empathize with the misfortunes of others and love them unconditionally, as He does. God loves His enemies, including you, and returns good for evil.

So, why did God cause all this evil to exist in the first place? Why didn't He just prevent it all from happening? Well? Good has no meaning unless contrasted with evil. Light has no meaning unless contrasted with darkness. Joy has no meaning unless contrasted with sadness. Love has no meaning unless contrasted with hate. Sacrificial (Agape) love is not possible unless sacrifice is needed. You cannot possibly become like Christ unless you first experience what is like to be a sinner. In order to fully appreciate being made alive in Christ, you first must experience being dead in your sins.

Your decision to become a Christian was not self-caused. It was caused by God who indwells you with His Holy Spirit, gradually molding you into His own likeness.

Prayer and the Double-Slit Experiment

If you have read about quantum physics, you have probably heard of the double-slit experiment whereby light waves (photons) turn into particles when “observed” by a conscious observer. The observations are made by means a device that detects which of the two slits the photons pass through on their way to a detector screen. When the measuring device is turned off, the waves do not turn into particles. When the measuring device is turned on, the waves turn into particles.

Theorists have concluded from experiments like this that our thoughts (ie. observations) actually do influence the physical reality that we observe and experience, at least at the quantum level of very small things. Interestingly, other double-slit experiments have shown that we don't actually have to physically “observe” the photons of light in order to turn them into particles. It is possible to change them into particles merely by thinking about them, without the use of a measuring device. Dr. Dean Radin, over the past few years, by means of over five thousand individual sessions, has achieved statistically significant results simply by asking a group of people to “imagine” observing which slit the quantum waves go through on their way to the detector. Instead of using an actual measuring device, they would use only their imagination. Asking a group of people to focus their thoughts on the double-slits for just 30 seconds at a time at repeated intervals, Dr. Radin was able to record a statistically significant increase in the number of photons that turned into particles during those 30 second intervals of time. Not all of the photons turned into particles, but a statistically significant number of them actually did, with over a 5 sigma standard deviation. The result was the same, even when thousands of miles separated the double-slit device from the group of people being studied.

So, how does this relate to prayer? The reason prayer works is that our thoughts are far more powerful than we realize. When we focus our thoughts on a desired result we influence, at least to some degree, what happens. The more vividly we observe the desired result, the greater the probability of its actual occurrence. Prayer doesn't work by changing God's mind about anything. It works because it changes our mind. God has built into all of us the ability to change our own circumstances. If you repeat the process of imagination enough times, the probabilities gradually increase. Over time, the odds of success can swing dramatically in your favor.

Keep in mind, however, that there is a difference between "hoping" and "expecting." Unfortunately, for most of us, prayer has the connotation of wishing or asking for God to do something for us. That kind of prayer is not very powerful. According to Hebrews 11:1, faith is not equated with things hoped for. Instead, faith is the "substance" of that hope. It is a realization that takes place in mind before it is manifested externally. When you pray, you need to be visualizing and imagining that what you desire has already happened in your mind, and that it is only a matter of time before it physically manifests in your life.

In the double-slit experiment, imagination does not convert the photons to particles all at once. The same principle holds true for prayer. Over time, as you continue to focus your attention on the desired result, more and more of those photons will coalesce into particles, and the desires of your heart will begin to take shape, first in your mind, and then outwardly in your daily life.

Proof that we are infinite beings

Simple math proves that we, that is our consciousness and self-awareness, have always existed and will continue to exist forever after the death of the physical body.

If we are finite and not infinite beings, the odds of our being alive and self-aware during our brief lifespan here on earth may be expressed by the following equation (with "n" being any number of years during our lifetime on earth):

$N \text{ divided by infinity} = \text{an infinitely small number approaching zero.}$

Technically there is no such thing as infinity. Infinity is something one can only approach. Infinity continually expands, as there is no end to it, by definition. The solution to the above equation is not technically zero, but it is a number so small that it might as well be zero.

Most people fear death because to them it represents cessation of existence. Many years ago, I thought very deeply about this. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't conceive of not actually existing. Then I did the math using the following equation: My 80-year lifespan divided by the 14 billion years of the existence of our universe. The result was an extremely small number, so small that for all practical purposes it might as well have been zero. Recently I changed the equation and substituted infinity for the 14 billion-year time period, because I logically assumed that the universe would continue expanding (possibly expanding and contracting) indefinitely. The new equation resulted in an even smaller number, approaching negative infinity.

What are the odds of my being alive and self-aware at this moment in time? The odds against it are infinite, UNLESS I have always existed and will always continue to exist, if not in this space-time universe, then in other physical and non-physical realms, as well.

The entire 14 billion-year life-span of the universe in which we are temporarily residing is infinitesimally small, when viewed from the perspective of the infinite realm in which our consciousness actually resides. It is so small that we might say that our universe does not actually exist at all. For me, this helps put in proper perspective the suffering and evil that is permitted by God to exist in our physical universe. Technically, it exists for such a brief period of time that it might as well not exist at all. It mainly exists only in our minds, as memories. Our experiences here on earth will remain with us for all eternity in the form of a very useful memory bank of lessons learned, some of them painfully, but only lasting for a brief, infinitesimal, speck of time.

Saved from what?

There is the joke about Jesus standing at the door and asking to be let in so He can save the occupant. When the occupant asks Jesus what He needs to be saved from, Jesus replies, *“from what I’m going to do to you if you don’t let me in.”* This is sort of like the lifeguard who throws a non-swimmer into the water and then offers to save him for a price. It’s like extorting money from people by threatening them with violence if they don’t pay up. It’s like the religion of the Pharisees of Jesus’ day who threatened people with the wrath of God in this life and the next, unless they gave generously to the Temple and kept every jot and tittle of the Law. It’s like demanding obedience to an impossible and oppressive set of highly detailed set of rules and regulations in order to earn God’s favor, which is a form of slavery. It’s like telling people they must believe that God loves them, because if they don’t, God will torture them in Hell for all eternity.

Jesus did not come to condemn us, but to save us. He didn’t come to save us from God, but from our failure to realize just how loving God really is, and from our inability to live righteous lives. He died and rose again from the grave to save us from our fear of death. And He imparted his Holy Spirit to convince people that God loves them and will always be with them and will never forsake them.

After His ascension, He commissioned His disciples to go into all the nations to spread this wonderful news. Most of them remained in Jerusalem and at least partially clung to the old ways, so He called out a Jew, named Saul of Tarsus, and directly communicated the true Gospel to him and commissioned him to be the Apostle to both Jews and Gentiles. The Apostle Paul is the one who proclaimed in no uncertain terms that God is the Savior of ALL (1 Tim. 4:10) and that salvation is a gift given by grace (unmerited favor) (Eph. 2:8,9), and that eventually every last one of us will be fully and completely saved by Christ. Paul was unequivocally a Universalist (see Romans 9-11).

God predestined that some of us would be called out to be “*ministers of reconciliation and ambassadors for Christ,*” proclaiming to all who will listen the unconditional love of God for all mankind. Eventually all will be reconciled with God through Christ and every knee will bow to Him, people in Heaven, people on the Earth, even people who have been residing “*underneath the Earth*” (symbolically in the Hells of their own making). (See Phil. 2:10-11)

The best way to learn about God

To me, the Bible, including the New Testament, is a very human book. It is inspired by God but no more inspired than the works of Shakespeare. It is full of God's truths, but, so aren't the works of Plato, Shakespeare, and the texts of other world religions. The true Word of God is, in my view, the divine Logos referred to in John 1:1, or, you could say, Jesus' higher nature, also ours. I am a "progressive" Christian and subscribe to a very "liberal" view of Scripture interpretation. I believe the teachings of Jesus were at the time, and remain today, the very highest expression of morality and ethics, and they capture the true essence of God's loving and forgiving nature, as revealed to us from a variety of other sources. All truth is God's truth, and it may be found everywhere, in science, history, philosophy, mysticism, metaphysics, as well as human intuition and practical experience. Ironically, the actual truth of the matter is that God doesn't want us to know "all" of the truth, or else that is exactly what would have happened. What actually did happen is that we have been given just enough of the truth to make life interesting, worthwhile, and challenging. There is value in not knowing all the answers. There is value in gradually arriving at the most important answers through a process of discovery that includes much pain and suffering, wrong turns, and lessons learned the best way, through actual positive and negative human interactions. Through it all, we are loved by God and guided by His unseen hand in ways that we will not fully understand until we finally pass over and meet Him "face to face," metaphorically speaking.

Reconciling Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle with the Second Law of Thermodynamics

This is for all you “eggheads” out there.

Here's the way I see it. We can surmise, based on Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, that true randomness does occur, and it is impossible to predict what will happen to a given particle, based even on an exact knowledge of its present position and velocity. This does seem to conflict with the second law of thermodynamics which states that, based on the uncertainty principle, in an "open system," we should see increasing disorder. What we see happening in our universe is increasing order. I would conclude then, that we are not operating in an open system, but a closed one, and that God operates from outside of that system.

My best "guess" is that God controls what happens by taking (causing?) a nearly infinite amount of "corrective actions" or "course corrections," none of which have a guaranteed result. God works with "probabilities" which over time become "certainties." Our "free will" operates within both contexts, the

immediate context of uncertainty, and the long range outcome which is guaranteed to happen, but only over much time.

Technically, when a quantum wave collapses into a particle in a given location, that location can potentially be anywhere in the universe, but most probably it will end up exactly where we expect based on its current position and velocity. So, for me it easy to see that if we focus our thoughts and observations on a positive result based on our knowledge of the past and present, then we most likely, but not certainly, will experience what we expect. Over time, however, the result becomes more and more certain. Our experiences, over time, tend to coincide with our "thoughts" or "expectations." I believe, however, that our futures are not totally at the mercy of our "misguided" thoughts, but at some level we are all guided by the invisible hand of God. Eventually, we will all arrive at God's predetermined destination.

What Is God Like?

God is like the ocean and is all that exists. The dry land exists on the edge of infinity and, at least in the beginning, it is an imaginary place that exists only in God's mind as potential reality. Eventually, tiny ocean droplets emerge from the ocean, as water vapor that condenses into clouds and rain. Some of the droplets remain in the ethereal regions of the sky and eventually fall back into the ocean. Some of them fall onto the dry ground. They combine with all the other droplets and form mighty rivers and terraform the land. They contribute to the formation of new forms of life. Some of them take the form of plants and animals, some rocks and sand, and some become people. They are the means by which the ocean experiences what it is like to live on dry land, apart from itself. They are the means by which the ocean creates and builds new worlds. Although some of the droplets coalesce and become sentient beings, they remain unaware of their connection with the ocean or with one another, despite the fact that they are comprised mostly of water. This is the way the ocean experiences, for a while, what it is like to not be the ocean. Over time, all life on earth experiences death and decay. It dries up and gives up the water which had formed the core of its existence. Eventually, the water finds its way back to its source and merges with the ocean, only to evaporate again and repeat the process. Without the repeated creation of new experiences through a cycle of birth, death, and reabsorption, God's life would be very boring indeed.

What is Preterism?

Preterists believe the events described in the Book of Revelation, and by Jesus in Matt. 24, have already occurred, and we are now living in the Kingdom Age. The Book of Revelation is a pretty good description of what happened to the Jews, prior to and during the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, which was prophesied by Jesus. Most of the Christians had escaped and left Jerusalem due to persecution by the Jews. The symbolism is there to disguise the underlying truth from the Roman authorities who were still persecuting the Christians. Gehenna, or "Hell," was the garbage dump outside of Jerusalem where literally thousands of bodies were burned after one of the greatest massacres of ancient times. Babylon was symbolic of Rome. The desecration of the temple and the abominations that occurred there actually did happen. The writer of Revelation

wrote after those events. He was describing the past, not the future, and believed himself to be living in the Kingdom Age in the New Heaven and New Earth. Symbolically, the murderers and sinners are still outside the gates of the Heavenly City and not being let in (see Rev. 22:14-17). The New Jerusalem is not a physical city, but a spiritual one. Jesus said, "my Kingdom is not of this world." Makes good sense to me.

What lies ahead for organized religion?

Religion is decreasing. Spirituality is increasing. More and more people, including scientists, recognize the existence of a "higher power," life after death, and agree that love should be the primary basis for human interactions. The problem is that when you try to codify these beliefs into an organized system of thought and establish an organization to promote it, the organization eventually becomes corrupted by financial concerns. It takes money to advertise, pay for buildings and upkeep, and pay pastor or leader salaries. Once a belief system becomes institutionalized, it becomes rigid and resistant to change, and eventually loses its original focus and intent.

I personally like the Methodist approach, because they are theologically flexible and emphasize the doing and living of our faith rather than on the specifics which can be very controversial. Sadly, Methodism is declining, along with other mainline denominations. In this current era of "Trumpism" it is easy to see that most people are looking for "certainty" and "charismatic leadership," and are not at all interested in doing the necessary homework to make intelligent decisions based on their own study and exploration.

I sincerely hope that over time there will be a marriage between science and religion. At some point in the future, the most important aspects of religion will be verified by good science and less subject to uneducated opinions and financial motives.

What are your thoughts on this?

Where does God draw the line?

If you believe that after death there are only two alternatives, everlasting bliss in heaven or everlasting punishment in Hell, how does God draw the dividing line between these two groups? Let's suppose you were able to line up all the people who have ever lived and rank them in order, based on whatever measuring stick you believe God uses in deciding who goes where. On one end of the lineup would be those who absolutely would qualify for Heaven, and at the other end would be those who would absolutely not qualify. It doesn't matter what criteria you would use for ranking these individuals. Most Christians would use the criteria of faith in Christ as one's personal Savior. Others might use the criteria of repentance from sin and following Jesus as Lord. Others might insist that both criteria be met.

Here's the problem, very few people would qualify 100%. If the measuring stick is faith, how many doubts are permissible? How strong does one's faith need to be? If the measuring stick is repentance and making Jesus Lord of one's life, how strong does that repentance need to be? Does one need to repent of every single known sin and completely change the direction of one's life in every respect and achieve perfection? For most of us, repentance would never be absolute, but something that we grow into as the Holy Spirit works in our lives.

So, understanding that we all believe and repent in varying degrees, let's line up everyone who ever lived in order of the strength of their faith and/or repentance from sin. At one end of the line would be those who satisfy the criteria 100% and the other end of the line would be those who have absolutely no faith and have never repented of even a single sin. Assuming there would be about 70 billion people in that lineup (all who have ever lived), where do you think God might draw that dividing line between those who go to Heaven and those who go the other direction?

How much difference might there be between the two individuals standing closest to that dividing line, one on the Heaven-bound side and the other on the Hell-bound side? For all practical purposes, there would be absolutely no difference between those two individuals with respect to their "qualification" for Heaven. Yet, one would be spending all eternity in Heavenly bliss and the other poor slob would be tortured for all eternity in the flames of Hell.

Does it make any sense at all to you that a just and loving God would divide all humanity in this way and into only two groups?

The truth is that Jesus did not come into the world to condemn it, but instead He came to save it, all of it, not just some of it. God chastises those whom He loves, in direct proportion to what is needed to eventually bring them to full repentance. This is not an instantaneous process. It is an ages-long process for each of us. Eventually all of us make it into the Kingdom, fully perfected.

Why God "hides" from us

Why does God hide from plain view, and why does God not immediately reward and/or punish human behavior?

One of the main reasons many people do not believe in God is that God seems to operate behind the scenes. He seems to hide Himself from us, and does not seem to answer our prayers, at least not in the way we would like.

Imagine, for a minute, though, what life might be like if God did visibly appear to all of us and we could see Him watching over everything we do, even things we do in secret. Now, further imagine what it would be like if God brought down the hammer and immediately whacked us on the side of the head every time we violated one of His rules or even entertained an unwholesome thought. Further imagine what it would be like if God were to instantly reward every good thought and action with a tangible reward. If that were the case, then our primary motivation for being good would be self-interest. We would be like Pavlov's dogs, who's responses were

conditioned solely by external stimuli. Selfless, self-sacrificing Agape love could not exist in such an environment.

That having been said, it would no sense at all for God to condemn unbelievers to eternal Hell. Sooner or later we will all believe, hopefully in this life, and most certainly in the next.