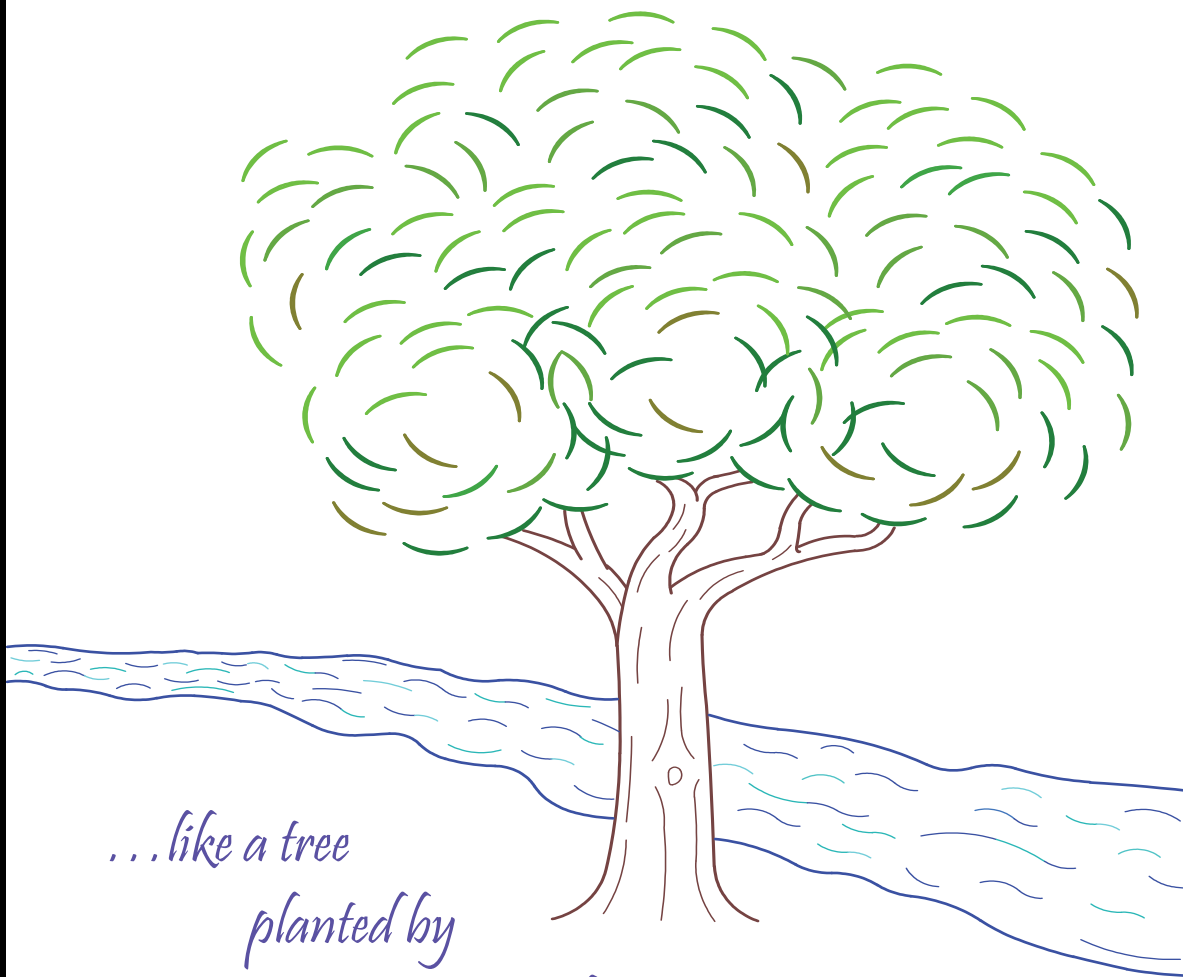


Beneath Foundations for Eternal Life

Embracing Self-Evident Truth

By Thomas G. Edel



*...like a tree
planted by
streams of water...*

Psalm 1

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Print Edition, April 2, 2015

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Preface

My previous book, “Foundations for Eternal Life,” summarizes spiritual truths found in scripture. No effort was made in that book to establish the validity of scripture as a source of truth; that was assumed.

This present book, however, discusses spiritual truths which are largely independent of scripture. These truths are based simply on observation and reason. Like many before me, I call such truths “self-evident truths.” These truths form the bedrock on which true faith can be built, and on which scripture can be understood and embraced.

This book is divided into three parts:

Part 1: Some Self-Evident Truths

Part 2: Faith and Science

Part 3: God Revealed

Part 1 focuses on self-evident truths which are important in understanding matters of faith as well as life in general.

Part 2 deals with the tension between faith and science, and how the two can be understood so that they don’t conflict with each other. Clear understanding in this area should help us to be able to embrace self-evident spiritual truths.

Part 3 presents how some aspects of God’s character are self-evident from what God has made, and how we can learn from other people about God.

While Part 2 and Part 3 of this book depend somewhat on Part 1 for logical consistency, each part stands on its own to some degree, and can be read independently of the other parts. If Part 1 doesn’t speak to you where you’re at presently, please consider skipping to Part 2 or Part 3. However, it may be helpful to read chapter 11 (Faith or No Faith) in Part 1 before reading Part 2 (Faith and Science).

Of course, the subject matter of this book is not new. It is

likely that no new concepts are presented in this book. Most of the concepts discussed herein go back hundreds of years, if not thousands of years. However, the way these ideas are presented is new, to some degree at least. It is my hope that by addressing these subjects from a somewhat new perspective that you will arrive at a deeper understanding of truth, and that your life will benefit from that.

I am indebted to the many people who have helped me in my own search for truth. Some of you I know personally; some I know only through your writings or audio-visual works; some lived before my time. Thank you for speaking truth into my life. Thanks also to those who reviewed a draft version of this book and gave me valuable feedback. It is a better book because of you.

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PART 1

Some Self-Evident Truths

What is truth?

Join with me as I explore the nature of truth. Like many topics, one can only understand it well by comparing it with something that is different than itself. Truth is meaningful primarily because it stands in opposition to deception or error. If deception and error didn't exist, then the concept of truth would, perhaps, be meaningless.

Throughout Part 1 we will be exploring concepts which I find to be "self-evident." That means that the validity of such concepts is apparent simply from reason and careful observation of people and our surroundings. Such concepts do not need to be derived or proven from other concepts that are more basic, they are simply self-evident. These concepts don't need deep philosophy or religious instruction to be known and understood, they are self-evident. I invite you to consider for yourself whether or not you agree that these "truths" are "self-evident."

Chapter 1

Truth Exists

Truth has to do with making a proper distinction between opposing concepts. Is something good or bad? Is it right or wrong? Is it high or low? Is it hot or cold? Does it have a particular quality or not? Is a statement true or false? Did that event, which someone said happened, really happen?

Those types of issues are all issues that involve truth. I think it is impossible for any of us to live a single day without dealing with truth at some level. Whether or not you agree with that last statement is itself an issue of truth. Did you just accept what I said to be true, or did you consider it more deeply? How do we know whether or not something is true?

Whether or not we agree about a particular thing being true is not the point here. The point is that we all regularly deal with whether various things are true or not true.

This quickly brings us to our first self-evident truth:

The existence of truth is self-evident.

Note that this first “self-evident truth” does not merely indicate that truth exists, but that it is “self-evident” that truth exists. The existence of truth does not depend on other reasoning, whether simple or complex. Reasoning itself presumes the existence of truth. I find that the existence of truth is simply self-evident.

For Further Reflection:

- Do you think the existence of truth is self-evident? Why or why not?

Chapter 2

True or False?

“Is it true...?” You have probably spoken those words many times yourself. Let’s continue our discussion with a simple true-or-false test. Please consider whether each of the following four statements is True (T) or False (F):

1. ____ “The color black is the same as the color white.”
2. ____ “The color black is different than the color white.”
3. ____ “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”
4. ____ “There is no God.”

I hope you agree with me that the answers to the first two statements are: 1. False, 2. True.

Now, regarding questions 3 and 4, things get somewhat more difficult. Since this is a book somehow related to eternal life, you may correctly suppose that it is written from a spiritual point of view, and that the author probably believes in God. You might also correctly presume that I (the author) think the correct answers to the last two questions are 3. True, 4. False. However, there are many people who do not believe there is a God, or who view God much differently than I do, and they may sincerely answer one or both of these questions differently than I do. We would then disagree about whether the correct answer to each of these questions is true or false. Historically, such disagreements have, at times, led people to persecute and/or kill each other. Let’s try to avoid that, while acknowledging that this subject of things being true or false is an important subject.

Initially my concern is not whether you agree with my answers to all four questions above, but whether or not you agree with me that there *is* a correct true-false answer to all four questions above. This has to do with the nature of truth. Is there absolute truth regarding at least some issues? Is it

always true that the color black is different in some way from the color white? Yes. That is self-evident.

What about our own existence? Is there absolute truth regarding whether or not you and I exist? It is self-evident to me that I exist, and I hope that it is self-evident to you that you exist. Your existence may not be self-evident to me (since I may never have met you), but I maintain that there is still absolute truth regarding whether or not you exist. My own belief regarding your existence doesn't change the absolute truth of whether or not you exist.

In the same way, is there absolute truth regarding whether or not God exists? It seems to me to be so. Either God exists, or he doesn't exist. Some kind of middle ground seems to me to be implausible. The statement "There is no God" is either true or false, and my personal beliefs about God's existence don't change that absolute truth.

However, a clarification is in order. What do we mean by the term "God"? How this term is defined or understood may affect whether or not "God" actually exists. So, even with absolute truth about such things, a careful definition of terms may be necessary to properly understand such truth.

We see, then, that there is absolute truth regarding at least some subjects, whether we are aware of it or not. The absolute truth about some subjects may not be self-evident, but it is self-evident that:

Absolute truth exists.

For Further Reflection:

- Do you agree that absolute truth exists? Why or why not?

Chapter 3

Clean or Dirty?

Let's continue with our true-or-false test. Please consider whether the following statements are True (T) or False (F), based on your personal knowledge about the clothing which you may presently be wearing:

5. _____ "I am wearing clothes; I am not naked."

6. _____ "I am wearing clean socks."

The first question is fairly straight forward. Most of us would answer "True." A few might truthfully answer "False." Either way, there would probably not be much debate about the issue, if everyone concerned was accurately aware of your clothing situation. This is what I call a "black-and-white" kind of truth. The statement is clearly true or false, and everyone who has accurate knowledge of the situation would very likely be in agreement.

The previous chapter was primarily about this kind of "black-and-white" "true-or-false" kind of truth. Of course, disagreements can arise over this kind of truth when at least some people do NOT have accurate knowledge about the black-and-white truth under consideration.

Now the second question above (about your socks) is likely more difficult to answer. If you are like me, I tend to resent such a question. Not only is the question socially inappropriate, but I believe the subject is more complicated than a simple true or false answer can communicate. I am wearing socks as I write this, but are they "clean"? My socks may not be completely clean, but I don't consider them to be dirty either. Neither "True" nor "False" seems to be an accurate answer. I think of my socks as being clean right after being washed, but once I put them on they immediately begin a transition away from being clean toward being dirty. I prefer to think of them as being more clean than dirty, even though they are no longer completely clean. You may prefer to

simply call my socks “dirty” once I put them on.

This odd discussion is intended to clarify an important issue: Some aspects of truth are not “black-and-white” in nature, but are better understood as matters of degree. That is to say that some things are better understood to be more “shades-of-gray” rather than being “black-and-white” in nature. If we try to reduce them to black-and-white facts, or true-or-false facts, then our understanding of them will be very shallow. For the sake of discussion, I’ll refer to this kind of truth or concept as being “gray,” or “more gray,” or “shades-of-gray” rather than “black-and-white.”

This brings us to summarize another important principle, which I find to be self-evident:

***Some truths are black-and-white,
while other truths are more gray.***

Some of you may find fault with my reasoning above. You may allege that the first true-or-false statement is not really black-and-white. For example, someone may have so little clothing on that the correct answer is debatable. This illustrates another important concept:

***Some truths that appear to be black-and-white
may, at times, involve shades-of-gray.***

For Further Reflection:

- Do you agree that some truths involve shades-of-gray? Why or why not?
- Is there a problem in your life that might be more easily resolved if it were understood to involve shades-of-gray, rather than being treated as a black-and-white issue?

Chapter 4

Good or Bad?

Bear with me as I ask you to answer a couple more true-or-false questions. These questions are longer than the previous questions, but, if you read them carefully, I think you will find them to be not very difficult. Please consider whether the following statements are True (T) or False (F), based on your personal shopping habits:

7. _____ “If I were to be shopping for a loaf of bread, and if I were given the choice between a fresh loaf of bread and an old moldy loaf of bread (the loaves are otherwise similar and cost the same), I would buy the old moldy loaf of bread, not the fresh loaf of bread.”
8. _____ “If I were to be shopping for a chair, and if I were given the choice between a chair that appears to be in good condition and a chair that has a broken leg (the chairs are otherwise similar and cost the same), I would buy the chair with the broken leg.”

I hope you didn't have too much trouble deciding. I presume that you are probably like me: For me, both statements are definitely False! Why would I care whether or not the bread is “fresh” or “old and moldy”? Why would I prefer a chair that doesn't have a broken leg? Isn't it simply because, when it comes to bread, “old and moldy” is bad while “fresh” is good? Regarding the two chairs, isn't a “broken leg” a bad feature, while “in good condition” is a good feature? Don't we almost always prefer something to be good rather than bad?

This brings us to two more self-evident truths:

***Some things are good,
and some things are bad.***

***Good things should normally be embraced,
while bad things should normally be rejected.***

Of course, it may be appropriate for someone to fix the broken chair, so that the chair becomes good once again. The old-moldy bread may make good compost (but not good bread). So we see that the concept of good and bad can get complicated. However, that does not nullify the self-evident truths mentioned above. The terms “good” and “bad” have real meanings, and are used to describe real things with real consequences that really matter to us.

For Further Reflection:

- What are some things you consider to be good?
- What are some things you consider to be bad?
- Are there some bad things in your life you should get rid of?

Chapter 5

Right or Wrong?

Once again, we'll start with a true-or-false question. Please consider whether the following statement is True (T) or False (F), based on your personal beliefs:

9. _____ “I believe it is okay for a person to torture a baby by any means whatsoever, if doing so is part of that person’s religion.”

It is my understanding that some people would answer that question “True.” However, I don’t think I have ever met anyone who would admit that directly to me. If you happen to be such a person, then please consider a slightly different statement:

10. _____ “I believe it is okay for anyone to torture me in any manner whatsoever, if doing so is part of that person’s religion. I would allow them to torture me without resisting them, since resisting them would inhibit their religious freedom.”

If you are being honest, and are not insane, then I think you probably agree with me that the answer to the second statement is “False.” Presuming that you answered at least one of those statements “False,” then this exposes a fallacy about “freedom of religion.” Few people really believe in freedom of religion with no limits. Why not? Is there something inherently wrong about torturing people for religious purposes? Of course there is. This is self-evident.

What if such things were done for pleasure, rather than religious purposes? Would that make such things right? Of course not.

On the other hand, is there something right about opposing such practices? Of course there is. This also is self-evident. This brings us to two more self-evident truths:

***Some things are morally right,
and some things are morally wrong.***

***Right things should normally be embraced;
wrong things should normally be rejected.***

Note that this concept of “right or wrong” is different than the “good or bad” principle discussed in the previous chapter. In this chapter the words “right” and “wrong” involve morality, while in the previous chapter the words “good” and “bad” did not involve morality.

This brings us to the problem of semantics. Many words have multiple meanings, or shades of meaning, and using such words can cause confusion. Unfortunately, there are few words that don’t have this problem to some degree, so we are stuck with this problem. For example, in the English language, the words “good” and “bad” may be used regarding moral activity (such as whether we treat other people in a good manner or a bad manner), as well as regarding non-moral things (such as whether bread is good or bad, or whether a musician’s performance was good or bad). The words “right” and “wrong” may also be used to clarify issues of morality, or be used to merely clarify the correctness of something, such as whether the spelling of a word is right or rong. However, we would not normally call fresh bread “right” or moldy bread “wrong.” Usually the intended meaning of a word is evident from the context it is being used in.

For Further Reflection:

- What are some things you consider to be right?
- What are some things you consider to be wrong?

Chapter 6

Righteous or Unrighteous?

Again, let's start with a couple of true-false questions. Please consider whether the following statements are True (T) or False (F), based on your personal beliefs and actions:

11. ____ “All people are basically good, and consistently try to do what is right.”
12. ____ “I always do what is morally right; I never do anything that is morally wrong.”

In the previous chapter we saw that some things are morally right, and some things are morally wrong. We may disagree over what is right and what is wrong (regarding particular subjects), but it seems painfully obvious that at least some things are morally right and some things are morally wrong. Almost equally as obvious is that some people intentionally do things that are morally wrong, while others appear to intentionally do things that are morally right.

So, for me, the first True-False statement is clearly “False.” The world seems to be filled with people who don't consistently try to do what is right. It's not hard to find examples; look in almost any newspaper and you'll likely find some good ones.

The second statement is more difficult. I may presently try to always do what is morally right, but, if I am honest with myself, I don't always do the morally-right thing. I like to think that my more recent failures have been unintentional, but I'm not so sure that a closer look would always come to that conclusion. Either way, I don't always do what is morally right. Again, my answer is “False.”

If you are being honest with yourself, I suspect that you also answered “False” to that second statement. If so, this brings into question whether or not anyone is completely righteous. Is there anyone who always does what is morally right and

never does anything that is morally wrong? That question, however, is beyond our present scope of dealing with “self-evident” truths. For, now, let’s just deal with the more obvious issue of whether some people aim to do what is morally right more than some other people. For our present purposes, let’s use a definition of “righteous” that is more relative than absolute:

Righteous: Generally making an effort to do what is morally right, and avoiding things that are morally wrong.

Consider that a great many movies are built around a good-versus-evil theme. Some characters in these movies are generally portrayed as righteous (generally doing morally right things), while others are portrayed as unrighteous (generally doing morally wrong things). The distinction is usually obvious, and appears to be universal to all cultures.

All this brings us to another self-evident truth:

***Some people are righteous,
and some people are unrighteous.***

Now let’s be clear. This truth is not a black-and-white kind of truth; it involves shades-of-gray. It is not claiming that everyone fits neatly into a category of being righteous or being unrighteous. Nor is it claiming that anyone is completely righteous or completely unrighteous. It is merely affirming that some people genuinely try to do what is morally right and some people do not. Many people are perhaps in the middle somewhere, with varying degrees of effort to do what they consider to be morally right.

For Further Reflection:

- Consider your own life. Do you consistently do what you know to be morally right? Why or why not?

Chapter 7

Different Groups

We all belong to various groups. Some groups we associate with voluntarily; other group associations are involuntary. Some examples of what are often considered to be **involuntary** group associations are clarified by a few questions:

- Are you male or female?
- What country are you a citizen of? (Or, are you in the group of stateless people?)
- What is your native language?
- Are you over 50 years old, or under 50 years old?

Some examples of groups that may be considered to be **voluntary** associations are also clarified by some questions:

- Are you religious or not? If so, what religious group are you a part of? Or, are you part of the group of people that consider themselves to not be religious?
- Are you part of the group that has been vaccinated against polio?
- Are you associated with a political party? Or, are you part of the group of people that does not have a party affiliation?
- Are you a fan of a particular sport? Are you active in a particular sport?

The distinction between what is a “voluntary” association and what is an “involuntary” association is often not very clear, and may vary some depending on culture. For example, many people do not consider their religion to be a voluntary association, as their culture may not promote free choice in this area. Another example: Vaccination against polio may be legally required for many people, in which case

being part of the “vaccinated” group may be considered an involuntary group association. Or, perhaps your parents had you vaccinated, and you had little choice in the matter, and there is no way to become unvaccinated now.

Anyway, this brings us to two more self-evident truths:

Everyone is associated with various groups.

***Some group associations are voluntary;
some group associations are involuntary.***

For Further Reflection:

- What are some of the groups you are affiliated with?
- Which of those groups are you part of voluntarily?
- Which of those groups are you part of involuntarily?

Chapter 8

Different Paths

To some degree, each of us is on a different path through life. Even identical twins are on different paths, even though their genetic makeup may be the same. The different “paths” of identical twins are apparent even at birth: one of them is born first, the other is born second. Though this distinction may just be a matter of timing, it is still a significant difference. Their lives will diverge from there further. They will never occupy exactly the same space at the same time, and will likely end up with significantly different personalities and significantly different paths through life.

Though there are countless ways each of our paths through life is uniquely different from anyone else, there are also broader ways of looking at “different paths” which apply more to groups of people rather than individuals. Different groups tend to share some common paths.

For example, some people choose to follow a particular religion with other like-minded people. Some people choose to follow a particular career path, along with other people pursuing similar careers in the same field of work. Some people choose a path of learning that involves going to a particular college or university; while some people choose other paths. Some people go down a path of marriage and parenthood, while some do not. These types of paths are shared by groups of people.

This brings us to another self-evident truth, which applies to individuals as well as groups of people:

Different people are on different paths.

Let’s consider this further from a moral perspective. We saw previously that some people are “righteous” and some people are “unrighteous” (to varying degrees). Some people intentionally do things that are morally wrong, while others

appear to intentionally do things that are morally right. For example, some people genuinely try to live by the “golden rule”:

- “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

Others prefer to live by a twisted variation of that rule:

- “Do unto others before they do unto you.”

These different ways of treating others can be thought of as two different paths through life, and this brings us to another important conclusion:

***Some people are on a path of doing right things;
some people are on a path of doing wrong things.***

Note that this conclusion is not claiming that all people are clearly on one of these two paths. This is another “shades-of-gray” truth. Many people may be on a path in the middle somewhere, sometimes doing right, and sometimes doing wrong. This truth does, however, affirm what is obvious: some people are living much more righteously than some other people who are making little or no effort to do so. These people are on different paths.

For Further Reflection:

- How would you describe some of the paths that your life has been on?
- Have you consistently been on a path of doing right things?
- What are some paths you would like to travel on?

Chapter 9

Different Destinies

We saw in the previous chapter that different people are on different paths through life. Just as different literal paths (such as trails and roads) lead to different destinations, so too, different paths through life lead to different destinies.

It is plain to see that people's destinies are strongly impacted by the paths they are on. Athletes who choose a path of consistent training generally become better athletes. People with an inactive lifestyle generally become weaker. Students who study hard gain more knowledge and skills. People on a path of drinking lots of alcohol tend to become alcoholics. People who practice kindness toward others tend to become kinder people. People who choose to take illegal drugs often become drug addicts. People who do evil things generally become more proficient in doing evil. A path of doing right things leads to increasing righteousness. A path of doing wrong things leads to increasing unrighteousness.

Good athletes, skillful people, righteous people, unrighteous people, and all sorts of people don't just happen. Their destinies are the result of traveling different paths through life. This leads us to another self-evident truth:

Different paths lead to different destinies.

The paths we follow largely determine our future destiny.

For Further Reflection:

- Consider what kind of person you would like to be in ten years. Are the paths you are following today taking you toward that destiny?

Chapter 10

Beginning or No Beginning?

Was there a beginning to your existence? I suspect your beginning was similar to my beginning. My life began when a sperm cell from my father united with an egg cell from my mother. Of course, the egg and the sperm had separate beginnings earlier in time, and my mother and father had distinct beginnings still earlier in a similar way. Every living creature appears to have had its beginning in a similar way, from previous life.

Similarly, plants have beginnings as particular kinds of seeds, or as shoots from the roots of other plants, or perhaps as plant cuttings which were planted in soil and developed roots.

Every non-living thing appears to have some kind of beginning also. Man-made items can be traced back to the various raw materials used to make them. The raw materials also have some kind of history to them, with some kind of beginning. Scientists have proposed various ages for the Earth itself, related to the Earth having a beginning a long time ago. Even the entire universe is widely understood to have a beginning, with a popular scientific viewpoint summarized by the phrase “Big Bang Theory.”

This leads us to another self-evident truth:

Everything has a beginning.

For Further Reflection:

- Can you think of anything that physically exists today that didn't have some kind of beginning?

Chapter 11

Faith or No Faith?

Here is a simple definition of faith:

Faith: Belief in something that has not been directly observed.

Based on this simple definition, let's consider some things that involve faith:

- When I drive through a green light at an intersection, I generally have faith that there is a red light displayed to cross-traffic (which otherwise might collide with my car). This involves faith since I usually cannot directly observe the red light which directs the cross-traffic to stop. It doesn't take faith to believe that the stop light exists (since it can usually be seen), but it does take some faith to believe that it is working properly.
- When I sit down in a chair, I usually proceed without hesitation because I usually have faith that the chair will support me and not break under my weight. Faith is involved regarding the strength of the chair, not the existence of the chair.
- When I go over a bridge, I have some degree of faith that the bridge will not fall down. If I didn't have some faith that the bridge would support me, I would not go on it. Again, faith is involved regarding the integrity of the bridge, not the existence of the bridge.
- When I wait at a bus stop for a bus to take me somewhere, I have at least some faith that a bus will come (even though I can't directly observe it coming until it is nearby). If I had no faith in the bus system, I wouldn't wait for a bus to come.
- People who follow the philosophy of naturalism generally have faith that everything that happens in the universe can

be explained with natural scientific principles. This involves faith since no one can directly observe everything that happens, much less explain it all.

- People who believe in supernatural things generally believe that natural science can't explain everything they observe and experience. They have some level of faith in someone or something that is supernatural, which cannot be directly observed (at least not directly observed in a consistent, repeatable way).

You may object to some of my examples. Many people have never associated "faith" with things like traveling through stop lights, sitting on chairs, and traveling over bridges. You may be so sure of the integrity of such things that you don't consider faith to be involved when you rely on them. However, if you haven't directly verified the integrity of such things, then it seems to me that you have a "belief in something that has not been directly observed" when you rely on their integrity. I would call such strong confidence "strong faith" rather than saying faith is not involved.

We can see from these examples that the strength of our faith in various things often depends on our previous experience with similar things. People who have had a chair fail under them, or a bridge fall down under them, or who have been injured due to the failure of a stop light generally have less faith in such things than those who haven't experienced such failures.

From the above examples, I think it is clear that everyone has faith in some things to some degree in many areas of life. This leads us to another self-evident truth:

Everyone has some degree of faith in some things.

For Further Reflection:

- What are some things you believe that involve faith?

Chapter 12

Spiritual Realm or Not?

Some people seem to believe that if something can't be directly seen or measured, then it doesn't exist.

That viewpoint seems strange to me, since there is so much that is accepted by science that can't be directly seen or measured. Take, for example, radio waves. Do you have faith that they exist? Why or why not? Have you ever seen or felt one? I haven't, and I don't think you have either. Yet I think you believe in their existence. Why? It is probably because you experience evidence of their existence whenever you listen to a radio or use any kind of wireless communication that is based on radio waves. These indirect evidences lead you to have faith that radio waves exist.

Likewise, does our inability to directly see or experience a spiritual realm mean that it doesn't exist? Of course not. However, there must be some reasonable evidence for reasonable people to believe in things that can't be directly observed, whether we are talking about radio waves, a spiritual realm, or something else. So, let's consider some evidence for the existence of a spiritual realm.

- Perhaps the strongest evidence is found in the beliefs and experiences of millions of people over thousands of years. Virtually all cultures in all time periods have believed in some kind of spiritual realm. It would be somewhat arrogant of us to completely disregard the experiences of so many people without solid evidence to the contrary. Could so many people have been living in deception about this issue for so many years if the reality is that there is no spiritual realm? I think not.
- Millions of people living today (perhaps billions of people) claim to have spiritual experiences which involve a spiritual realm. Are all of those people deceived about their experiences? I find it to be very unlikely that all

such claims are without any merit.

- People who have died and have come back to life often give testimonies regarding life-after-death experiences, which generally involve a spiritual realm. Are all such experiences baseless? I think not.
- Many people claim to have witnessed “miracles” that cannot be explained by natural science. People who experience such miracles often attribute them to some kind of spiritual force and a spiritual realm.
- Considering a scientific viewpoint, modern “string theory” suggests that the universe has many more dimensions than those we are directly aware of. A parallel realm, which we are largely unaware of, is proposed to exist to explain string theory models. Even modern science seems to be leaning toward the existence of what I refer to as a “spiritual realm.”

All of this evidence seems to result in another self-evident truth:

A spiritual realm does exist.

For Further Reflection:

- Have you had any personal experiences that are evidence of the existence of a spiritual realm?

Chapter 13

Creation or No Creation?

We previously saw that everyone has faith to some degree regarding some things. We also saw that both a belief in naturalism (everything can be explained through natural science) and a belief in supernatural forces (some things can't be explained through natural science) involve faith. Only an "agnostic" (one who takes no position about such things) can claim to **not** have faith about such things.

When it comes to the issue of "creation or no creation" we have a similar issue of faith. None of us can directly observe what happened "in the beginning," so any beliefs we have regarding how the universe and life came into existence involve some degree of faith.

For me, the greatest evidence for a creation (which implies some kind of supernatural force at work) is science. Through science mankind's knowledge about natural things has greatly multiplied. Many things that were once thought to be simple are now known to be very complex. The sheer complexity of life and the complexity of the universe appear to me to be far too great to have happened based only on natural forces, time, and chance. When I view a complex universe, and complex life in this world, I see a "creation," not something resulting from random chance and time.

Some who think otherwise embrace the viewpoint of Charles Darwin, who wrote the book "The Origin of Species" (originally published in 1859). In that book, Mr. Darwin promotes the idea that complex life has evolved over long periods of time by time and chance, with no supernatural creator involved. On page 194 (in the edition published by P.F. Collier & Son, copyright 1909, edited by Charles W. Eliot) he writes:

"If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed, which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory

would absolutely break down. But I can find no such case.”

While there is a lot of evidence that “microevolution” does happen (as Mr. Darwin correctly observed), to the best of my knowledge no one has ever observed “macroevolution” to occur (one kind of animal changing into another kind, or life developing from inanimate matter). No one has ever observed any “*complex organ*” forming “*by numerous, successive, slight modifications*” from some other kind of organ. Mr. Darwin shows himself to be a person who has faith in the beliefs of naturalism by believing such things have happened by random chance and time in the past, when no such things are observed to happen anywhere today.

Since Mr. Darwin’s time, the science of molecular biology has shown that even just a single living cell is incredibly complex. Science still cannot bring a single living cell into existence from lifeless non-organic matter; nor can science yet fully explain how cells function. In my opinion, it is self-evident that every living cell in existence today is too complex to “*possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications*” from lifeless matter. I conclude, based on Mr. Darwin’s own statement, that modern science has shown his theory to “*absolutely break down.*” This leads us to another self-evident truth:

There is a creation.

For Further Reflection:

- What do *you* think? Is it likely that our complex universe with complex life came into existence merely by time and chance, with no supernatural forces at work?

Chapter 14

Creator or No Creator?

In the previous chapter I concluded that there is a creation, that a complex universe with complex life could not have happened merely by time and chance. This logically requires some sort of supernatural creator. On one level, that simple logic should be enough for another self-evident truth. But first, let's explore this concept of a "creator" some more.

Have you ever pondered the marvel of photosynthesis? Photosynthesis is the term used for how certain plant cells combine sunlight energy, carbon dioxide (CO₂), and water (H₂O) to make complex organic molecules (with oxygen usually being a byproduct of that process). Complex organic molecules are both the building blocks of life and they provide a chemical form of energy storage. Our bodies require a regular supply of these complex organic molecules to survive. We often call the various complex organic molecules that we consume "food." While part of the benefit of food is various vitamins and minerals our bodies need, a huge part of the function of food is simply providing us a source of energy to live by. Our bodies use the chemical energy stored in complex organic molecules as a source of energy to sustain life.

Note that with my definition of "food" I am excluding substances which don't provide us energy, such as salt and water (though these may be mixed with complex organic molecules, and the overall mixture also may also be referred to as "food"). "Food" in this discussion refers primarily to things we eat which provide our bodies with energy to maintain life.

Have you ever eaten any non-organic food? By "non-organic food" I mean complex molecules that are similar to complex organic molecules found in food derived from plants and animals, but which are made by people using only

inorganic materials, without using plants as part of the process of converting carbon dioxide and water into the complex molecules. I'm pretty sure I have never eaten any non-organic food, and I don't think you have either. Why not? Because, at this point in time, mankind is unable to make food from inorganic materials, at least in any quantity that is meaningful. Yes, some scientists have made simple sugar molecules from inorganic materials using special laboratory procedures (not photosynthesis), but that is about all. We are still totally dependent on plants for our food supply. (Note that food derived from animals ultimately has plants as the source of their complex organic molecules, when the overall food chain is considered.) Only plants are able to efficiently make food via photosynthesis.

Some people think that the marvel of photosynthesis just started happening by time and chance. However, photosynthesis happening by time and chance has never been observed. On the contrary, sunlight is normally observed to break down complex molecules, not build them up. I find that the existence of plants that make food directly from sunlight, carbon dioxide and water is evidence of an intelligent "creator" who is much more intelligent than mankind.

Now suppose scientists eventually develop ways to make food from inorganic materials. Would that nullify my reasoning? No, it would only show that things as complicated as photosynthesis only happen with the help of a lot of intelligence, not just time and chance.

This brings us to another self-evident truth:

There is a creator.

For Further Reflection:

- Have you ever seen or eaten any non-organic food?

Chapter 15

Creation and Creator the Same?

In the last chapter we moved away from the realm of atheism (which holds that a supernatural creator does not exist) into believing in some form of a supernatural creator. This moves us into the realm of either theism (the belief in one or more “gods” which are distinct from physical creation) or pantheism (the belief that all creation is divine and is part of one god).

The question at hand then is this: Is the physical creation, which we experience with our senses, distinct from a supernatural creator or creators (theism), or is the physical creation simply part of a supernatural creator (pantheism)?

I find several insurmountable problems with pantheism. First, there is the problem of evil. If everything is divine and part of one god, then the concept of good and evil makes no sense. This is contrary to our experience (as expressed in previous self-evident truths).

Second, there is the problem of the distinct personalities of all people on Earth. Every individual on Earth appears to be a unique self-directed individual who is often in conflict with other people. Moreover, the religious beliefs of various people vary greatly. It is difficult to see how these realities line up with everything and everyone being divine and part of one god.

Third, modern science shows non-organic lifeless matter to normally follow strict laws of physics and chemistry. It is difficult to see how inorganic matter can be thought of as being divine and part of one god.

Fourth, modern biology understands life and intelligence to exist in clearly defined units, such as individual plants or individual animals. This seems contrary to all life being divine and part of one god.

From this I arrive at another self-evident truth:

Creation is distinctly separate from its creator.

For Further Reflection:

- Can you think of other evidence which relates to whether or not creation is distinctly separate from its creator?

Chapter 16

God or gods?

Recent chapters have concluded:

- There is a creation.
- There is a supernatural realm.
- There is a supernatural creator.
- The supernatural creator is distinct from creation.

So, we have moved out of the realm of atheism (no supernatural creator) and pantheism (all is God) into some form of theism (a belief in one or more “gods” distinct from physical creation). To avoid confusion, let’s clarify the terms “god” (with a little “g”) and “God” (with a capital “G”):

god: A supernatural being having some kind of supernatural power.

God: The greatest of all supernatural beings, and the creator of everything (including all lesser “gods”).

We previously found that the existence of a spiritual realm is self-evident. Acceptance of a spiritual realm usually is associated with acceptance of supernatural beings which exist in the spiritual realm. Almost every religion acknowledges this. For example, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim traditions generally believe in angels and evil spirits. From a natural human perspective each of these is a “supernatural being having some kind of supernatural power,” which correlates with the definition of “god” given above. Hinduism, as well as most other eastern religions, also believes in the existence of multiple gods. Likewise, Satanism, Wicca, and various other occult religions generally believe in multiple supernatural beings with supernatural powers. From this I conclude:

Multiple supernatural beings with supernatural powers exist in the supernatural realm.

While this conclusion may be good progress, we are still left with the question of whether there is one God who is greater than all others, and whether or not this one God is the source of all other gods, and ultimately the creator of everything.

Many people follow religions which are usually thought of as believing in many gods. However, many of these, including many branches of Hinduism, also believe in one God who is greater than the others, and who is often considered to be the creator of everything.

Consider further: In religions that don't believe in one God who created everything, the various gods are usually understood to be somewhat independent of each other and are often in conflict with each other, in much the same way that people are often in conflict. Just as committees of people often have a hard time agreeing and making progress, such seems to be the case with the gods of these religions. Such a situation seems to me to be incompatible with the tremendous ordered complexity that we observe in the universe. It is difficult to conceive that the universe could have been made by multiple gods each having different opinions of how things should be.

We have previously seen that complex life in an ordered universe demands some kind of creator. Since it appears that multiple lesser gods cannot account for such a creator, it appears that there must be one God who created all things (including all other "gods"). This brings us to another conclusion:

***There is one God
who is greater than all other "gods."***

For Further Reflection:

- Do you accept this "one God" conclusion? If not, what do you believe in this area, and what evidence do you have to support your beliefs?

Chapter 17

A Self-Evident Conclusion

Many years ago, I studied electrical engineering at Oregon State University. Pretty much all of my engineering studies were based on what I consider to be “hard science,” such as math and physics. Of course, the division between what is “hard science” and what is “soft science” is debatable. I consider “soft science” to include fields such as philosophy, psychology, religion, and political science. For me, the distinction between “hard” and “soft” science is the degree to which the main concepts are observable, precise, provable, and repeatable.

I don't remember any serious disagreements regarding “truth” relating to my science, math, and engineering classes. With hard science as the foundation, there isn't much to argue over, it's mostly a matter of understanding it and learning how to apply it in practical ways. Of course, people can argue over the best way to implement a solution (such as what style of bridge to build to span a river), but the underlying hard sciences (the calculations and principles that ensure the bridge won't fall down) are usually firmly established. If that were not the case, people would not be able to design bridges with reasonable certainty that they won't fall down.

There is an elegant side to the hard sciences which I have come to appreciate: There is generally only one correct answer to most hard-science types of analyses. I suppose that relates to how I define “hard” and “soft” science. With hard science, the mathematical analysis of a problem can often be approached from many different paths, but the answer should always be the same (there is usually only one correct answer). If the solutions come out differently when approached from different directions, then a mistake has almost certainly occurred (or else, by my definition, we aren't dealing with hard science).

This same pattern of arriving at similar results from different directions should also occur in practice, to a lesser degree, in soft sciences, such as philosophy and religion. For example, consider this philosophical question:

“Why does the universe exist?”

Previous chapters have arrived at the following three self-evident truths through observation and reason:

- Everything has a beginning.
- There is a creation.
- There is a creator.

We can simply combine these truths and arrive at the following conclusion about why the universe exists:

In the beginning, a creator created creation.

Alternatively, someone might look in scripture for an answer to the question: “Why does the universe exist?” The first verse in the Bible reads:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 1:1

These two answers are practically the same. Using two different paths we have arrived at similar results. The first path was using observation and reason. The second path was looking to scripture for an answer. We have essentially found the first verse in the Bible to be true, based on self-evident truths.

For Further Reflection:

- Do you agree that “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”?

PART 2

Faith and Science

There seems to be a great deal of confusion about the relationship between faith and science. This confusion tends to hinder people from embracing self-evident spiritual truth. So, in this section I'll try to make sense out of the relationship between "faith" and "science."

We'll approach this topic with the following outline:

- About Faith
- About Science
- Faith in Science?
- Deception
- Faith and Deception
- Science and Deception
- Faith and Science in Conflict

Chapter 18

About Faith

In chapter 11 a simple definition of “faith” was given:

Faith: Belief in something that has not been directly observed.

Of course, like so many words, there are many other possible uses of the word “faith” which this definition doesn’t address well. But, for the discussion in this book, that definition is what I mean when I use the word “faith.”

Further, the phrase “to have faith” means to believe in something that has not been directly observed.

By this definition of “faith” a person can have faith regarding things both in the natural world and in the spiritual realm (as discussed some in chapter 11 “Faith or No Faith”). The key point about faith is that it involves believing in things that have not been directly observed, regardless of whether those things are natural or supernatural.

With this definition, faith is involved when I believe something that other people claim they have observed, but which I myself have not directly observed. If I don’t have first-hand knowledge or experience about a particular thing, then faith is involved if I believe in it. I think the same is true for you. For example: Do you believe that what is reported through a particular news outlet is true? If so, then you have some level of faith in the truthfulness of that news outlet and the news they report. After all, since you don’t observe most news first-hand, it is possible that some of the news you hear has been fabricated or twisted to suit the purposes of those presenting it. It takes some level of faith to believe in second-hand information. And, of course, just believing something is true doesn’t make it true. We may be deceived regarding things we place our faith in (more on this in chapters 21, 22 and 23).

Note that for a person who directly experiences an event, that event is not a matter of faith for that person, since they directly observed the event. However, for those who only hear about the event second-hand, then believing such an event happened is a matter of faith. The strength of one's faith about such an event is dependent on the type and amount of evidence there is regarding the event. The stronger the evidence, the stronger one's faith about it would normally be. The more faith one has in a particular source of information, the more readily one will accept what is said as being true.

There is a common misunderstanding we should be aware of. We often have so much faith in some sources of information that we don't even consider faith to be involved in believing them. Indeed, most schools and teachers seem to operate with the assumption that students should simply accept whatever is taught without question. Too often students do simply accept what is stated by teachers as authoritative fact, with complete faith in whatever the teachers teach. I have been guilty of this myself, more often than I care to admit. I suggest that we all should be more careful about the things we accept by faith. We would do well to not be hasty in accepting second-hand information as final truth.

For Further Reflection:

- What are some things that you believe which you haven't directly observed?
- What are some things that you know to be true due to your own direct observation?

Chapter 19

About Science

Now let's consider a simple definition of "science":

Science: Knowledge about the natural world and universe derived from experiments, observation, and reason.

Again, like the word "faith," there are many other possible uses of the word "science" which this definition doesn't address well. But, for the discussion in this book, that definition is what I mean when I use the word "science."

By this definition, "science" deals with the "natural world and universe" not the spiritual realm. To the extent that something is part of the "spiritual realm," to that extent it is beyond the realm of science, which deals only with the "natural world and universe."

Note that "science" deals with knowledge derived from "experiments, observation, and reason." One might clarify this by adding that science is based on experiments and observations that can be repeated with consistent results. If experimental results and observations can't be repeated consistently, then the results are not normally accepted as legitimate science.

However, there seems to be a great deal of "knowledge" which many people accept as "scientific" knowledge, but which is not derived from repeatable observations or experiments. For example, some people claim that life on earth began with what is called "spontaneous generation." That is the concept that the first living cell (or cells) just randomly happened through time and chance, with nothing supernatural involved. Is such a belief a matter of science or faith? Based on the definitions of faith and science we are working with in this book, such a belief seems to me to be more in the realm of faith than science. I have never heard of anyone observing such a thing to happen, not even

indirectly. I am not aware of any experiment that has been able to repeat such an occurrence. So, believing in “spontaneous generation” seems to me to be a matter of faith, not science.

For another example, consider the origin of the human race. Some people think that “science” shows we evolved from apes and lesser animals over millions of years. Has anyone ever directly observed anything like that happen? Not that I am aware of. Are there any repeatable experiments that support this belief? Again, I am not aware of any such experiments. Yes, I am aware that some scientists claim certain fossils support such theories. I myself have never seen any fossils or even any photos of fossils that clearly lead to such a conclusion. If I were to believe in this kind of macroevolution, it would be a matter of faith. It would be a “belief in something that has not been directly observed.”

Note that I am NOT claiming here that such beliefs are incorrect (though I indeed may lean toward that perspective); I am merely pointing out here that such beliefs are more matters of faith than science for most people. Some people may have direct knowledge about such things, and for them their own knowledge could be said to be based on science, not faith. For most people who believe such things, it seems to me that their beliefs are more matters of faith than science.

For Further Reflection:

- What are some scientific beliefs that you know to be true based on your own experiments, observation, and reason?
- What are some “scientific” beliefs you accept by faith?
- Have you ever seen any fossils that clearly support the belief that humans are descended from other life forms?

Chapter 20

Faith in Science?

In the last chapter, I alleged that many beliefs people have regarding things associated with science are more matters of faith than science. I'll try to clarify that some.

The problem of people confusing matters of “faith” and “science” appears to be fairly common, both among people who think they aren't religious as well as those who do consider themselves to be religious. This problem is partly due to the overlap that there tends to be between faith and science. Most scientists have direct scientific knowledge through “experiments, observation, and reason” in their area of expertise. However, most people, including most scientists, don't have direct scientific knowledge through “experiments, observation, and reason” in many areas of scientific knowledge. For them, their acceptance of such scientific knowledge is based partly on faith, faith in others who claim to have developed scientific knowledge through “experiments, observation, and reason.”

So, the line between science and faith is rather fuzzy, and will be different for different people. For example, consider Einstein's equation relating energy (e), mass (m), and the speed of light (c):

$$e = mc^2$$

Some people claim to actually understand the derivation and evidence for that equation. I am NOT one of those people. I did study some physics in college, but I did NOT major in it. However, I do believe that $e=mc^2$ is valid and true, but not because I understand the physics behind it. I haven't verified this equation to be true by reviewing experimental results, or by my own observation or my own reasoning. I believe it is true by **faith**. I have faith that Einstein and those who have reviewed and approved his work knew what they were doing. I have **faith** that Einstein was right based upon the

wide acceptance of $e=mc^2$ by the scientific community.

On the other hand, I did major in electrical engineering. One of the most fundamental equations of electricity is known as Ohm's Law. It relates voltage (E) to current (I) and resistance (R):

$$E = I \times R$$

I know this relationship to be true based on my own experiments, my own observations, and reason. Stated another way: I know Ohm's Law to be true based on my own personal understanding of science. Faith is NOT involved for me when I affirm that Ohm's Law is true.

Now the point of talking about faith and science like this is to help our understanding of the relationship between faith and science. Some people claim to only rely on science, and claim to want nothing to do with things of faith, not realizing how much of their reliance on science actually involves **faith in science** rather than their own direct observation and reason and understanding.

Let me try to summarize these thoughts. To the extent that something is directly observed or understood by an individual, it is a matter of science for that person, not faith. To the extent that something is believed, but NOT directly observed or understood by an individual, then it is a matter of faith to some degree, NOT just science. I find that many people seem to have more faith in science than knowledge about science.

For Further Reflection:

- How much of your acceptance of scientific knowledge is based more on faith than your own knowledge “derived from experiments, observation, and reason”?

Chapter 21

Deception

In chapter 2 we looked at the concept of “true or false.” We saw that some things are true and some things are false. It follows that it is possible for each of us to believe something to be true which is actually false, or to believe something to be false which is actually true. It is common to say that a person who has such wrong beliefs is “deceived” regarding those beliefs. Based on this, I propose a simple definition for the word “deceived”:

Deceived: A state of believing something to be true which is actually false, or believing something to be false which is actually true.

It should be clear that all of us have been deceived, at times, about some things. Perhaps we preferred to say we were “mistaken,” but it probably fits the above definition of being “deceived.” For most of us, the older we get, the more things we are aware of that we have been deceived about. Those who think they have never been deceived about anything are perhaps the most deceived of all!

We should note that being deceived is different than being neutral or ignorant about something. If I don’t have a settled opinion or belief about something I cannot be deceived about it. I am either just neutral regarding it, or perhaps I am just ignorant about it (or some of both). I can only be deceived about things I claim to know truth about. If I don’t claim to know the truth about something (either openly or secretly), then I cannot be deceived about it. I think the same is true of you.

Now it seems obvious that being deceived about something is generally NOT good. With few exceptions (I can’t think of any) it is generally BAD to be deceived about anything. Being deceived generally leads to doing things that are harmful rather than helpful. So, I hope you already make it

your goal to NOT be deceived. Assuming that is the case, it raises an important issue:

How can we avoid being deceived?

I propose the following simple ways of avoiding deception:

First: Simply be aware of the possibility of being deceived. This should help us to be slower to come to conclusions about a matter. We will be less likely to be deceived if we are conscious of the possibility.

Second: Embrace a neutral attitude toward things which you don't have enough knowledge about to be sure about. I believe strongly that it is better to have a neutral attitude about something than to be deceived regarding it. There is often no need to form conclusions about things quickly. Embrace a neutral attitude until you have enough information to form a valid belief.

Third: Acknowledge your own ignorance, when appropriate. Someone has said "ignorance is bliss." I generally disagree. However, it is often better to acknowledge our ignorance about something than to pretend to have all the right answers and end up being wrong. Be willing to acknowledge your own ignorance about something rather than risk being deceived about it.

Fourth: Be a seeker of truth. Actively pursue truth and build your life around things you know to be true. Avoid relying on things that may not be true.

For Further Reflection:

- What are some things you have been deceived about?
- Might you presently be deceived about something?

Chapter 22

Faith and Deception

Recall the simple definition of “faith” that we are using:

Faith: Belief in something that has not been directly observed.

Since “faith” deals with things that have not been directly observed, it follows that it is relatively easy to be deceived about matters involving faith. Few people are deceived about things they directly observe. No, we are more likely to be deceived about things we do not directly observe, including things which we only partially observe or indirectly observe, or things we only hear about through others.

For example, you may have heard about the 1938 radio drama about “The War of the Worlds.” History indicates it was directed and narrated by Orson Welles, and that it aired on the Columbia Broadcasting System on October 30, 1938 throughout the United States. (I was not alive then; I did not hear it or observe it myself; I am basing this on historical accounts, about which I have some level of faith in their accuracy.) It was a radio drama about an invasion by space aliens, based on a novel by H.G. Wells. Unfortunately, many people who tuned in after the introduction of the drama thought the news reports about an alien invasion were true and began to panic and suffer extreme mental anguish. A few people are reported to have attempted suicide. Why the mental anguish? Why the attempted suicides? Because these people had strong faith in the accuracy of radio news reports. They believed that what they were hearing was true, even though they hadn’t directly observed any evidence of the reported invasion. They were deceived; they believed something to be true which was actually false.

Consider another example. Bernard L. Madoff Investment Securities LLC is reported to have been founded in 1960 by

none other than Bernard L. Madoff. For about 48 years, this investment firm “invested” other people’s money for them, and generally showed very consistent and strong returns on those investments. Mr. Madoff developed a great deal of wealth and respect based on the consistent success of his company. Many people had strong faith in the company, and proved their faith by eventually entrusting over \$50,000,000,000 to Mr. Madoff’s investment firm (that’s 50 Billion dollars, or 50,000 Million dollars). Perhaps you heard: in 2008 this investment company was found to be operating a Ponzi scheme! New money coming in wasn’t invested in a proper way. Instead, it was used to pay previous investors and provide Mr. Madoff with a lavish lifestyle. Apparently even some of his own family members who worked in the business were largely unaware of the deception. Lots of people had faith in Mr. Madoff and his company, but they were deceived. They believed in something which they had not directly observed, and only later found out that they had been deceived.

Consider a somewhat more religious example. Many successful television preachers (and some churches) appear to have a message that goes something like this:

“God wants to financially bless you! We who are serving God need more resources to serve God better. Invest in our ministry and God will financially bless you! Don’t hinder God’s blessing any longer; give today!”

Are such claims true? Believing such claims usually involves faith, but having faith about something doesn’t make it true. Likewise, however, not having faith about something doesn’t make it false.

For Further Reflection:

- Do you presently have faith in something which may end up being a deception?

Chapter 23

Science and Deception

Recall the simple definition of “science” that we are using:

Science: Knowledge about the natural world and universe derived from experiments, observation, and reason.

Since “science” deals with knowledge “derived from experiments, observation, and reason,” one might think that it is relatively difficult to be deceived about matters of science. However, we previously saw in chapters 19 and 20 that many people have more faith in science than actual scientific knowledge. Since much of what we believe regarding science is really based on faith in what scientists say (rather than our own direct observation and understanding), the possibility for deception is rather large, in my opinion.

For example, did you hear about the technology start-up company whose main product was based on a scientific breakthrough? Investors poured money into the company, believing the science behind their planned product was solid. Instead, only the company’s business plan to get money from investors was solid! The investors believed the science was valid, but apparently it was not. Fraud was alleged; lawsuits followed. I’m purposely not naming names here; the situation described is not unique to one company.

Consider another example. Many years ago it was a common scientific belief (based on simple experiments, observation, and reason) that many life forms, especially small insects, spontaneously developed in organic matter (such as in rotting food or feces). It was around the year 1864 that Louis Pasteur clearly showed that spontaneous generation of life does not happen. He showed that all life forms come from similar life forms through natural reproductive methods. With more-developed science now in existence, it is now widely accepted that life forms as we

know them do not just spontaneously happen. This is a clear example of a former “scientific” belief that has been shown to be false based on better science. Appearances can be deceiving!

Consider the science of medicine. How many drugs have you heard of that were once promoted as a good treatment for a particular health problem but were later found out to have harmful effects that were worse than their benefits? Many people took those drugs believing that medical science showed them to be safe. They believed the drugs were safe, when they actually were not safe. They believed something was true which actually was false. They were deceived.

Note that the definition of “deceived” we are using does not consider whether or not there is a willful deceiver involved. Being deceived is simply “a state of believing something to be true which is actually false, or believing something to be false which is actually true.” In the last two examples, it does not appear that anyone was intentionally deceiving anyone else. However, in the first example (the start-up company) there appears to be a greater likelihood of intentional deception by someone. So, we can be deceived about things even in the absence of intentional deception.

Consider a common thread to each of the above examples. In each case people believed something they actually had little or no direct knowledge about. They had faith either in their own limited understanding, or in the limited scientific knowledge of others. So, we see that we can be deceived about “scientific” knowledge when that knowledge is either incomplete or is simply accepted by faith.

For Further Reflection:

- Have you ever been deceived regarding something which you had believed was based on sound science?

Chapter 24

Faith and Science in Conflict

Let's briefly review, again, the simple definitions of "faith" and "science" we have been using from chapters 18 and 19:

Faith: Belief in something that has not been directly observed.

Science: Knowledge about the natural world and universe derived from experiments, observation, and reason.

Since faith generally involves belief in things that are not directly observed, and science generally involves knowledge about things that are observable, there doesn't need to be conflict between the two. So, why does there often appear to be conflict between faith and science?

We should understand that conflicts between faith and science can happen in two fundamentally different ways:

- Conflicts **between different people** (or different groups of people), which arise due to differences in the faith beliefs and scientific knowledge of the different people.
- Conflicts **within an individual** regarding their own faith beliefs and scientific knowledge.

If we are to have any hope of resolving faith and science conflicts between different people, we should first be able to understand and resolve such conflicts within ourselves. So, let's focus on conflicts at a personal individual level.

Many people simply think that conflicts between faith and science can't be resolved, so they don't even try to reconcile the two, not even within their own understanding. However, I believe that the "law of non-contradiction" is valid. This law, developed from ancient times through several philosophical traditions, basically states:

- If two statements (or ideas or beliefs) contradict each other, then both statements (or ideas or beliefs) cannot be

true at the same time and in the same sense.

I believe this law of non-contradiction is true in all matters of science (things we can consistently observe) and faith (things not directly observed). I believe that true science does not contradict faith regarding things that are true. So, based on the law of non-contradiction, I claim the following to be true:

- If we have faith only in things that really are true (though we can't prove their truth in a scientific way), and if our scientific knowledge is based only on science that is really true (not affected by various deceptions associated with science), then there will be no contradiction between matters of faith and matters of science.

Contradictions in our beliefs serve to indicate to us that we are believing in something that is false. Applied to our own lives, this serves as a way to help us identify false beliefs and free ourselves from them. If there is a contradiction in our beliefs, then we ought to adjust our faith beliefs or our science knowledge to resolve that contradiction.

Now let's look briefly at faith and science conflicts between different people or different groups of people. It should not be difficult to see that many of these conflicts result from one or both sides believing things that aren't true, whether they are "scientific" things or matters of faith. Since most people are slow to embrace changes in their beliefs, conflict resolution is usually a slow and difficult process.

For Further Reflection:

- Do you believe that the law of non-contradiction is true? Why or why not?
- Are there some contradictions between your science knowledge and faith beliefs? If so, what changes to your knowledge or beliefs might resolve those contradictions?

PART 3

God Revealed

Is it possible to learn something about an artist from his art? Is it possible to learn something about an architect from the buildings he designs? Of course. The things we create are a reflection of who we are.

With the conclusion in Part 1 that there is one God who created everything, we can now go further: We can look at what has been created to learn about God. We will approach this through looking at how God is revealed in several areas:

- God Revealed in Nature
- God Revealed in Self
- God Revealed in Others
- God Revealed in Relationships
- God Revealed through Others
- God Revealed through Scripture
- God Revealed through Jesus?

Chapter 25

God Revealed in Nature

Beautiful sunsets, crashing waves at the ocean, cycles of life and death, earthquakes, storms, disease; what can we learn about God from such things?

First, consider the greatness of God. The vastness of the universe reveals a God whose power we cannot comprehend. The complexity of life, and of nature in general, reveals a God whose understanding and creative ability far exceeds our own. Indeed, some reject belief in God simply because they cannot comprehend a God who has power and creative ability that is so unfathomable. Perhaps it would be wiser to acknowledge our own limitations in this area, rather than try to limit God to something we can fully comprehend.

Throughout history, people have struggled with just how great God is. The Italian astronomer Giordano Bruno was among the first to propose an infinitely powerful God based on his understanding of an infinite universe. Unfortunately, few people of his day could comprehend the vastness of the universe as science now understands it to be, and most of the religious leaders of Mr. Bruno's time insisted on an Earth-centered model of the universe. Mr. Bruno had many other beliefs that were contrary to the religious leaders of his day. Eventually his non-conformist thinking was deemed to conflict with traditional beliefs too much, and history indicates that Mr. Bruno was executed in Rome on February 17, 1600 AD, after a lengthy trial regarding his beliefs.

Giordano Bruno's understanding about the vastness of the universe is now widely accepted, given the tremendous advancements of scientific knowledge since his death. I believe Mr. Bruno was also right about the greatness of God. This brings us to an important truth about God:

God is greater than we can comprehend.

Second, consider the stark contrasts displayed in nature. Much beauty and joy seems to be paralleled by much ugliness and suffering. And perhaps that is the point: So much of nature is a matter of contrasts. Only when compared with something ugly can we understand the value of beauty. Good health is only appreciated when contrasted with poor health. Peace is valued only to the degree that it is contrasted with conflict. Clean is valued only when contrasted with dirty. So, I conclude from these many contrasts in nature that making distinctions is part of who God is. Distinctions between beauty and ugliness; between good and bad; between healthy and sick; between strong and weak; making distinctions between such things appears to be part of God's character.

Some might suggest that God is indifferent about such things, since both sides of these contrasts are present in nature. On the contrary, I find that the existence of such contrasts indicates that God does care about them. And just as we people naturally pursue "good" things and reject "bad" things, I think it is clear that God, likewise, prefers "good" things over "bad" things. Let's summarize this idea this way:

God makes distinctions between things that are good and things that are bad.

This raises an important issue: It seems to me that it would be wise of us to value the things that God values, and reject the things that God rejects.

For Further Reflection:

- Can you think of other aspects of nature that reveal something about God?

Chapter 26

God Revealed in Self

We humans are arguably the most sophisticated and most developed beings in God's physical creation—at least that we are directly aware of. As such, it seems likely that many aspects of God are reflected in how he has made each of us. Let's consider some ways that God's character appears to be reflected in how we are made.

Have you ever been struck by the beauty of a work of art, a beautiful sunset, or a beautiful waterfall? Have you ever been concerned about something you made, whether or not others would appreciate it or not? Where does your appreciation and concern for beautiful things come from? I find that having an appreciation for beauty is part of how I have been made, not something I had to be taught (though education may have an impact on how I value beauty). Since God is ultimately the creator of us all, and each of us seems to have an innate appreciation for beauty, I conclude that:

***God appreciates beauty,
and enjoys making beautiful things.***

Consider also that it is natural that, when any of us makes something, we want it to reflect something good about ourselves. If we cook food, we normally want it to look good and taste good so that others will have a good impression of us. If we make art, we want it to communicate something good about ourselves. If we build a house we want the end result to be “good” so that others will benefit from it and appreciate our work. I believe this also is a reflection of God:

***God values making good things, and likes it when
we appreciate the good things he has made.***

Now consider something you have made, which was either

recklessly damaged by someone else or spoken poorly of by someone else. Did it bother you that someone showed such disregard for what you made? I know the answer for me is obviously “Yes, it bothered me when they did that.” Do you suppose that God is indifferent when we abuse what he has created, or speak poorly of it? I don’t think so. I think we can safely say:

God cares about what he has created.

Consider further: Have you ever been wronged by someone, and gotten upset at them? Where do such convictions and emotions come from? Why do you get angry about some things? This too seems to be part of how we are made. Again, I find this to be a reflection of God’s character:

God has convictions about what is right and what is wrong.

God has an emotional response to wrong things that happen.

Some people think that God is indifferent toward us and far off. On the contrary, I find that our own emotions, our own likes and our own dislikes, show that God is not far off, uncaring and indifferent. Rather, he is near, he is caring, and he is righteous.

For Further Reflection:

- What are some other aspects of your own humanity that may be a reflection of God’s character?

Chapter 27

God Revealed in Others

We saw in chapter 25 the many contrasts and opposites in nature, which help us understand God's character.

Consider another contrast in what God has created: Men and women, boys and girls, male and female. Men are generally associated with "masculine" characteristics, while women are generally associated with "feminine" characteristics. Without both men and women being created, we would likely have little understanding about those differences, and the relative strengths of each. Consider the huge impact our sexuality has on our life. I think God must have had a good reason for making us this way. I think it says something about God's character.

Now, discussing the differences between men and women is somewhat like walking across a field with landmines buried in it. No matter how gently you try to walk, there is the possibility of a landmine exploding and maiming you. So, it's usually better not to go that direction. So, for now anyway, let's just talk in generalities.

What do you consider to be some of the differences between men and women? What are the best characteristics and strengths of each gender? Could it be, in some ways, that God has the best characteristics of each gender, without the weaknesses and failings of each gender? I like to think so. I think that is partly why God made male and female, so we could better understand his own character, through understanding our many differences.

Let's take this a little further. Consider the great variation there is between virtually every person on Earth. We are all very different from each other in many ways. Think of some people whom you respect or admire. Why do you respect or admire them? Could it be that the characteristics you respect and admire are also characteristics of God? I think that is

probably the case. Let's summarize this idea this way:

In many ways, God's character is revealed by the best things we observe in other people.

To further clarify this, consider some character-trait opposites that are observable in various people. Which of the following traits do you think best describe God?

Courageous / Cowardly

Selfish / Generous

Strong / Weak

Incompetent / Skillful

Righteous / Unrighteous

Caring / Indifferent

Beautiful / Ugly

Unstable / Rock-Solid

Reliable / Unreliable

Hurtful / Comforting

Helpful / Destructive

Yes, we can learn much about God by observing the best in others.

For Further Reflection:

- What are some other character traits that you value in others? Are these same traits likely to be part of God's character?

Chapter 28

God Revealed in Relationships

Have you ever longed for deeper relationships? When I was young, I felt hurt by many relationships, and sometimes dreamed of becoming a hermit to get away from people and bad relationships. But that was not what I really wanted. What I really wanted and needed was good relationships with other people. I desire to be known, accepted and loved by others. Where does such a desire come from? I conclude again that this is part of God's nature reflected in us:

God values deep relationships.

Even most simple forms of life require some kind of physical relationship to happen for reproduction. As we consider more complex forms of life, relationships between individuals play an increasingly important role. The higher the form of life, the more important relationships appear to be.

Consider the highest form of natural life we are aware of: people. It seems obvious that relationships are a hugely important part of our lives. This leads me to believe that for God (arguably the highest form of life) relationships are very important. God is into relationships; deep relationships. He is not, as some have hypothesized, far away and disinterested. On the contrary, part of his purpose in creation appears to be all about relationship. I conclude that:

God wants relationship with us!

Let's consider some specific kinds of relationships. First let's look at parents and their children. Why did God make us so utterly helpless at the point of our birth? Why did God make us so dependent on our parents for so many years? I see from this that God must value close interdependent relationships. God does not intend for us to live alone and independent of others. Further, it seems reasonable that

parent-child relationships have some similarities to the relationship that God wants to have with us (with God being our provider and caregiver, and us as his children).

Consider parental love and devotion for their children. Where does this come from? Again, it looks like its source is in how God made us. Perhaps God gave us the love which we naturally have for our children so that we could better understand his love for us.

Consider another important human relationship: romantic love between a man and a woman. Where does romantic love come from? Why do we desire a romantic and physically intimate relationship? Again, this seems to be part of how God made us. Why did God make us this way? Apparently because deep intimate relationships are very important to God.

Based on this discussion, I conclude that:

The love God has for people is like a parent's love for a child, and is passionate like romantic love.

For Further Reflection:

- Are there other aspects of human relationships which you think reveal something about God?

Chapter 29

God Revealed through Others

We have seen that God values deep relationships. Since God appears to be all about relationship, it is to be expected that people throughout the ages have experienced relationship with God. I conclude:

*We should learn from other people
who have experienced God.*

This raises an important issue: How do we tell whether someone has had a genuine encounter with God, or just some kind of deception or misunderstanding? Here are some guidelines I have found helpful:

- **Look for consistency among many different people.** Truth about God should not be dependent on a single person's testimony. Everyone who truly experiences the one true God should have experiences and share truths that are similar, not contradictory.
- **Consider the backgrounds of people.** Is there something about their life that makes you think they understand spiritual truths better than others?
- **Look for people who promote spiritual truths that don't change with time.** Science shows us that creation operates under unchanging physical laws. The same laws of physics and chemistry that were in operation long ago are still in operation today. They haven't changed. From this we should expect that spiritual principles are also unchanging. People's experiences with God and the spiritual realm should be consistent over time. Spiritual perspectives that change their beliefs with changing times are not likely to be closely in tune with unchanging spiritual truth.
- **Look for people with spiritual truths that are in agreement with self-evident truth.** The testimony of

people with genuine encounters with the genuine God should not contradict what is known through creation.

- **Do not rely on sources that are known to include false teaching.** I find that all religions have at least some beliefs that are mostly true. Just because some things about a spiritual perspective are true does not make all of its teachings true. It is the beliefs that aren't true that show a spiritual perspective to be false, not its beliefs that are true. If a spiritual perspective promotes some things that are clearly false, then don't expect that perspective to lead you to ultimate truth.
- **Do not rely on people associated with false prophecies.** If a person or a religious group has made predictions about future events, did what was prophesied actually happen? This test is not practical with prophecies which still involve the future, since what has been predicted is not yet verifiable. However, this test can be effectively used to safely avoid many people and groups whose prophecies have clearly not come to pass.

Note, however, that a prophecy being accurate does not necessarily prove the validity of a prophet or religious group, since anyone could possibly be right with one or more lucky guesses. Logically speaking, it only takes one false prediction to prove a prophet to be false. But it takes many consistent accurate predictions to establish that a prophet is genuine.

Clearly, others have experienced God before us. Let's aim to learn from their experiences.

For Further Reflection:

- Who are some people from whom you could learn something about God?

Chapter 30

God Revealed through Scripture

In the previous chapter, we saw that we can learn about God through other people who have experienced God. In this chapter we explore a narrower slice of that same idea: Some people have experienced God so directly that what those people wrote is considered by many to be “scripture.”

While some religions are largely passed on orally (by word of mouth, not by writing) and by local tradition, this is not generally the case with religions that are widespread. Written text is usually a key factor in communicating religious beliefs broadly.

Calling written text “scripture” is simply elevating it above other writings, and often believing that it is divinely inspired somehow. Most religions have written texts which are considered foundational to their beliefs. Written texts enable religious beliefs to transcend time and place.

An obvious question arises: How do we determine whether or not a religious writing is true, and whether or not it should be viewed as “scripture”? The principles discussed in the previous chapter can easily be adapted:

- **Look for consistency from multiple sources or different authors.** Again, truth about God should not be dependent on a single person’s testimony.
- **Consider the credibility of the authors.** Do their lives give you reason to trust them? Is there reason to think they encountered God more deeply than other people?
- **Look for writings with spiritual truths that don’t change with time.**
- **Look for writings with spiritual truths that are in agreement with self-evident truth.**
- **Do not rely on religious writings that are known to**

include false teaching. Again, all religions have at least some beliefs that are mostly true. However, if a religious writing is truly divinely inspired, it should not include any teachings that are false.

- **Do not rely on writings associated with false prophecies.** The inclusion of false prophecies in a religious writing is an obvious indication that it should not be considered “scripture,” and that its author is not receiving inspiration from God.
- **Multiple fulfilled prophecies are evidence of divine inspiration.** However, it is sometimes difficult to truly know the validity of such claims, so use caution.

Of course, most religious groups are quick to claim that their “scriptures” are the only—or the best—source of truth. You should decide for yourself which, if any, religious writings you will accept as scripture, and not just accept the beliefs of those around you without serious consideration.

For myself, I have found the writings included in the Bible to satisfy the above criteria in a way that no other religious writings do. For me, the Bible is “scripture.”

Of course, since I consider the Bible to be scripture, I think it would be a good thing for you to also consider the Bible to be scripture. However, that is a decision you should make for yourself, based on your own observation and reasoning. If you would like an overview of the main teachings of the Bible, I recommend that you read the book “Foundations for Eternal Life,” by the same author as this book (a free eBook version may be available at www.ShalomKoinonia.org). Or, if you prefer, simply get a good translation of the Bible, and read it for yourself.

For Further Reflection:

- Which, if any, religious writings do you consider to be “scripture”? Why do you consider them to be scripture?

Chapter 31

God Revealed through Jesus?

We have seen that God greatly values relationships. I have concluded that God wants deep relationship with each of us. But how could God establish relationship with us when the gap between his greatness and our relative humility is so huge? Could God somehow reveal himself to us through a person we could relate to better?

If God did reveal himself to us more directly through a person, what would such a person be like? Would he (or she) come as an all-powerful king? If not, how do you suppose he would come? Would he descend out of heaven, or just magically appear, or would he come into the world more discretely? Would he be supportive of our human leaders, religious institutions, and political institutions? Might he have some harsh words for some people, or only kind words for all? What might he say to you?

It is probably no surprise to you that the writers of the New Testament (the newest part of the Bible) claim that such a person has indeed come to us; his name is Jesus. Did Jesus really come from a spiritual realm to reveal God to us? Or was Jesus merely human? Many people throughout history have claimed special divinity, but most were obviously deluded or were using such a claim to gain power. Jesus appears to be the only person in history whose life and teachings are actually consistent with such a claim. If such a claim is true, then it seems obvious that each of us should learn about Jesus and what he taught. But how can we determine whether such a claim is true?

If you are interested in pursuing truth about Jesus, consider doing the following:

- **Be a seeker of truth.** Don't just wait around for truth to come to you. Seek it out yourself. Embrace truth when you find it.

- **Spend time seeking the truth.** Talk with people who currently follow Jesus (and those who reject him, if you like). Read what his early followers wrote about him in the “New Testament” section of the Bible.
- **Ask God for help.** A previous chapter concluded that God wants relationship with us; so ask him to help you learn the truth about Jesus.

It seems to me that there are only five general conclusions that are possible regarding Jesus:

1. Jesus didn't really exist. All the historical writings about him don't have any basis in fact.
2. Jesus was a real person, perhaps a good person, but just a human being. Much of what was written about him by his followers isn't true.
3. Jesus was a real person, who purposely deceived people into thinking he was something more than he was. People who wrote about him were deceived.
4. Jesus and his followers were all deluded crazy-people.
5. Jesus really did come from a spiritual realm to reveal God to us.

For myself, I have concluded that only the last option is consistent with historical evidence and the self-evident truths I see in creation. I conclude that Jesus really did come from a spiritual realm to reveal God to us.

For Further Reflection:

- What are your beliefs about who Jesus is? What are your beliefs about Jesus based on?
- Read about the life of Jesus in the Bible, in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John.

Conclusion

Thank you for joining me in this journey of exploring self-evident truth. We began by asking the question: What is truth? Though we have not arrived at a definitive answer to that question, I hope you can agree with me that truth does exist, and that truth is important. Hopefully you have a little better understanding of the subject now than when you started this book.

If you agreed with some of my conclusions throughout this book, you may be interested in exploring what the Bible has to say about spiritual truth. If that is the case, I invite you to read a companion book called “Foundations for Eternal Life.” In that book I have attempted to summarize the main points of scripture in a concise way that is easy to understand, with lots of references to scripture to show where those truths come from. I have tried to avoid promoting beliefs that are not clearly in the Bible. A free eBook version (in several different file formats) may be available at either of the following websites:

www.ShalomKoinonia.org

[www.FOUNDATIONSFORETERNALLIFE.com](http://wwwFOUNDATIONSFORETERNALLIFE.com)

A hardcopy version may also be available wherever books are sold (by special order, if not normally stocked).

May God bless you as you seek to know Him and follow Him.

Soli Deo gloria.
