

Why I am a Christian:
in a scientific, humanistic and atheistic world

Part VI: The Bible is a HUMAN book (*in addition to a Godly book*)

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

(II Timothy 3:16, 17)

A. The Bible, according to Christians, is the **inspired word** of God

That the Bible is the inspired Word of God is a matter for faith, not one of fact. However, this is a faith that has been tested by the crucible of time and scholarly debate. The holy books of many other faiths were often the product of one author, and which, therefore, suffer from a myopic and parochial perspective since they were not sufficiently challenged or tested like the Christian book of faith. David L. Jones

1. What does it mean that the Bible is inspired?

a. To be inspired means to be God **BREATHED**

b. The Bible is the meeting of the human & **DIVINE**

1) God dwells amongst us in a tangible form with which we can interact

- Humans share the creed of Missouri: *the show me state*
- *Seeing is believing*

2) God created us with a need to **see** it, **touch** it and **feel** it.

- We are, by nature, existentialists, requiring a direct experience with the **divine**
- **Creation** is one of the ways in which we meet the divine, so that everyone may have an experience with the divine. (Romans 1:20-23)
- One does not need to be a **Christian** to meet God. God makes His presence known to everyone through creation.
- Christians cannot keep God hidden in a nice little box from the rest of the world. Those who attempt to do so become an **obstacle** to God's loving purpose by trying to control the world's access to God.

3) There are other places, according to the Christian Bible, in which the human meets the divine

- The **Tabernacle** (Exodus 25 ff), which literally means the dwelling place
- **Jesus** (John 1:14), of whom is used the phrase "*God dwelt among us,*" translated from the word tabernacle
- **Baptism** (Matthew 28:19)
- **Communion** (Matthew 26:26-29)

2. What does it mean for the Bible to be the Word?

a. When God created the universe, God did not get His hands **dirty**:

- God spoke a **WORD**, and everything came into being.
- This is reflective of the word of a king: A king speaks, and what the king speaks is done.

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. Genesis 1:1-3

b. The Word from God is not only the power of God (e.g.—*may the force be with you*), it is **GOD**. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. John 1:1-4.*

B. Some Christians have made a **mockery** of God and of the Word

1. We have used superfluous adjectives and meaningless qualifiers to describe the Word (Just as I did in this sentence) that only serve to **weaken** an already strong description of the bible.

a. Some Christians insist that we add two human made qualifiers to define the Word: **inerrant** and **infallible**.

1) These words may seem harmless enough, but no one really agrees on what they **mean**

- These words are NOT found in the Bible but only serve as an emotional Christian litmus test to see if you are one of the in crowd, one of the cool kids.
- They are a test to see if you pass the “*conservative enough to fellowship with me*” exam.

2) Is the Bible inerrant/infallible in the **original** manuscripts?

3) Is it infallible/inerrant in **transmission**, intention, or meaning?

b. I am concerned about using any human made categories about which there is misunderstanding.

- The use of **adjectives** often weaken what one is trying to communicate. (**Story:** Using inerrant and infallible is like saying that the Bible is really really really really the Word of God. To which another Christian replies, “*You only used 4 really’s to define the Word, not 5, so you must not really believe it is the word of God. I can’t fellowship with you since you are a heretic who is going to hell. Only when you repent and use 5 really’s before the Word will I accept you as a faithful Christian. Until then, you are too liberal for my tastes.*”)
- Calling it the Word of God should be **sufficient**.

Did you know... The original manuscripts of the Bible no longer exist? There are over 24,000 fragments and copies of the New Testament books. The earliest fragment is from 70 AD, but most are from 150 AD to 1000 AD, a long time after the originals were written. They are copies of copies many times over. Many of them are inconsistent with other copies of the same book. In what way, then, is the Bible inerrant & infallible? In addition, there are inaccuracies within the texts themselves. For instance, in Mark 4:31, Jesus says that the smallest of all seeds is the mustard seed. We know that this is NOT true. Science tells us that the epiphytic orchids of the rainforest produce seeds that are significantly smaller, only 1/300th of an inch long. Was Jesus in error? Do we redefine the word “seed” so that Jesus was not in error? Or, do we just admit that Jesus was a product of his time, in which case, how do the words inerrant and infallible in any way contribute to our understanding of the Bible?

An anti-theist will say, but “*Hey... so these guys wrote the Bible, then defined their words as the Word of God. Doesn't that seem crazy and self-serving? They are, in essence, defining their words as God's Word so that they can't be questioned.*” Good try, anti-theists. It's almost a good argument if it didn't express an ignorance of how the Bible came to be in its current form. None of the NT authors thought they were writing scripture, only words of guidance for the young church. It is only after hundreds of years of testing and debate that Christians determined that these books spoke something to us about our faith that should be preserved and shared. While there was wide-spread agreement on the Christian canon by 250 AD, it wasn't until the Synod of Hippo in 393 AD that the canon became officially accepted. That is a lengthy testing and discerning process. Do you think Hitchens book, *God is Not Great*, will even be remembered in 300 years? I doubt it. There were many books left out of the canon, like the books of Clement (well respected by the early church) as well as the Gnostic Gospels (considered to be heretical by the early church fathers), but they were written long after the time of Jesus by those that did not have a direct experience with Jesus. The early church fathers knew that it would be critical that the books they passed on to future generations be books written by eyewitnesses of Jesus so that they would be credible. Therefore, do not buy into the hype about the books that were “banned from the bible.” These books were not eyewitness accounts of the events to which they give testimony. This is a legitimate reason for excluding them from the Christian canon.

2. Improper uses of the Word

- a. We have used the Bible to enforce our **will** upon others
 - It is difficult enough to discern what I am supposed to do, let alone to **dictate** to someone else what they are to do
 - Everyone is to embark on their own God-journey and to have their own unique walk and experience with God; therefore, I have no right to dictate anyone else's walk.
- b. Some Christians treat the bible with **disdain** and **disrespect**
 - 1) Dogmatic and inflexible **interpretations** of the Bible (**Story:** “*I read the Bible literally,*” some might say. The truth is, no-one reads the Bible literally. Much of the bible is poetry, which is a literary form not to be interpreted literally. Also, there are many passages, if interpreted literally and followed literally, would make one evil. For instance, did you know that parents are told to have their disobedient children murdered in Deuteronomy 21:18? Is anyone buying that commandment? I didn't think so. Please don't tell me you take the Bible literally.)
 - 2) **Proof**-texting (having a conclusion in mind and finding passages that confirm one's biases rather than allowing the scriptures to speak to us)
 - 3) Taking passages out of **context**.
 - The Bible has a context and purpose. (**Story:** It is an abuse to make it say what we want it to say. Christians, who say they value the bible often abuse the book and treat it with contempt and disrespect. We would never abuse Hamlet in the manner we abuse the Bible. The Bible is to be treated as a precious piece of literature, written by humans, through whom God spoke. We need to treat it with at least the same respect we do other pieces of literature by discerning the context of the passages we read.)
 - To understand what the Bible means to me, I need to first understand to **whom** it was written and what it **meant** to them.
 - The Bible is **for** me, but was not written **to** me.

C. The Bible is a HUMAN Book

1. It speaks to the human **condition**
 - It has stood the test of **time**
 - It connects us to the unbroken lineage of **humanity**.
 - The **ancients** were not primitive and stupid. (**Illustration:** A contemporary, technological human of the 21st Century would find that he lacks the common wisdom and experiences to survive in the ancient world. The ancients were hardly stupid or primitive.)
 - The ancients had insights into the relationships of their world and into the rhythms of life which contemporary humans no longer grasp.
 - The Bible is not simply an early attempt to explain the science of the world in “**magical**” terms, as is so often derisively accused by atheists.
 - On the contrary, the Bible is about **relationships**, our brokenness, and the restoration of what is broken.
2. We are meant to **engage** with the stories of the Bible
 - a. We interact with them
 - b. We are **transformed** by the process so that we might live a fuller life.
 - c. The bible is primarily a story book of relationships, not a listing of **dogma**
 - How do we relate to the universe that God created and to each other?
 - How does God relate to us?
 - The stories show how our forefathers and mothers made decisions: some good and others bad.
 - If we read the Bible believing that the bible heroes’ response to their circumstances is the law of how we ought to respond, we open ourselves up to terrible **abuses**.
3. Many of the “saints” of the bible are **flawed**, **crude**, **immoral**, and **arrogant**.
 - a. We are to **evaluate** the behavior of the heroes of the Bible
 - b. In the Bible, some of our “heroes” were:
 - **Liars** (Abraham—Genesis 12 & 20)
 - **Manipulators** (Sarah—Genesis 21)
 - **Cheaters** (Laban—Genesis 29)
 - **Thieves** (Jacob—Stole Brother’s birthright, stole from father-in-law Genesis 27 & 31)
 - **Murderers** (Moses—Exodus 2)
 - **Abusers** of their own children (Lot—Genesis 19, willing to give up daughters to be raped protect visitors)
 - **Adulterers** (David—II Samuel 11)
 - **Cowards** (10 of 12 Disciples—Matthew 26 & 27)
 - Hotheaded, self-righteous **anarchists** (Judas—perfume, betrayal—John 12)
 - Thick **skulled** (Peter—Matthew 16:23)
 - **Bull-headed** (Paul & Mark—Act 15:36 ff)
 - **Doubters** (Zechariah, John’s Father—Luke 1)

- c. This is what makes the Bible so real and vivid and worthy of our attention and interaction. The characters are real. They can create anger, empathy, frustration in us as we read of them. They show us what to do, what not to do, how to respond when we fail. Sometimes the greatest lessons are those learned in the humiliation of failure.

Addendum

The Anti-theist's argument against the Bible...

1. If there were a God (which there isn't),
 - a. This God should have written a book that would be clearly understood by anyone who reads it (which it isn't clear as evidenced by stupid Christians who have murdered each other and caused nothing but havoc and destruction in the world because of their magical faith.)
 - b. The values should be universally and eternally applicable (which, obviously, they are not, since the values of the bible are the product of the magical imagination of an inferior ancient people, not the inspiration of God)
2. Therefore:
 - a. the God of the Old Testament and the Jesus of the New Testament, in which you Christians believe, are immoral, dangerous, and evil (followed by a list of 100 phrases and events of the bible which we will take completely out of their context to prove to you how immoral God is; but, that is what you Christians do when you read the bible, so we can't be accused of using the bible any differently than Christians do)
 - b. This book could not have been written by this magical God (which, we all know, there isn't one anyway, and you would, too, if you weren't such an ignorant stupid ass...)

A Point-by-point disagreement with the ant-theistic argument

1. The belief that God exists is a reasonable conclusion to which one can hold (See Part III: God Created Science)
 - a. It is true that the bible is not clear
 - This argument is a red-herring by the anti-theist, however. They have come to the conclusion that the bible should be clear based upon their view of what a magical God should look like: authoritarian, legalistic, and domineering.
 - The God of the bible is a God of relationship, and relationships are not based upon such a hierarchical perspective, but on mutuality. This is one of the things that makes the bible so unique. The God of the bible makes covenant with humanity. A covenant is an agreement between equals. So, while we are not God's equal in creativity, ability, or morality, God treats us as equals, in the same way a parent treats a child who has potential to grow to be a man or woman as equal.
 - We are made in God's image, and the impact of having that image means that we have the ability to think, create, and interact with our surroundings and each other. Therefore, the Bible is not intended to be a list of do's and don'ts, even though some Christians treat it in this manner.

- We are meant to interact with the Bible, to challenge it and to be challenged by it. We are not created to be automatons. We are to reach and stretch so that our understanding of life grows and matures and our view of God grows and matures. The more we learn about the universe, about others, about what surrounds us, the bigger God becomes. Faith is an evolutionary process called sanctification (I Thessalonians 4), which means our faith is an ongoing process
- b. The values of the Bible are universally applicable
- The Bible gives us only one law: love one another, and this is universal and scale-able to all situations. However, how we are to love is not definitively expressed. The Bible gives us examples and stories of love, but these are contextually based. We must find how to love within the context God has placed us.
 - The story of the bible is a universal story that continues to be retold, whether it is in contemporary mythology, literature, art, or movies. For instance, what do the stories of Moses, Jesus, King Arthur, William Wallace, Frodo Baggins, Simba, Luke Skywalker, and Harry Potter all share in common? 1) The unusual circumstances of their birth: 2) They leave their family and live with others; 3) Some event or trauma engages or singles out our hero to be, which leads to their very public journey 3) They develop or use a special gift or weapon that only the hero can wield 4) The hero receives some type of unexpected or supernatural help during a time of travail that becomes transformational to their journey 5) The hero is tested and must prove himself 6) The hero has some type of descent into hell experience, a crucible that scars the hero for life but is critical to the journey of making them who they are 7) There is an atonement that paves the way for the resolution 8) The conclusion of their journey leads to some reward or peace, and allows others to share in the fruits of the hero's labor. For Christians, Jesus is the Hero who wins something of value through the crucible of His life and the cross. This is a valuable story that, if not told in Jesus, would still be told over and over again. It is necessary and speaks to the human condition and need.

2. Therefore...

- a. The God of the Old Testament and the Jesus of New Testament are not immoral. Such a conclusion is based upon poor scholarship of the bible
- Remember: the stories of the bible are contextual. If one does not understand the context, one cannot understand meaning
 - Anti-theists abuse the bible in the same manner that some Christians do by taking phrases out of their context or by proof-texting. This is the fallacy of false attribution, quote-mining or contextomony: removing a quote out of the context that would clarify the intentions of the words.
- b. The Bible is God inspired, but is written for us by humans. The bible is a human book, and the characters are human with every fault and wart one would expect of humans. This is what gives this book vitality, viability, and believability.

Some of the immoral acts and words that anti-theists attribute to the Bible usually begin with some that are difficult for Christians to justify:

- **The willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac, at God' request** (Genesis 22)
- **The slaughter of the first-born sons of Egypt** (Exodus 12)
- **God's command to commit genocide** (Joshua 6) (These events SHOULD make us uncomfortable. However, we do not know, understand, nor can we relate to the context of these stories. It is like us rejecting cannibalism, which we should, and, therefore, condemning the behavior of the survivors of the Andes Flight Disaster of 1972 who cannibalized the dead passengers in order to survive. These stories of the Bible were all ONE time events and commands that are not in any manner universal or normative to Jewish or Christian morality, and this is evidently clear from the context. Survival in the Middle East of the ancient times was always difficult. It was quite common that one tribe eliminated the competition of other tribes that might or had hindered or threatened their own tribe's survival. This would and should be considered an immoral and evil response in our context. In the context of a hand-to-mouth existence, do these same standards apply? Do you and your children starve to death in order to allow for the survival of someone else's family? These are not easy discussions, mostly because we cannot relate to being slaves and to the brutality of such meager margins of survival. These stories, as uncomfortable as they are for us to consider, became a part of the process of our communal sanctification: a maturing that ultimately leads to the rejection of such immorality and evil. Our discomfort of these stories is an indication that we have embraced the maturity of faith as expressed in Jesus.
- **God's command to murder children that disobey their parents** (Deuteronomy 21:18-21) There is NO evidence that this was ever practiced. The Jews were the ones who wanted to live by the law, not by the grace of love. Therefore, these commands were given to show how oppressive living by the law might be. In other words, the Jews insisted on living by the law, which was never God's intention. Therefore, the oppressiveness of the law is demonstrated by a command that no one is willing to obey.

Anti-theists accuse Christian theology of being immoral:

- **Sacrificial death**—The death of one allowing for the life of another is a necessary staple of humanity. The problem in contemporary society is that death has become so distant and sterilized that we are under the impression that our life costs nothing. This was driven home to me when I was a butcher. The meat we purchase in the grocery store was, at one time, a living, breathing animal. It gave its life so that we might live. The people of Jesus' day were directly connected to the death of that which gave them life. They had to kill it themselves before they could eat it and survive. They did not purchase a pre-packaged rib roast in the grocery store like we do. The sterilization of the butchering process allows western humans to ignore the sacrifice of death which is made so that we might live. This is why a prayer of thanksgiving is ALWAYS appropriate at meal time: something gave its life so that you might live. Vegetarians: don't kid yourself. You, too, by harvesting plants, are also taking that which does not belong to you and cutting short the life cycle of the plant. It is still a living thing. The principle that applies to the meat eater is still applicable to the vegetarian: something must give its life so that you might live. This death for life struggle was a part of the DNA of those who had a connection to the earth, but we have lost this understanding with the more distance we put between us and death. The death still occurs, but we are just good at ignoring it, which makes some, in particular, radical anti-theists, believe that they are superior to the ancients and to a wrongly held belief that a sacrificial theology is immoral. These radical anti-theists are hypocrites, unless they have found a way of living without costing the life of something. If they do believe that the theology of sacrificial death is immoral, then the anti-theist's only moral decision is to starve to death, except that, oops, they would then be the sacrifice that allows something else to live. What a moral quandary for the radical anti-theist: to live is to benefit from sacrificial death; to die is to be the sacrificial death. Either way, the radical anti-theist is screwed, morally.
- **Original sin** which claims that the sin of some stupid guy named Adam condemns everyone—We are condemned by the sins of our parents. However, every child does pay the consequences for the parent's foolishness. If a parent murders a person and is sent to jail, the children suffer the consequences. If a father is abusive, the child is scarred for life. The question becomes, *"How will I respond to the disadvantages that are the result of my parent's behavior? Will I blame my parents and repeat the same mistakes? Do I choose to overcome the disadvantages and reject those short-comings? What happens when I discover that, while I may have overcome some of my parents' shortcomings, I perpetrate my own upon my children? What should I do when I create a circumstance for which my child must pay the consequences?"*
- **The concept of forgiveness eliminates personal responsibility**—On the contrary. Forgiveness is NEVER free. It always costs the one who forgives. Rather than eliminating personal responsibility, forgiveness demands a moral obligation of greater responsibility. One who is forgiven, one who understands the cost of that forgiveness, does not wish to place the one who forgave them in the position of having to forgive again.
- **The exclusive claim that Jesus** is the ONLY way to heaven—God does speak to all people through creation (Romans 1:20). There are many who are not Christians through whom God has spoken powerfully (Gandhi, anyone? The Buddha?) The claim of the uniqueness and exclusivity of Jesus is that there is something being communicated by God through Jesus about forgiveness and restoration of relationship that is not being communicated by other philosophies or religions. At the same time, there may be others who have a unique message to communicate to us of which we Christians are ignorant; therefore, Christians must watch the

offense of our mouths. God will communicate through whom God chooses to communicate, and it is not always through Christians. Belief and baptism are assurances of salvation, a comforting gift of God, a rock to which we cling amidst the storms of life. It is regrettable when there are those who travel through life without these assurances, such as those who are anti-theists. They suffer no amount of undue grief and a lack of certainty. However, we need to be careful not to claim that they are, therefore, going to hell. That is over our pay-grade and not in our department. Christians are to proclaim God's love as gifted in Christ, but should remain silent otherwise.

- **The focus on eternal life** rather than the here and now—We have a faith that is meant to be lived on this side of the kingdom of heaven. There is no doubt that life beyond the realm of this universe is an important perspective of Christianity. Science proves that life is not bound to this universe, though that certainly is not by necessity an affirmation of the Christian perspective. That said, the events of the Bible and the message of Jesus is meant to transform us so that we live a life of love on this side of the kingdom and are not oriented solely to what is to come.
- **That an all-knowing and all-powerful God would allow evil to exist makes God culpable for the evil of this world**—This reminds me of the logic question posed by anti-theists to indicate the perceived fallacy of a belief in God: *“Can God create a rock too big for God to lift?”* The answer is, *“Yes. Then God would lift it.”* Not a satisfying answer to an anti-theist. The following will not satisfy the anti-theist, either. Faith is about relationships: a relationship with the universe, and, consequently, with the creator of the universe. Were I to create a machine that is a human analog, one which I programmed but could therefore, within reason, predict its performance, would I not want to create a machine that could eventually surprise me and make decisions that are unexpected and unique? The creation of artificial intelligence is a motivating factor for many programmers. Were I to be successful, I would not, therefore, cease to be the creator should my creation achieve intelligence, I would not suddenly cease to be relevant in relation to the creation, nor would my genius suddenly be called into question. On the contrary, my genius would be confirmed by such a success. God's genius is confirmed by the ability of humanity to create. What of foreknowledge, predestination and an all-knowing God? Again, there is a biblical context to God's foreknowledge. This context is not parallel to the philosophical concept argued by anti-theists. The foreknowledge of God in the scripture is a relational concept, not a philosophical one. In other words, anti-theists are arguing about philosophical absolutes when the bible is making a case about a God of relationship. The contexts of the arguments are not parallel. All I can say is that I understand the argument of the anti-theist, but it is not, ultimately, a concept addressed by the bible, not one to which I am privy, nor one that makes the concept of God vanish in a logical dust-cloud (like Captain Kirk confusing a homicidal computer with a logical circular argument, then poof, the homicidal computer self-destructs).
- **If God created the universe, then who created God?** Christopher Hitchens says that Christians must answer this question. Ummmm... No we don't. Sorry Chris, but just because you say so doesn't mean we have to. This is a reductive argument from which all science and faith suffers. From whence did the matter of the big bang originate, since it is a principle of physics that something cannot be created out of nothing? It pre-existed outside of the boundary of this universe? At some point, there is a prime-mover: eternally existing matter, in one form or another; or, eternally existing God out of which matter gets its form. Both are illogical, which just proves the limitations of human logic, not the non-existence of God.

- **The Bible NEVER opposes slavery or the devaluation of women.**—I’d really like to know from anti-theists, “*What book are you reading?!!!!!!*” That is THE major theme of the bible: setting the oppressed and imprisoned free (including women). That is THE reason why God opposed the nation of Israel being like the other nations and having a king. Israel demonstrates their lack of faith by choosing to be ruled by kings and by a centralized form of government. God told them it would lead to oppression and would lead to the enslavement of its citizens. It did. The point of the prophets is to proclaim the need for delivery from this oppression and slavery. Did you anti-theists really ever read the Bible? In the New Testament, most of the Christians either were slaves, or were oppressed and threatened with slavery. Slaves don’t often condemn the slave holder with impunity. Do you think that may be the reason why it is not addressed in the manner that a 21st Century anti-theist living in a free country that allows free speech would expect, since the authors were first century Christians living under the very real oppression of slavery? Yet, Jesus makes it clear that his purpose is the delivery of humanity from slavery, oppression and captivity (Isaiah 61, Luke 4:18-19).