

# Chapter 13

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## **Materialism, Dualism, and Idealism**

The three “isms” given above represent three world views that are common to scientists, theologians, and just plain ordinary people like you and I. These world views directly influence the way we process information. Our world view influences many of the underlying assumptions, or premises, that we begin with when we perform certain types of theological or scientific investigations. If the underlying premises are false, then even a flawlessly conducted investigation will yield a flawed result.

I believe that faulty underlying premises are the root cause of many paradoxes or contradictions that scientists and theologians are forced to live with after their investigations have been concluded. That is why equally brilliant individuals can arrive at totally different conclusions after examining exactly the same information. For example, if an evolutionary biologist has a materialist philosophy and begins his investigations with the assumption, or premise, that God does not exist, he would most certainly conclude that the evolutionary process is guided by random chance and nothing else. He would have to live with unexplained gaps in the fossil record, and results which are in conflict with the universally accepted second law of thermodynamics. If a Biblical literalist examines the same evidence, he might conclude that the geological strata were laid down by a single cataclysmic event, the Genesis flood, just a few thousand years ago. He would have to live with apparent contradictory evidence that these strata were laid down over millions of years. Or he might conclude that the universe and the earth were created with the illusion of age built in.

During the course of my scientific and theological research and inquiry I have come to appreciate the brilliance and impeccable logic of those who disagree with me. Nevertheless, it would be pointless to engage in debate with them, because the underlying premises which form the basis of their logic are not the same as mine.

This brings me to a discussion of the three “isms” mentioned in the title of this essay. These three different world views form the basis of our logic when we read the Bible and formulate doctrine. The materialists believe that everything is material in nature. To them, even our thoughts are nothing more than electrical and chemical processes which occur in our physical brains. If you begin with this premise when examining the Bible, your conclusions are going to be quite different from those of a theist and/or dualist. A dualist is a person who believes that the material and the supernatural worlds are separate and distinct. Most Christians are dualists. They believe that because God is separate from the physical world, He needs to intervene “supernaturally” to influence the course of human events.

The idealist, on the other hand, has a totally different world view than either the materialist or the dualist. The idealist believes that the physical and the spiritual worlds are one and the same, and there is no difference between the natural and the supernatural. The idealist believes that both the spiritual and material dimensions of reality are comprised of and created by the “thoughts” of God and to a lesser extent those of other conscious beings created by God. Some quantum physicists also view reality in this way. They believe that the present universe that we observe currently exists only in the form of un-collapsed quantum waves. These waves do not actually collapse into reality until observed by God and/or other conscious observers. This has been demonstrated by repeatable and universally accepted experimental data. To date, no viable alternative has been offered. Not all physicists are idealists. As a matter of fact, the overwhelming majority are died-in-the-wool materialists, despite the experimental evidence to the contrary. As a result, materialist physicists are forced to live with many as yet unresolved contradictions and paradoxes associated with quantum physics.

In like manner, religious dualists must live with many unresolved contradictions and paradoxes associated with their belief systems. Most Christians, and also many non-Christians, are dualists. They view almost all theological issues in black and white terms and approach all religious inquiry with an either/or mentality. This forms the basis of their world view and is one of the underlying premises on which their logic is based. Here are some examples of these “black and white” dualisms: God vs. Satan; good vs. evil; physical vs spiritual; Heaven vs. Hell; saved vs. lost; God of love vs. God of wrath; faith vs. logic; grace vs works; the Bible is literally true or not true at all; and so on.

When studying the Bible and searching for spiritual truth, our logic is flawed if we begin with the premise that there can only be two possible results for each inquiry. If neither result is the correct one, then at the conclusion of our investigation we will inevitably be left with unanswered paradoxes and contradictions. The actual “truth” of the matter might lie somewhere in between two extremes, or it might be a solution that incorporates them both, or it might be something altogether different that disproves both of the alternatives you originally had in mind.

Dualism lies at the heart of religious fundamentalism. The opposite of fundamentalism, however, is not liberalism. Most liberals also think in dualistic terms, though perhaps somewhat less so than fundamentalists. Christian fundamentalists and liberals have more in common with one another than they do with the materialists.

Idealists, on the other hand, believe that the so-called material world is not actually material at all and is not really separate and distinct from God Himself and the spiritual world. According to them, everything created by God is a part of God. Many adherents of Eastern religions also view the world in this way. Idealism is far less common in Western thought.

If everything that exists is technically a part of God, created by God, and controlled by the thoughts of God, and if God is by nature loving and good, then everything that happens or exists must be consistent with God’s character and would have a loving purpose. In other words, things or events that we would normally think of as at “cross purposes” with God’s intentions (Satan, evil, suffering, hell, and the like) must instead fit into God purposes and be consistent with His loving nature.

As you approach the study of the Bible, don't be afraid to think outside of the box, so to speak. Do not dismiss out of hand all approaches to truth that might conflict with the prevailing dualistic Christian world view.

Studying the Bible with an open mind is a very scary proposition, especially for the Christian fundamentalist, because for this person a lot is at stake. Entertaining the possibility that he or she might be wrong about one of these very rigid fundamentalist doctrines could be viewed as an admission of doubt. Faith, in the view of many fundamentalists, is an absolute requirement for salvation. Without it, there is no chance of escaping endless, infinite punishment in Hell. Any open minded investigation which has the potential of eroding a person's faith is very scary. They are stuck in the black and white box of dualism. For them, God is either your best friend or your worst enemy. There is no in between. To them, God is extremely "schizophrenic," so to speak. He is an "either-or" God. Either He forgives and overlooks your sins or He never forgives you at all, and instead punishes you forever in Hell. You are either saved or you are not saved. Most fundamentalists will tell you they believe in God's unconditional love for all mankind. At the same time, their description of God's actual behavior is not even remotely consistent with that kind of love.

So, here's the problem. Because dualists begin their study of the Scriptures with the underlying assumption (premise) that people are either saved or not saved and are going to Heaven or Hell when they die, they interpret all the Scriptures they read in such a way as to be consistent with this dualism. As a result they have to live with huge unresolved paradoxes and contradictions, and a very schizophrenic God.

A few years ago, I embarked on a very scary journey of discovery. I decided to engage in a serious attempt to study the Bible with an open mind and see if it was possible to interpret the Scriptures in such a way as to retain the essence and truth of the Gospel, and at the same time remove the paradoxes and contradictions. I hope you can appreciate how scary this was for me. In order to be intellectually honest, I also had to entertain the possibility that the materialists might be right and the Bible is not true at all. My main criteria for interpreting the Scriptures was to accept the most natural interpretation and avoid as much as possible work-a-rounds and the twisting of meanings and semantic tricks in order to arrive at conclusions which were consistent with the result I was seeking. If the materialists were right, and the Bible was just a hopelessly flawed human document, then so be it.

The result of my investigation over a period of several years was a validation of most of the core beliefs of Christianity, but with some important differences. Most of the dualisms have been replaced by their idealistic counterparts. The one major doctrine that emerged, and made possible a resolution of the dualisms, paradoxes and contradictions, was the doctrine of salvation as a process, rather than an instantaneous event. Rather than viewing Christian salvation as an all-or-nothing condition, I now view it as a journey, a journey that we all share together. God loves us all equally and has only the best intentions for all of us. Each of us is at a different stage in that journey, and, in the end, none are left behind.