

## **One way to uncover truth is to first discover what is not true.**

My faith in God is stronger today than it was during my days as an evangelical. This is the happy result of a process of elimination during which I was able to narrow down the range of possibilities by the application of reason and common sense.

Because my faith in Christ was Bible-based, it was helpful to me to narrow down the range of possibilities regarding the interpretation and application of Scripture. The first possible truth that I eliminated was the doctrine of Scriptural inerrancy and infallibility. This was rather easy for me to do. Even as an evangelical, I did not espouse this view of Scripture. I believe that any “objective” analysis of the Scriptures would uncover many internal contradictions and inconsistencies in the historical narratives, many contradictions with the findings of science, and many absurd and contradictory teachings about the nature of God, primarily the mutually exclusive teachings that God is at the same time both loving and unimaginably cruel and hateful.

Of course, this in no way confirms or refutes the truths that might be contained in the Scriptures despite its imperfections. To do this, I would need to continue the process of elimination in order to discover a means of Scripture interpretation that takes into account all of those “imperfections.” One way to do this would be to examine many “reliable” extra-biblical sources of information and use this as a filter of sorts to eliminate Bible teachings that do not match up with those external “facts.”

If the Bible contains information about God that cannot be obtained from any external source, the examination of the external sources can at least help me to narrow down those Bible teachings that are closest to the truth. If the Bible does not contain “exclusive” information about God, then the examination of those same external information sources would tend to bear this out. At least that is my reasoning. My conclusion, which is not contradicted by any of my studies, is that the Bible is a record of genuine encounters with God, written not by the direct hand of God, but by fallible human beings. It records the history of man’s changing and evolving views about God. It was written from man’s perspective, not God’s.

Over the course of my lifetime I have read extensively on the topics of evolution, cosmology, paleontology, and the like, and have come to the conclusion that the creation of the universe and the development of life on earth cannot possibly be the result of random processes and blind chance. So, I do believe the writers of the Bible are correct in describing God as creator. However, the means by which God created is another matter altogether. I am comfortable with the idea that the Bible should be regarded as a theological document (or should I say “collection” of documents), not a scientific one. I would regard any Christian doctrine as suspect which is based on a literalistic interpretation of Scripture passages that are historically and scientifically suspect. Examples of this would be the doctrines of Total Depravity, Original Sin, and the relationship of body, soul and spirit, which are at least in part derived from the legendary story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

During the past few years, after listening to a lecture on quantum physics and the nature of reality by Amit Goswami in a PBS television special, I took time to read about quantum physics. I read several books on the subject and watched a lot of YouTube videos. This does not make me an expert on the subject, but as a result of this inquiry I became convinced that human consciousness is eternal, exists independently from the human body, and survives the death of the body. By applying this filter to the interpretation of Scripture, I was able to eliminate the teaching that upon death, we cease to exist and are not made alive again until some future resurrection during which our physical bodies are somehow resuscitated and we become alive again. The teachings in the Scriptures are, at least on the surface, contradictory regarding the immortality of the human “soul” or “spirit.” For me, the matter has been put to rest by the findings of quantum physics, and also by the experience of people who report Near Death Experiences (NDE’s), some of whom were clinically dead at the time of their experience.

This brings me to the topic of the Near Death Experience (NDE). Not only does this phenomenon prove, at least to my satisfaction, the existence of life after death, but it also tells me a lot about the nature and purpose of God’s judgments, which, in the NDE, mostly take the form of “life reviews,” during which the experiencers mostly judge themselves and are not condemned by God. This is true regardless of one’s religion, or non-religion, prior to death. This gave credence to my prior belief that Christ died for all, not just some, and that God’s judgments are corrective, not retaliatory, in nature. To say that Christ died for all, and at the same time say that not all are covered by the blood of Christ is self-contradictory. The experience of the NDE eliminates the mistaken belief that all non-Christians are automatically condemned to everlasting Hell after death. Although some have “hellish” experiences, they are not tortured in literal flames and they are rescued when they cry out for help.

The NDE accounts eliminate to my satisfaction some untruths, but they do not provide any definitive answers regarding the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and atonement for the sins of mankind that allegedly occurred on Calvary. Regarding Calvary, there are three main options, (1) that Christ made atonement on Calvary for the sins of mankind, or (2) that the events of Calvary were merely a demonstration of God’s sacrificial and loving nature, or (3) that the events of Calvary have no special significance whatsoever. One could argue all day about various theories of the atonement. But does it really matter which theory one accepts, so long as the “result” is the same? Based on an intense study of the Scriptures over the past 10 years, I am absolutely certain that universal salvation is taught, regardless of one’s view of the atonement. You will find a complete discussion of this in my book, *“Christian Universalism, Maybe God Isn’t Such A Bad Guy, After All.”*

Now let’s discuss the correct meaning of the expression, “Jesus is the only way.” If the universalists are right, and all are eventually going to end up saved in Heaven, and if Jesus is the only way to become fully saved in Heaven, then the question remains, how and where is He involved? In most, but not all, NDE accounts there is no encounter in Heaven with a man named Jesus, even in cases where the experiencers are Christian. If the NDE accounts are true, and I believe they are, I would conclude that if Jesus is involved in the salvation process, He would not be known by the name Jesus by everyone in Heaven, at least not immediately after we arrive there. If the man, Jesus, was uniquely the Son of God and if He was the human personification of God the Father, it is possible that in heaven He might discard His human persona and assume the

form of God the Father. We are told in the Scriptures that no one has seen the Father and that God is Spirit. Although the Near Death Experience does not support the teaching that Jesus is the Son of God and the only “way” by which we can gain entrance into Heaven, it does not refute it either. The NDE accounts do, however, refute the teaching that only Christians enter the Heavenly realms when they die. They also refute the notion that all Christians meet the man, Jesus, when they die.

The Bible does teach in some places that at the end of the ages every knee will bow to Christ and acknowledge Him as Lord. If this is true, and if the NDE accounts are also true, then that event would not necessarily occur for everyone immediately upon their arrival in the heavenly realms after the death of the physical body. Could it be that Christian salvation is not an event that takes place instantaneously upon death, or at any single moment in time for that matter, but is instead an “ages-long process,” culminating at the end of the ages, as I have consistently maintained in all my writings? Could it be that this process culminates at a different time for each of us? Do these “ages” refer to historical time periods experienced by everyone at the same time, or could they refer to individual human lifetimes and also periods of time in the Heavenly places in between earthly lifetimes?