October 7, 2011

This Week at Adventist Today Online

Headline News & Book Review

La Sierra U. Faculty and Trustees Issue Statement on Teaching Creation

Faculty and trustees of La Sierra University have written a proposal that outlines a pathway to mutual understanding regarding the university's teaching of Creationism. The proactive proposal has garnered a positive response from the North American Division, and the exchange of communication could be the beginning of the end to more than a year of controversy on this issue. Read both communiqués here....

The Winter of Our Disconnect (Reviewed by Edwin A. Schwisow)

As the nation mourns the passing of Apple founder Steve Jobs, why is it that with the advent of so much electronic gadgetry during the past 30 years, student achievement remains low and reports of computer addiction grow more troubling? “The Winter of Our Disconnect” tells the story of a family that unplugged everything for six months so they could reconnect with their souls. An entertaining, information-packed discussion book....

Blogs, Columns & Previous

Millennials: Ready or Not, Here They Are - Lawrence Downing

Of Life, Love, Death and Hate (Crimes) - Stephen Foster
Blogger Lawrence Downing says that to understand the immediate future, we need to note the characteristics of the emerging generation, the Millennials (born between 1982 and 2003). He says the Millennials can be expected to disrupt existing organizations and institutions, but in a different way than the old Baby Boomers. Find out about the next wave.....

Blogger Stephen Foster says the wrongful execution of even one innocent individual is far worse than saving the lives of a number of guilty ones. He argues that the death penalty is meted out primarily to those who cannot afford expensive lawyers, and that it's time to get rid of a practice associated worldwide with cruel and Medieval ways....

**Clifford Goldstein: The Light and Fallen Humans** - Ervin Taylor

What is it about some "fallen human beings" that assigns higher esteem to their views than those of others? Ervin Taylor takes *Adventist Review* columnist Clifford Goldstein to task for suggesting that some minds are apparently less fallen than others.

**God Loves Gays (and so should we)** - Kendra Perry

Columnist Kendra Perry says we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, because of our inherited, imperfect tendencies. Gays and lesbians are no exceptions, and we should not penalize those who do not try to hide how they feel—even as we should not penalize the older person who because of inherited tendencies, must use a wheelchair because he is no longer able to walk.

**A Life that Matters** – Nathan Brown

**Doing Church as “The Way”** – Don Watson

**Scientists and Theologians Have Similar Problems** – Herb Douglas

**What Good is God?** – Book Review by Barbara Gohl
La Sierra Univ Faculty and Trustees Issue Statement on Teaching Creation

Submitted Oct 5, 2011
By AToday News Team

A group of biology professors and trustees at La Sierra University have issued a statement dealing with the teaching of creation. The North American Division has issued a response to this statement. Both statements are reproduced below.

The Adventist Review has also posted a story about the release of these two documents. This can be accessed at http://www.adventistreview.org/article.php?id=4769

Joint Proposal of individual La Sierra University Faculty and Trustees

The controversy over the teaching of origins at La Sierra University (LSU) has led us, through informal dialogue, to propose an approach-in-principle to resolving these issues. Notably, our dialogue has been consistent with the suggestions of members of the WASC visiting team (April 2011) that Faculty and Trustees talk directly and collegially with each other about these important matters in light of the unique faith-based mission of our University.

Our Joint Proposal is the result of our dialogues, which by deliberate design were conducted across a wide spectrum of views, with the conceptual input of various scholars and individuals. From these discussions, we as individual Faculty and Trustees have generated and here propose an approach-in-principle to the teaching of Creation at LSU, which maintains the Seventh-day Adventist faith of our University and the integrity of our science programs.

In our dialogue, we found a solution to be the teaching of Creation as a faith conviction, rather than as science. Creation is not a scientific construct. It is a faith construct. The conviction of Divine Creation lies beyond the purview of the methods of empirical science, and cannot be subjected to them. Nevertheless, faith and science can and should constructively interact.

This approach is based on two core principles:

I. Affirmation and incorporation of the Biblical concept of creation, including the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Genesis 1 and 2, as a faith position at the classroom level, when questions of origins are discussed.

II. Continued teaching and research in the various disciplines of the modern sciences according to the most up-to-date and rigorous standards of the published science, to which we contribute as practicing scientists and active faculty, including the data which highlight the strengths and weaknesses of various models.

In accordance with the principles of academic freedom, as appropriate to a faith-based institution, the incorporation of these core values into the curriculum is the responsibility of the faculty of the Department of Biology in their science classes, and of the University Studies faculty in interdisciplinary classes and seminars.
In addition, we suggest the following:

La Sierra University hosts a North American Division (NAD) Office of Education Summit of scientists, biblical scholars, and theologians, who are actively publishing in the peer-reviewed literature on issues relevant to origins within their respective academic disciplines of the earth sciences, the biological sciences, biblical studies, and the theology of creation — in order to freely discuss together the difficult issues. A NAD Summit would not replace the important role provided for Adventist educators at all levels by the biannual GRI Council (GRICO) meetings, which are so ably run by the Geoscience Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. We see the proposed NAD Summit meetings as fulfilling a different and complementary role to GRICO.

Promotion of an ongoing culture at La Sierra University of open and transparent dialogue on these important issues among Faculty, Trustees, and Administration on campus.

Continued dialogue with other thought-leaders and fellow Adventist educators beyond our University, and with members of AAA and the NAD, has been and will continue to be advantageous.

We believe that the ongoing comments and suggestions of our fellow individual colleagues, among Faculty, Trustees, and Administration, especially while the University takes steps regarding the recommendations from WASC and AAA, will be invaluable. This Joint Proposal is the result of us working together as individuals. As members of this faith-based, academic community which we love and serve, we do not presume to speak on behalf of our University, or the Board of Trustees.

Undersigned individual LSU Faculty:

James Wilson, Ph.D.  Lee F. Greer, Ph.D.  Lloyd Trueblood, Ph.D.
Professor; Chair  Assistant Professor  Assistant Professor
Cell Biology  Molecular Systematics, Genomics  Marine Biology

L. Lee Grismer, Ph.D.  Natasha Dean, Ph.D.  Eugene Joseph, Ph.D.
Professor  Assistant Professor  Associate Professor
Herpetology, Systematics  Microbiology  Bone Cell Biology

Undersigned individual LSU Trustees who support this Faculty-initiated Proposal:

Kathryn Proffit  Carla Lidner Baum  Marta Tooma  Alvaro Bolivar
Businesswoman  Dentist  Dentist  Surgeon
Former US Ambassador to Malta  Community Volunteer  Philanthropist

1 Our informal dialogues were indirectly initiated by the formal invitation of President Randal Wisbey to the Biology Faculty to make a presentation to and dialogue with the LSU Board in September of 2011.

2 Including the North American Division (NAD) Vice President for Education, Larry Blackmer, who is also a member of the Adventist Accrediting Association (AAA).
A Response to the Joint Proposal

The North American Division has received and reviewed the “Joint Proposal of Individual La Sierra University Faculty and Trustees.” The officers of the division are very supportive of the dialog that has taken place with the LSU biology faculty and several trustees and we would encourage a stronger commencement of discussion regarding the concepts contained in the Joint Proposal. We are in general agreement with your core principles:

I. Affirmation and incorporation of the Biblical concept of creation, including the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Genesis 1 and 2, as a faith position at the classroom level, when questions of origins are discussed.

II. Continued teaching and research in the various disciplines of the modern Biological sciences according to the most-up-to-date rigorous standards of the published science, to which we contribute as practicing scientists and active faculty, including the data which highlight the strengths and weaknesses of various models.

It is understood that in an academic setting modern science and faith-based creationism are both frameworks that need thorough exploration and definition to ensure that our conversations are based on mutual understanding of those terms and the implications surrounding them. Also, although the two frameworks are different, they are not individual silos in which we are able to work, without relating to the other framework.

It has always been the position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America that we want all of our institutions of higher learning to uphold the highest levels of academics including rigorous science, as defined in section II above. At the same time we support your affirmation of the Seventh-day Adventist position on creation, which is a literal six-day, short-term creation. While we understand the tensions that exist between these positions, the most important values that we hold together are the student’s faith and its expression as they leave our institutions.

The NAD is committed to hosting a summit of participating scientists, theologians, and biblical scholars in Adventist higher education to further the dialog and to clarify how to strengthen the faith maturity of our students while providing comprehensive science education. This summit should not be a time of debate over the wording of a position or statement, but should be held in a protected environment to openly discuss how to best move forward within the context of the natural tension between science and a faith-based creation position. We believe this is not only an issue at LSU, but is a broader issue that needs to be considered by the highest levels of the Adventist Church, involving all institutions in NAD.

We commend the individuals who have drafted and signed this important proposal. Open dialog and conversation is the only method to resolve controversy and to move forward as an organization. The proposal is a major step forward in that conversation and with prayer and continued diligence is the basis for more direct resolution of the
ongoing controversy surrounding LSU. Thank you for your willingness to open a channel of communication and to work together on behalf of all students in Adventist schools in NAD.

Michelle Stevens  2 weeks ago  Reply

Because I previously criticized AToday News Team for its reporting, it is only fair that I thank you for posting the actual statements here.

Thank you for your timely conveyance of this information.

M

Horace Butler  2 weeks ago  Reply

They have to include that "academic freedom" clause, don't they? I know I will be accused of stifling honest debate, but how far does the concept of academic freedom extend in an institution supposedly committed to the beliefs and teachings of the SDA Church (what we understand as "present truth")? Where is the fine line between academic freedom and heresy? I'm all for following the evidence where it leads, but an unpopular author, who is highly esteemed by some readers of these blogs, has stated profoundly that science and revelation are in perfect harmony. Therefore, if science appears to be out of harmony with revelation (such as death before sin, as is believed by some here), then the problem is not with revelation, but with scientific methodology and theory. But we've been down this road before, and the evolutionists among us will pounce on this. No matter. The lack of evidence for evolution, as it is commonly understood is so overwhelming, that only the bewitching power of the devil can account for the rush to embrace it by so many professed Christians.

Kevin Riley  2 weeks ago  Reply

I think we do not have the ability to judge that in every case where science and revelation disagree, it is because the science is wrong. We are capable of being wrong in our understanding of revelation. We have proven that often enough in the past not to have to be in doubt. Unless we accept that our pioneers and/or our contemporaries are willfully misunderstanding revelation, every change in our beliefs shows that we can be wrong. We need to seek to harmonise human knowledge of this world and human knowledge of revelation, rather than assuming our understanding of revelation is correct and seeking to harmonise our understanding of science, history, etc with that understanding.

I believe God did create the world, and I am not persuaded it wasn't in 6 days, but I am also willing to consider that we may be misunderstanding revelation on this matter. I used to believe, along with most other SDAs, that the whole universe was created in 6 days because the Bible says "In six days God created the heavens and the earth and everything which is in them", but I now accept, along with many SDAs, that the Bible can be read differently, and that science indicates that the universe is very old. I am comfortable with that. After all, why would a creator God sit around not creating until 6,000 years ago?

Horace Butler  2 weeks ago  Reply
I have no problem with the universe being centillions of years old. I have always believed that. The Bible primarily addresses the activities of God in relation to our little solar system, and the available evidence indicates that it cannot be more than 10,000 years old. So the 6000 year figure is reasonable and defensible.

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**Elaine Nelson**  
2 weeks ago  
 "The lack of evidence for evolution, as it is commonly understood is so overwhelming, that only the bewitching power of the devil can account for the rush to embrace it by so many professed Christians."

To castigate all your fellow Christians as being "bewitched by the devil" is a very unChristian attitude as well as a personal value statement. To condemn all those who are convinced that evolution currently offers the best explanation for the world we live in today, is to judge all those who do not agree with that position as being captivated by the devil. How can you worship side-by-side with someone who you believe is captivated by the devil?

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**Horace Butler**  
2 weeks ago  
 I should have qualified that statement by laying the blame where it should lie most heavily: church leaders. If they had not rushed to embrace these untenable theories, the people in the pews would not have been so easily duped. It is the leaders who have been bewitched, and my comments were directed to them. The average person has probably not studied it out for themselves, and are fare less culpable then pastors and administrators. Unfortunately, today, as in the time of Christ, the average person will accept the word of the pastor, rather than following the Berean example of studying to see if "these things are so." That attitude is well expressed in statement made by a woman in the Bible Belt many years ago. She told my brother that she didn't care what the Bible said, she was going to do what her church said. This attitude is found in all denominations.

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**Vernon P. Wagner**  
5 days ago  
 The moment a person becomes a 'believer' in what he/she accepts as 'truth,' all other viewpoints are 'of the devil.' This fact is a blight on every earthly religion, and gives the 'devil' too much credit.

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**Edwin A. Schwisow**  
2 weeks ago  
 Creation, Jesus' resurrection, a virgin conceiving, and water turning to blood or grape juice are not science, but singularities—events occurring perhaps only once, as the Bible explains, by the hand and word of God.

The discussion of singularities is not a natural province of scientists, and they should not be asked to express their views professionally on these matters in a classroom setting—nor should they argue AGAINST miracles and singularities. Miracles and science will ALWAYS appear to contradict one another, by definition. We must seek the wisdom to accept both as coexisting essentials of an informed Christian experience.
"The average person has probably not studied it out for themselves, and are fare (sic) less culpable than pastors and administrators."

Most pastors have little education in the sciences and are probably no better nor no less qualified than their parishioners to pontificate on such matters. The blind are leading the blind and rather than educating, they are pandering to the lowest common denominator. They should be studying on these subjects if they dare to preach and write on them--usually from ignorance. There is not one pastor in 100 who is qualified to speak on every subject, and especially in biological sciences.

Elaine take it easy, don’t came to had hard on them. The great majority of the people probably will sleep and snore if some body talks about molecular biology in any church. Probably next time the church will be empty.

When I’m doing clinical round with young doctors, as soon I start mentioning same basic concepts of biochemistry or molecular biology they are lost (I can see in their faces) and theses guys few years ago were taking these courses. Even in medical schools, few students will really enjoy these subjects. Now history shows that some theologians were great scientist too: Sir Isaac Newton, Mendel, J. Priestley, Planck among others.

This statement projects a huge disconnect. On the one hand we are to believe what the bible says about origins simply by faith but we are to accept what science says, as usually interpreted, as real truth. But which contradicts the faith statement. How are we to keep these two opposites in balance in our mind.? They seem to me totally contradictory. I can see the science teachers saying, "Here is the faith statement of the church. But here are the real facts." Who would want to believe a faith statement in that way?

Some see science as never static but as a constant search for more information and possible explanations. It never claims to have the final answers.

Can the same be said about religion, even Adventism? Is there a constant search or has it found the "truth"? In the church's self-description, it professes to have the "truth" and wishes to enlighten all those who are unaware of the church's truth.

Can anyone deny that all religion is based on faith? To dub science as "faith" is to confuse the meaning of faith. Does one have "faith" in medical science when he consults physicians for diagnoses and treatments? Everyone daily relies on science by their commitment to belief, but it is faith in actual evidence. Can religious faith also claim evidence for its propositions? Certainly the many doctrines of the Christian religion are impossible to examine: Six-day creation; the many miracles in the Bible including virgin birth and resurrection all require enormous amounts of faith to be accepted. Everyone who questions is suspect.
What is suggested for the science teachers: Give their honest appraisal as befitting their professional educational qualifications? Why is there a need for them to state anything about the church? They were hired to teach science and that is not part of their teaching. Science teachers should never be required to endorse any religion in their professional capacity. If they desire, privately they might speak of their personal faith, but the classroom is no place for such comments.

Horace Butler
2 weeks ago  Reply

I've never heard anyone state that science is based on faith. True science is based on observation, experimentation, and verification. What I have said is that it takes more faith to believe in evolution than it does to believe in creation. Evolution is based on speculation, supposition, and imagination. The proponents of evolution cannot observe, experiment, or verify, because the very tenets of their faith are false.

Elaine Nelson
2 weeks ago  Reply

And just like evolution, faith believers cannot observe, experiment, or verify what they profess to believe. Does that mean that their tenets are false?

Horace Butler
2 weeks ago  Reply

The evidence is on the side of Christianity. Faith is "the evidence of things not seen." Evolution is a fairy tale for grownups who wish there was no God.

Anonymous
2 weeks ago  Reply

Horace,

"Evolution is a fairy tale for grownups who wish there was no God."

You are wrong.

People who believe there is no God are called Atheists, NOT evolutionists.

Evolution does not deal with the question of God or beginnings, and one can believe in evolution and God. Only to a fundamentalist is this considered impossible.

Horace Butler
2 weeks ago  Reply

I didn't say they didn't believe in God; only that they wish or hope there is no God. But evolution and atheism (if there really are any true atheists/agnosticism go together. The whole edifice of evolution presupposes no God and their beginning is the so-called "Big Bang" which supposedly originated from an extremely dense particle of matter, whose origins remain unknown. Then it spontaneously exploded and ignored the laws of physics by producing order (everything from apples to zebras) out of chaos. Real scientific, that.
Gregory Matthews

I am a creationist who happens to hold beliefs in several aspects that are not supported by science. I read widely in science in an attempt to understand it. In seeking to understand this incompatibility I have concluded that: 1) As a matter of faith, I will accept as truth what the Bible teaches. 2) The problem may be that I am in error as to what the God has attempted to teach us in the Bible. 3) The foundational principles of science and Biblical teaching are such that it is likely that there will never be resolution. 4) As a result I seek to understand each, but I do not look for some some magic key that brings them together.

As I consider, in general terms, the statements that AT has published on this current issue I commend those who have written them. I consider them to be positive and a good beginning. However, I am concerned about one aspect that appears to be present to me. That aspect seems to me to commit to a specific understanding of what the Bible teaches rather than a commitment of what God has said in the Bible.

E.g. In a commitment to a short time 6,000 year creation it takes a position that is not open to a future conclusion that the Bible does not teach such. The same could be said for a 6-day creation of 24 hour days and a global flood. On a personal basis, I happen to believe in a 6-day creation and a global flood. But, my knowledge of science leads me to believe that neither is supported by science. I remain open to the idea that I may be wrong as to what the Bible teaches on these points.

As to a 6,000 year creation, I do not believe that the Bible teaches a time of creation of the earth. As to the Universe, itself, I consider the Bible to be silent other than to say that God created.

So, while I am a creationist who, I believe, has some understanding of science, does not expect to resolve the tensions that exist between the Bible and science and remains open to the idea that my understanding of what God has taught us in the Bible is likely imperfect and should be subject to revision as I gain a clearer understanding of what constitutes truth.

Ervin Taylor

Mr. Matthews gives evidence that he is an intellectually-honest creationist who "remains open to the idea that my understanding of what God has taught us in the Bible is likely imperfect and should be subject to revision as I gain a clearer understanding of what constitutes truth." Mr. Matthews position is in such great contrast to that expressed by Mr. Butler, Mr. Joy, and David who do the cause of Creationism no great help by their scientifically uninformed statements. I think that anyone who accepts the scientific evidence for long ages in the geological record and the evidence that living organisms have evolved over these long ages and takes the Bible seriously but not literally should affirm that same principle that Mr. Matthews advances.

Horace Butler

While science cannot prove a 6-day creation, the evidence for a worldwide flood is overwhelming. Fossil graveyards where thousands of fossils are all jumbled together, obviously deposited by water is one example. To become a fossil an organism must be buried rapidly, so there had to be many floods all over the world, or, as the Bible says, one global flood. It's interesting that scientists see evidence for a massive flood on Mars, but they are blind to it here on earth.
While the Bible doesn't specifically state that the earth was created 6000 years ago, when one pieces together the findings of archaeology, and compares it with the genealogical lists found in the Bible, there isn't much wiggle room beyond the 6000 year figure.

Science cannot prove that the days of creation were 24 hour days, either, but that is what the Bible clearly teaches, since the structure of the Hebrew in Gen. 1, does not allow for any other conclusion.

Horace I don’t believe in the theory of the evolution. But when you saying that the earth has 6000 years, are you referring to the created life in earth? Or even the existence of the planet?

Genesis 1:1 says “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

The beginning is more than 6000 years. In the beginning also was created the universe that means all the galaxies. Only GOD knows the exact meaning of beginning. How long ago were created the angels and Lucifer?. probably was more than just 6,000 years. I suppose they exited before Adman and Eve (is hard to imagine just for few days or hours before them).

I’m not a scholar in Hebrew but the word “heavens “means the following including the abode of God

a) visible heavens, sky
   1) as abode of the stars
   2) as the visible universe, the sky, atmosphere,

b) Heaven (as the abode of God).

It is possible that the planet itself was created long before God created the life on it. But science cannot prove that it was because it can only make calculations based on the present, and must make unwarranted assumptions about past conditions. This inevitably leads to erroneous conclusions. In spite of the love affair that many have with the radiometric dating methods, they are not as accurate as scientists would like us to believe. So I have no problem with the idea that the earth was created about 6000 years ago.

As for the angels and the rest of the universe, there's no way of knowing. Pick a number: centillion, googol, whatever. I think the truth would blow our minds.

Horace said:
[quote]While science cannot prove a 6-day creation, the evidence for a worldwide flood is overwhelming. Fossil graveyards where thousands of fossils are all jumbled together, obviously deposited by water is one example. To become a fossil an organism must be buried rapidly, so there had to be many floods all over the world, or, as the Bible says, one global flood. It's interesting that scientists see evidence for a massive flood on Mars, but they are blind to it here on earth.[/quote]

While I happen to believe in a global flood, I clearly disagree with your comment that there is overwhelming evidence for a global flood. The evidence is clearly there that there have been major floods on the earth. However, science does not tie all of those floods into one flood that occurred at one time and was global. For
one who posits a global flood, science raises questions for which I do not have an answer and I do not believe an answer currently exists.

Gailon Arthur Joy

“What is suggested for the science teachers: Give their honest appraisal as befitting their professional educational qualifications? Why is there a need for them to state anything about the church? They were hired to teach science and that is not part of their teaching. Science teachers should never be required to endorse any religion in their professional capacity. If they desire, privately they might speak of their personal faith, but the classroom is no place for such comments.”

And who dares declare such a heresy??? On what standard is your grossly erroneous assumption based? Only the closed and heretical mind can sustain this view and is just as validly challenged as the inverse, much to your chagrin.

Science is the perfect match for building confidence in the Biblical record. The one great thing about the Biblical written record is it’s very existence. And the SDA scientist should be able to teach this avidly. No such record exists to support your heretical thinking. And I will dare to suggest that there is NO ROOM for the teaching of heretical evolution in a Bible Based institute. That is the THEORY that should be ignored as the heresy it is!!!

And I will respectfully disagree with the pre-eminent Chaplain and declare with the prior authors that the world as we know it has irrefutable evidence of a world wide flood for the mind open to the clear and concise biblical record, further supported by the illumination of the Spirit of Prophecy.

We should have no fear of taking our stand on these critical issues and merge Faith with Science in support of the various entities, including the Genesis Project as it builds it’s case in support of the ONLY written record preserved for our edification.

I shall stand firmly with “Thus sayeth the Lord” and would implore any Seventh-day Adventist serving and collecting a salary of our institutions do the same for their benefit and the benefit of those entrusted with their development and care. AND SHARE YOUR FAITH!!!

Gailon Arthur Joy
AUReporter

Elaine Nelson

So the suggestion is for math and physics teachers to teach from the Bible as their textbook and source for the subjects for which they were hired? One does not need a PhD in the sciences to teach from the Bible. The four-month Bible teaching graduates of those SDA schools are equally qualified. Why spend all that time in advanced education if one needs only the Bible for all the answers.

Of course, if one doesn't care about having transcripts from a non-accredited school which will almost invariably not be accepted for any other university, why not attend the SDA Bible training institutes that are
much shorter and less expensive? Who needs degrees to teach? Qualifications such as those credentials pale in comparison to the Bible as textbook for all subjects. Viva anti-intellectualism!

Elaine Nelson

BTW, just from curiosity, what does "AU reporter" mean?

Floyd Petersen

Some years ago my wife and I were privileged to be part of a Geo-Science tour of Western Canada. Except for two of us who were trained in the sciences, the participants were all pastors and church administrators. The program was rigorous. Every night we had a two-hour class on what we had seen that day. Of course discussions of the age of the earth came up often. In these classes, the questions asked by the theologian types were revealing and sometimes amusing. "In general they were: "What is the answer"? "What are we to tell our congregation"? They were very uncomfortable living in a world where many questions didn't have an answer, where it is OK to say "I don't know". Welcome to the world of science where the more we learn, the less we realize, we know. Welcome to a world where we don't know very much, but it sure is fun trying to find the answers.

Elaine Nelson

Floyd, I think you've hit a nerve! Pastors are expected to have all the answers, and when they are out of their element it is a little frightening not have a Bible text or EGW quote that supplies an answer. Science usually baffles them. Sadly, all seminary students should be required to take some science courses as part of their training.

Gregory Matthews

Elaine asked:
[quote]BTW, just from curiosity, what does "AU reporter" mean?[/quote]

For a number of years Mr.Joy has reported news about the SDA Church that is not reported elsewhere. It is from that perspective the he uses the title: AU Reporter as in the early years he primarily reported news from the Atlantic Union area.

In recent times, he has been closely associated with reporting on events as he understands them that involve 3-ABN and people associated at some time with 3-ABN.

If you want to know more about that a search of the legal data bases involving his name, that of Three Angles Broadcasting and that of Bob Pickle would probably be instructive.

Currently, his name is on a petition for a Writ that is now before the United States Supreme Court. It has been filed as 11-312.
Trevor Hammond

The question is: "Why are evolution philosophy proponents so threatened by what is taught in the Biblical account of Creation?" After all, they say they have a theory which explains our origins and believe that it is true based on some assumptions in their theory. Yet they seek to use the courts to force these evolution theory convictions on the general public by indoctrinating those frequenting our educational institutions.

Elaine Nelson

You may not recall the Scopes trial in 1925 where the churches were going to court to maintain the teaching of Creationism in the schools. Was that not "indoctrinating" the educational systems?

Or, you might re-read the First Amendment where Congress "shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion..." Teaching Creation from the Bible (is there another source recommended?) is establishing a religious belief in the public, tax-supported schools. Not a good idea, and the courts have ruled repeatedly on this.

Ervin Taylor

Mr. Hammond asks a question which suggests that he is not very well informed concerning the U.S. Constitution and its first 10 amendments (we call it the Bill of Rights). In the first amendment, there is stated the principle of the separation of church and state. Evolution is a scientific theory like the germ theory of disease. Creationism is a religious-based belief and thus may not be taught as science. It can be taught in the humanities such as history, literature, and comparative religion. I hope this brief explanation will help Mr. Hammond.

Perhaps Mr. Hammond lives in a country where the separation of church and state does not exist. That is really a shame. It works usually very well in this country to keep religious-based ideology out of the public schools (well most of the time, except in some of our southern and some midwestern states, where there are large groups of voters who identify themselves as fundamentalists. In progressive states such as California, it works very well).

Trevor Hammond

Ok, then why allow the evolution 'belief system' to flourish either? Do courts determine what is religion or what is science? I think that evolution got passed off as empirical science by dodgy politicking and the resulting manipulation of the courts.

Horace Butler
Mr. Taylor has gotten to the heart of the matter. If we really believed in separation of church and state, we would not allow evolution to be taught as science in the government school systems, because it is just as much a religion as Christianity or Buddhism. It can hardly be defined as science since it cannot be proven. At least the Intelligent Design theory follows the evidence to a logical conclusion: there was a designer who produced all this complexity. By contrast the typical evolutionary "scientist" denies the evidence of his senses and holds to his dogma, no matter where the evidence points.

Elaine Nelson

That may be a private belief but convincing the government, both state and federal, that operates the public school system of that proposal has absolutely no traction. Try and sell it to the necessary officials!

David

“Evolution is a scientific theory like the germ theory of disease”
There is a big difference; the germ theory of disease can be proved any day, to the highest level of science. It can reproduce over and over. Evolution NO
Compare evolution to the germ theory is misleading. Nice intent but does not pass the test!

Elaine Nelson

Most physicians are convinced that the germ theory is not a theory; most scientists equally agree that evolution is not a theory. Those who continue to contend that evolution is not a theory have the burden to explain why it isn't with more than simply continuing to claim it is, or preferring creationism without justifying their reasons other than "we believe the Bible literally when it is read."

Physicians can explain the germ "theory" and the biological scientists can explain the theory of evolution--if the creationists are willing to listen.

Roscoe Fogg

David said "The germ theory of disease can be proved any day, to the highest level of science." NO. Those that are taken in by the militant microbiologists "scientists" are ignoring the clear word of God.

"However, if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you: ... The Lord will plague you with diseases until he has destroyed you from the land you are entering to possess. The Lord will strike you with wasting disease, with fever and inflammation ... which will plague you until you perish." Deut. 18: 15, 21-22.

Those that wish to attribute disease to so-called "germs" that can't even be seen, are just looking for an excuse to ignore God's command to obey.

Ervin Taylor
Mr. Fogg's logic is absolutely on track and first class. However, I'm sure that David will have some very "creative" way of working around it. As for Mr. Hammond, just reading his stuff is enough to convince the most confirmed YLC that perhaps evolution might be right after all.

Horace Butler

I guess I don't get the joke. Is Mr. Fogg being extremely facetious, or does he really believe that there are no microorganisms which cause disease? The Lord can and does plague people with diseases on occasion, but the fact that God may "plague" someone with a disease does not thereby disprove germ theory. And the fact that diseases are caused by microorganisms does not contradict the text cited above. Obeying God does not guarantee the absence of disease, as is evidenced by the experience of Job.

Trevor Hammond

RE Mrs. Nelson's comment: Physicians can explain the germ "theory" and the biological scientists can explain the theory of evolution—if the creationists are willing to listen.

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Creationists have 'listened' to a lot of this ATheistic/Theistic evolution hoo-hah for far too long. Preaching evolution is jus' talk: it's about time evolution 'believers' walk the talk and show some REAL evidence of it been given a rightful place in the empirical sciences. The geological column etc., as evidence, is jus' pie in the sci-fi stuff. There is definitely something 'fossil' about all of this evolution belief which to me have proven that the church state divide found in the 'First' may just be another 'talk' only but no walk. Maybe there is really no church state divide when one considers how evolution belief, which represents what atheists subscribe to, has been pronounced 'kosher' science by some lawyers. Ah, maybe we aren't reading the 'fine print' in the Bill of Rights and are missing words like fossil; billions of years ago; geological column; death before sin: INTELLIGENT MUTATION; lesser evolved species racism; or even perhaps of Dawkin's cabbage sci-fi theories. Athiests have encroached on the church and have been aided and abetted by the US courts who have allowed them on the TURF of La Sierra and WE'RE saying how 'bout no! Viva La Sierra viva!

♥T

Truth Seeker

Horace Butler
"The evidence is on the side of Christianity. Faith is "the evidence of things not seen." Evolution is a fairy tale for grownups who wish there was no God."
And those who prefer the fairy tale will, until converted, continue to believe a fairy tale. An excellent book by Ariel Roth - ORIGINS- I never see referred to by the pros or cons. Too bad as he is an excellent source of information.

Elaine Nelson

Science becomes old the day after a book is written.

Horace Butler
By contrast, Inspiration (Scripture) is timeless; it never becomes old, because it originated from the Source of all wisdom and truth.

Elaine Nelson 2 weeks ago Reply

Principles are timeless; everything written is not timeless. Should we still be looking for Messiah? Past history is only for reflection.

How much truth can be found in the 600 laws of Judaism recorded in the OT? Is everything God was reported to have said as relevant today as thousands of years ago? Does anyone accurately obey all the many Levitical rules, except the Orthodox Jew? When and where were they revoked?

"By speaking of a new covenant, he implies that the first one is already old. Now anything old only gets more antiquated until in the end it disappears" (Heb. 8:13).

David 2 weeks ago Reply

If “Mr. Fogg's logic is absolutely on track and first class” I wonder how could be the ones from “couch class”. Sometimes is just better to be silent, a least people will not noticed our “information”

Philip Law 5 days ago Reply

During our youth Sabbath School Class our junior high students, some from public schools, were able to give rather detailed accounts of human origin from pre-humans to *homo sapiens*. I was surely impressed that even at junior high levels our modern students are so well informed about human evolution. Since they learned the facts from their science teachers our students spoke without doubt that their teachers taught them the truth. I did ask them about the difference between chemistry or physics and evolution as science. They could not tell the difference. I gave a couple of examples how facts of physics or chemistry can be subjected to experimental tests anywhere in the world to confirm their validity. I was not able to tell our students about similar experimental demonstrations for the facts of evolution due to my ignorance on the subject. Neither were the students able to give me an example. Few high school teachers are professional scientists and they usually teach from scripts of their textbooks or teachers’ guides. Are the students receiving an incomplete education?

Horace Butler 5 days ago Reply

"Are the students receiving an incomplete education?" Of course they aren't, because that is how the government cookie cutter schools are designed. Anything that might bring into question the evolutionary hypothesis is banned, ignored, or discredited by clever obfuscation. Sounds more like communist era brainwashing to me. Students are not taught to think for themselves. Since they aren't given both sides of the story they can't make intelligent decisions. But this seems to be the case only in this one area of education. This shows the inherent dangers of sending our youth to the government schools. Homeschooling is becoming more attractive all the time.
Both sides? Doesn't this indicate only two sides? What about the origins of life from the Buddhists, the Daoists, the Mayans, the native Americans? Why limit to only two? If the best scientists have long accepted evolution and other "sides" are suggested, why only one one? Should there also be two positions on history? Geography? Why biology?

Come on, Elaine. The debate in this country is not over Buddhist or Mayan beliefs on origins. It is between the Biblical account and the atheist account. Science is about looking for answers. If potential answers are prohibited from the discussion, where is the objectivity that is supposed to characterize science?

BTW, I didn't realize that there were competing views on geography. Is there a dispute over the location of Australia or Antarctica? Please enlighten me.

Point made. Because Christianity is felt to be the "national religion" it's either evolution or the Bible account of Creation. To call all other explanation as "atheist" is to damn by words and consider that all scientists who are convinced of evolution (nearly 99%) as being atheists is a sad judgment, committing guilt by association. Why the automatic assumption that everyone who does not totally believe all the Bible accounts of creation are atheists? There are millions who are Christians and read and study the Bible who do not accept that every word in the Bible is straight from God's mouth and that the writers fully understood science, geography, physics and more. They were humans, just as we, and they were neither prescient or omniscient and wrote just as their contemporaries. Much earlier was the Babylonian creation story which is uncannily similar to the account in Genesis 1. Why is not the creation story in Gen. 2 of equal authority? It is very different but is almost completely overlooked as the account of creation also found in the Bible. Who decides which one is valid?

As for geography: if it is taught as the creation account is--dated many centuries B.C.--it would also be very different. How much credit do we give to Herodotus' accounts, or Ptolemy who never knew of the entire western hemisphere? Why believe the Bible accounts of creation as accurate and up-to-date and not geography and history which was believed at the same time? (BTW, the writers of geography even in the last century B.C. were totally unaware of either Australia or Antarctica.)

Evolution, in its purest form is naturalistic, and therefore atheistic. The attempt to marry creation and evolution into some form of theistic evolution is untenable. Hardcore evolutionary scientists understand this. The average high school biology teacher may not. Anyway, I wasn't picking on anyone who believes in the theory; only attempting to clear away the debris and get down to the heart of the matter.

As for geography; we don't live in the first century B.C. The maps of the globe are fairly complete. I don't think there is much room for disputation. This is observable, testable science; unlike the science of origins where so much is dependant on speculation and assumption.
Elaine Nelson

"We don't live in the first century."

Exactly, so why should we believe and accept today what people believed thousands of years ago? Should we believe the same Torah that had all sorts of treatments and prohibitions about the human body? Have we not evolved (pardon the pun) in our understanding of human biology since then?

Since "observable testable science" is believed, how much "observed testable science" is there for belief in the Genesis account of creation? Does it need no scientific validation, but geography does?

Any belief in the supernatural, by its very definition can never be tested, which is why it is a concept of faith. Is modern geography a concept dependent on faith? Is the 21st century understanding of human biology dependent on faith? Is microevolution dependent on faith? All these can be verified. Science is an on-going study, new concepts may be discovered; Creation as described in Genesis is not changeable or subject to scientific testing, and has never been verified, ergo, it is all of faith, and faith, whether Christian, Islam, or another should not be taught in public-funded classrooms. Private schools are free to teach these. In the U.S. we should never pay for religious teaching; biblical creation is based on religion, which is why no taxpayer should be asked to support any religion.

Horace Butler

I agree that taxpayers should not have to pay for religious instruction. But the problem in the science classroom is that any attempt to question the prevailing theory is perceived as an attempt to introduce religion into the discussion. So no dissent is allowed. Ben Stein's documentary (Expelled. No Intelligence Allowed) is enlightening in that respect. A case could be made that evolution itself is a religion, since much of it is based on faith in the unseen.

I don't need to prove Creation. The evidence against evolution is so overwhelming that it takes a much more faith to believe it than it does to believe the Biblical account of creation. The burden of proof is on the evolutionist. So far, their arguments are weak and contradictory, at best.

Maybe some of those health related instructions in the Torah weren't so far off. If the sanitary principles outlined in the OT had not been lost sight of, the diseases resulting from the lack of sanitation during the Dark Ages may not have been so devastating.

Elaine Nelson

If creationism is not religious, what is its origin? From where did it come? Should there be a number of theories of origins taught in the classroom? Or only the one described in the Bible? What other theories should be alternatives?

Granted, that some of the principles in the OT were relevant, but what about the uncleanness of women 14 days after the birth of a female with only 7 days following a male child? Or that the ritual for a house where leprosy
was found to offer a sacrifice for the "sin of the house"? Or for a man with leprosy, the blood of sacrifice put on the lobe of the right ear, the thumb of the right hand and the toe of the right foot of the man being purified?

How is it possible to choose principles with such a myriad of specific rules? Sanitary hygiene for the camp was an obsession with blood or body discharges all being unclean, thus the quarantine pattern.

Yes, for a very primitive, illiterate people, rules like that were necessary. But to bring them into the 21st century as still valid and useful, defies medical knowledge we have today. It was not lack of following those rules that caused the many diseases of the dark ages, because if all those descriptions had been followed, to suggest no epidemics would have occurred cannot be demonstrated. Germs were unknown then, and unknown in the Middle Ages, and only discovered by scientists (who did not rely on the Bible for all answers) but studied and discovered them. Had the Bible's rules been followed, we would still have the same useless remedies. Instead of denigrating science and its many discoveries, we should be extremely grateful. Most of us would not be alive today had we lived in the time of the Israelites when life expectancy was little more than 35 years.

Perhaps you will give us the proof of creation. There is far more accepted evidence for evolution than creation which only has the Bible story for evidence.

Nathan Schilt

In case anyone is interested in directing comments to the statement which is the subject of the news release, I'd love to know how the Adventist Left can now contend that science classrooms in SDA universities should be religion-free zones. Haven't Lee Greer and the biology faculty who signed on to this statement conceded that affirmation and incorporation of the SDA understanding of creation should be included in the science curriculum? Yes, it is true that it need not be taught as science, but only as a "faith position." Nevertheless, if this is what the biology department is agreeing to, it seems to me that this is huge news. How can WASC come down hard on the Board when key science faculty have agreed that religious tenets of Adventism should be a core value of the University which should be presented and affirmed in science classrooms?

Elaine Nelson

Contact WASC and state your concerns. Maybe you will get an audience. WASC has certain standards which must be met in order to qualify as a university. What about WASC standards are not clear? I would never consider paying tuition or time to attend a non-accredited school. Would you?

Nathan Schilt

Elaine - Aren't you oversimplifying the matter a bit? Isn't context important in looking at how WASC will apply its standards to the LSU tensions. Most standards are only clear in the abstract. Two primary interrelated issues seem to have been driving the WASC interrogations. One is Board structure; the other is faculty governance and autonomy.

As to Board structure, have WASC standards or Board structure changed recently? I don't think so. Since Board structure didn't seem to offend WASC standards in the past, why is the issue suddenly on WASC's radar screen, and why is LSU's Board being challenged for lack of independence from the Church when WASC apparently has no problems accrediting Mormon universities where the entire Board is made up
of the LDS Education Department?

As to faculty governance and autonomy, if the science faculty agrees that SDA beliefs about creation science do indeed belong in the science curriculum as core values, haven't they thereby surrendered a significant amount of the autonomy they were asking WASC to vindicate - surrendered it to an ecclesiastical, doctrinal agenda, no less?

It is my impression that you, Elaine, have long been beating the drum for science classrooms at LSU to be faith-free zones. Have I misunderstood you? You also seem to believe that WASC standards should and will be applied to vindicate your position. If the "joint proposal" does indeed represent the position of the science faculty, have they not agreed to "pollute" their science curriculum by giving space and respect to beliefs that are, to your way of thinking, on a par with alchemy and astrology? Would such a curriculum pass WASC scrutiny? Will the WASC standard enshrining faculty autonomy trump its standard of ensuring that the scientific integrity of the curriculum be protected.

As I see it, WASC appears to be more concerned about institutional conflict and mechanisms for resolving conflict than it is about curriculum content per se. These conflicts can't be simplistically addressed by looking at "clear" standards. It requires prioritization and weighting of standards, for which there is no cookie cutter. And if the conflict is resolved by the faculty agreeing to present and honor SDA faith positions in the science curriculum, will WASC cry foul? I doubt it.

Elaine Nelson

Nathan, as a layperson, I only know the situation at LSU as reported in the various news blogs. And I may not correctly understand the relationship between WASC and AAA, but it seems to me that the board chairman overstepped his authority when he dictated to the president of LSU as to how it should be handled. Is this part of the problem WASC has found?

You are entirely correct in the assumption that I believe that faith and science cannot be taught in the same courses; it is inappropriate to dilute either subject by mixing them, IMO. It's either one or the other: science should be taught by professional and qualified teachers in those subjects; religion and theology should be taught in the religion department and if their mission is to enhance the students' faith--that is their prerogative.

"WASC appears to be more concerned about institutional conflict and mechanisms for resolving conflict than it is about curriculum content per se."

Even if the faculty agreed to present and honor SDA faith position in the science curriculum, would that not be prostituting science to introduce certain faith positions? Whether WASC will agree, even with the faculty, that faith should be part of the sciences, is questionable. Time will tell.

It seems to me that faith is far more a very subjective view than one of an entire church. Does any church get to define faith? Why is not faith a very individual belief? What if one's faith does not accept a very specific YEC position, yet believes God was the creator? Is that faith to be questioned?
Nathan Schilt

No, I don't think it's prostituting science to point out evidence of what a faith tradition believes to be a transcendent force that has in the past transected a natural order which appears by certain reasoning processes to have been continuous, progressive, and random, over billions of years. In other words, the inferences which can and should be drawn from science are not necessarily within the exclusive domain of science. They belong to the less certain moral realms of reason and experience.

Prostituting science is what happened in Climategate. It is manipulating the data or falsifying the lab results in order to reach a desired conclusion. It is using science to prove matters which are beyond the purview of its methodologies.

Faith is indeed quite subjective and personal. That's why people who share a particular iteration of faith got together and get together to build schools, churches, and other institutions with a common vision. The evolution and preservation of faith tenets are often messy and incoherent. And yes, I believe the larger faith community does have the right to question whether the faith of its members has evolved or "progressed" beyond the bounds of what the faith community feels it has been called to.

Elaine Nelson

Is there a limit in what a teacher should teach? If it is in the realm of what some, but not all might believe, should it be taught? Is it asking a teacher to present something with which he might not accept simply that to do otherwise might destroy someone's previous perceptions? Isn't that what a university is supposed to do--stretch one's mind with new ideas rather than merely confirming the immature mind with which a student enters higher education? If he is not introduced into new concepts and new ideas, why waste time in a university?

No, I cannot accept that the belief in a flood had anything at all to do with the early vision of faith which prompted people to build schools and other institutions. Yes, a common vision, but at the time the church was begun, the common vision was of Jesus' soon coming and nowhere that I am aware, was there discussions of a flood nor an adopted position about it; in fact, is there such a statement in the 28 FBs? Is the flood story in the Bible the central position of Adventism or even its schools?

While the church's position on many things has been added, is it expected that teaching should remain in the boundaries of what the faith community believes? Would that be the same around the world? Who decides the advancement if it depends on the approval of everyone in that community? Should those with minimal education decide what universities or graduate students should be taught? Are they expected to understand at the same level?

It appears that a very small but vocal minority have gotten far more publicity than their numbers would indicate. They should not be considered the "larger faith community" merely by publicity, as the "silent majority" may be left voiceless in such situations. IOW, should the manner in which university subjects are taught be left to a church-wide vote?

Nathan Schilt

[URL: Adventist Today : La Sierra Univ Faculty and Trustees Issue Statement o... http://www.atoday.org/article.php?id=869&action=print]
I partially agree with you, Elaine. Belief in a literal six day creation and the Noachian flood was hardly a distinguishing feature for any Christian denomination at our Church's inception, so it wasn't exactly a remnancy issue. I don't think anyone "decides" where the boundaries are in a large institutional church. Beliefs and practices evolve in smaller faith communities within the institution. Sometimes, as you say, vocal minorities stand up and say halt, while other vocal minorities say full speed ahead. Both can be highly destructive and also serve a useful purpose in helping us to reflect on who we are and where we are going. We who identify with both and neither tend to project our own views as being the reasonable voice of moderation.

I don't think most Adventists want the laity or the clergy to be micromanaging classroom curriculum. But I would venture that what they do want is Godfearing teachers with a passion to inspire young people to a deeper faith and stronger commitment to Christ and His church through higher education. That's what I had when I went through Union College in the late 60's, and I don't think my intelligence or education suffered as a result of having professors whose faith and commitment to the Church was clear and strong, even in the midst of questions.

Having spoken with many students who have gone through LSU, including three of my own children, as well as students who have gone through non-SDA Christian universities in Southern California, including one of our children, I can say with sad confidence that, when it comes to nurturing faith and commitment to the body of Christ, LSU has much deeper and more pervasive issues to deal with than how life origins are presented in biology classes. There are battles for Christian identity and commitment that need to be waged on some of our college campuses. But if creation vs evolution, or 28 Fundamental Beliefs are the battlefields on which the future of Adventism is waged, the war for the hearts and minds of our youth is, IMHO, doomed no matter which side wins that battle.

Kevin Riley

I agree whole-heartedly with your conclusion. The rush of young people to join the battle over those subjects here and elsewhere indicates the high importance they give to those subjects. The silence of so many who are neither traditional SDAs nor progressive SDAs (which I still believe is the majority) might indicate it is not just the young who have that view. I personally do not want my faith defined solely or primarily by those issues.

Elaine Nelson

All those promoting, practically mandating that YEC needs to be incorporated in the 28FBs, should ask themselves:

"Is this the hill we are ready to die on"? If it is to be of do-or-die doctrines, there may be a greater fallout than the church is willing to suffer.

David

“The hill to die”, give me a brake, the church went for allot and still is growing more than any other protestant church. Any way you already give the church long time ago. Do you really care?
After the DES MESS some people left the church but still wanted to have a valid opinion in the sda circles.
Who would listen to them?

Elaine Nelson

You needn't listen to those of us who have left; there is sufficient numbers in the church today who have the same opinion, which you surely know.

Trevor Hammond

God's Truth will NEVER fail. His Church WILL be triumphant with or without dissenters. His Truth IS marching on ALL around the globe. Ex-Adventists and the DESS MESS self-inflicted casualties, in their disgruntled despondency, can only see doom and gloom, yet our Bible says (Jesus says): "Luke 21:28 But when these things begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads; because your redemption draweth nigh.

My dad taught me a two line poem some years ago:
Two prisoners looked out from the bars:
the one saw the mud, the other the stars.

La Sierra may lose some WASC accolades but have THEY STOOD UP AGAINST the evolution usurper which has stayed some eternal consequences in terms of the many young souls who may be lost to such Atheistic nonscience. How 'bout no to state bully legislation which supports a non-God belief system and imposes this on our Christian Institutions. Viva la Sierra viva!

♥T

David

The people I associated are more preoccupied sharing the good news than to be distracted by the theory of evolution. People with great needs are waiting for the good news and not for empty speculations of apes pre-apes aging apes etc.
At La Sierra, Biology Faculty Affirms Importance of Teaching About Creation in Curriculum
Statement welcomed by North American Division Leadership

BY MARK A. KELLNER, Adventist Review news editor

A statement by a group of biology professors and trustees at La Sierra University, a Seventh-day Adventist Church-owned school in Riverside, California to affirm and incorporate the church’s position on creation at the classroom instructional level alongside traditional scientific approaches has been welcomed by officers and educational administrators of the North American Division, the regional entity of the church which provides oversight and accreditation to church-operated institutions.

The joint statement, prepared and signed by six LSU biology professors and a group of trustees, offers hope of a peaceful resolution to tensions that have surrounded church and public media accounts of the curricular differences between the university’s teaching on origins and the doctrinal positions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

“We’re pleased to see the dialogue move to a new and constructive level,” says Larry Blackmer, vice-president for education for the North American Division. “When you’re trying to build a bridge, you pay special honor to those who help engineer the foundations and the architecture that will support future traffic, and we consider this development one that has considerable positive potential.”

In their statement, the faculty members and trustees said “two core principles” were behind their proposal:

First, “affirmation and incorporation of the Biblical concept of creation, including the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Genesis 1 and 2, as a faith position at the classroom level, when questions of origins are discussed.”

Second, a “continued teaching and research in the various disciplines of the modern sciences according to the most up-to-date and rigorous standards of the published science, to which we contribute as practicing scientists and active faculty, including the data which highlight the strengths and weaknesses of various models.”

The group further recommended that an Education Summit be conducted to which “scientists,
biblical scholars, and theologians, who are actively publishing in the peer-reviewed literature on
the earth sciences, the biological sciences, biblical studies, and the theology of creation” be
invited—“in order to freely discuss together the difficult issues.” The proposed Education Summit
and other opportunities for dialogue are to encourage the “promotion of an ongoing culture at La
Sierra University of open and transparent dialogue on these important issues among Faculty,
Trustees, and Administration on campus.”

North American Division leadership responded quickly and positively to the proposal from the
LSU faculty and trustees, issuing a statement saying it was in “general agreement” with the core
principles contained in the document, adding, “it has always been the position of the Seventh-day
Adventist Church in North America that we want all of our institutions of higher learning to
uphold the highest levels of academics including rigorous science . . . . At the same time we
support your affirmation of the Seventh-day Adventist position on creation, which is a literal
six-day, short-term creation. While we understand the tensions that exist between these positions,
the most important values that we hold together are the students’ faith and its expression as they
leave our institutions.”

The NAD statement said this “proposal is a major step forward in that conversation and with
prayer and continued diligence, is the basis for more direct resolution of the ongoing controversy
surrounding LSU.”

Ricardo Graham, La Sierra board of trustees chairman, said, “It is critical to note the scientists at
LSU have always been willing to dialogue relative to the resolution of the teaching of evolution
and creation in the biological sciences. When people of good will and good faith openly approach
a challenging situation such as this, God positions them for a hopeful resolution. While many
members around the world had been praying, God has been hearing. And while this is not a
conclusive position, we praise God for the direction in which He is leading.”

Dan Jackson, North American Division president, also supported the move: “In moments of
challenge and crisis, the Spirit of God inevitably moves on the minds of individuals to frame
creative and peaceable solutions,” he said. “This is a helpful and much-needed start of a
conversation at the level where it can do the most good in affecting what actually impacts the lives
and faith commitments of hundreds of Adventist university students—and we consider that to be a
good thing.”

Read the full texts of the both the LSU biology faculty/trustee statement and the response by the
North American Division leadership.
As I write this review of the book, *The Winter of Our Disconnect*, by Susan Maushart, Ph.D., Apple Computers founder Steve Jobs is being eulogized around the world for his revolutionary effect on our communication culture. His influence was so profound and rapid; we're still asking ourselves if it's ultimately all for the good.

The apparent addictiveness of electronic devices, videogames, smart phones, and their attendant software is of concern, and despite the supposed educative properties of these machines, achievement levels in American schools continue to sag.

Adventists, who trace their lineage back to hardy New Englanders who decried any influence that reduced a person's ability to exercise free choice and independence, are showing greater and greater concern. Several young relatives in my own Adventist family have chosen to eliminate televisions and Internet access from their homes, believing these distractions detract from their devotional lives and communication with their spouses and children. They've eliminated these devices, not because they don't want them, but because they fear they want them too much!

This nonfiction book *The Winter of Our Disconnect*, first published last year in Australia and appearing for the first time in America in 2011 is a Penguin (quality softbound) edition, written by media ecologist Susan Maushart, Ph.D., a single mother of three teenagers, who sounds (in writing) like Erma Bombeck’s Australian cousin.

Concerned that she and her children were becoming seriously addicted and, in fact, dominated by the machines in their lives, the author tells the story of their decision to go six months without television, computers, Internet, or cell phones. She writes they all felt ‘info-obese’ and needed to lose some electronic weight.

The book is quirky and too long for what it covers, but that's part of the fun of reading it, and indeed it has received rave reviews on Amazon.com. (the first 100 pages are its strongest). As an education in the strange nomenclature and idiom of electronic addicts, the book offers an entertaining and effortlessly in-depth experience in laugh-line augmentation. The author’s Australian background may add challenge to her prose, but it adds flavor to the tone of the family’s odyssey.

Adventism, in fact, has had a peculiarly challenging time contending with electronic media competition, especially at the children’s Sabbath school level, where much of the unruliness of younger children has been blamed on television.

The family in the book learns profound lessons about the real advantages of electronic media (computers help save a LOT of time on homework) and that some electronic gizmos require far more
extra time than they ever save.

The book contains a great deal of factual information, such as, “Today, some 93 percent of teenagers are online and 75 percent use cell phones, according to 2010 figures from the Pew Internet & American Life Project.” In this reviewer’s opinion, the first 100 pages or so of this 278-page book would make excellent and entertaining grist for a Christian study group on controlling electronic media in the home and office.

Elaine Nelson  2 weeks ago  Reply

TV, like movies and other modern inventions offers both good and bad influences. It also forces individual discriminating choices that may have not been exercised when all movies were "out-of bounds" for Adventism. Individuals gradually began seeing movies in their homes and changed the equation. No longer is it sufficient to refuse all modern technological inventions, but one must make good judgments on their use.

The TV is invaluable to keep up with current events; and especially for Adventists whose main message is about "last-day-events." There are excellent educational programs that inform. The computer is like having a complete encyclopedia at a touch of keys. If parents wish to monitor and limit TV usage, it has been done. When my children were small they had one hour of approved viewing and only after their homework was done. Today, none of them as adults are "addicted to TV" but enjoy reading and other activities. Today, college students rarely read a book. The instant communication via cell phones has eroded good English and is used excessively; but then young people are known for their "excessiveness" in many things.

Funny, how Adventists condemn the media from where they are active!

Edwin A. Schwisow  2 weeks ago  Reply

Adventism has traditionally been a very performance-driven culture, emphasizing less "who" we are and focusing more on "what we accomplish." We are a product of 19th-century America's entrepreneurial emphasis, and this is by no means an entirely negative thing. Without that drive, we would not be a worldwide church today. Without the drive for self-improvement, we would not be a church of highly educated adults. There would be no Adventist Today. We are driven! But that very drive can predispose us to compulsiveness and addiction, to wearing ourselves down to a level where we are highly disposed to use of medicinal or electronic pick-me-ups. I was fascinated by this book, written by a non-Christian who recognized that the pursuit of connectedness and productivity can sometimes degenerate into an overblown dependence on the channels and productivity-enhancing substances themselves.
Millennials: Ready or Not, Here They Are!!!

Millennials: Those born between 1982 and 2003
Number of: 95 million plus
Methods: Networking
Effect: Disrupt existing orgs and institutions

The book, *Millennial Momentum how a new Generation is Remaking America*, by Morley Wineograd and Michael D. Hais (Rutgers University Press, 2011) serves as an informative guide to organizations and individuals that wish to better understand and navigate the ever-changing American cultural landscape. The Seventh-day Adventist church, its members, pastors and administrators might learn from the authors’ research and findings.

In the first chapter, the authors compare two speeches by two United States presidents, Lyndon Johnson and Barack Obama. Each was delivered to an audience that gathered in the University of Michigan football stadium. President Johnson gave his speech in May, 1964. President Obama was the graduation speaker 46 years later. Both presidents challenged their hearers to be part of rebuilding a new America and urged them to participate in revitalizing our country. The hearers were implored by each president to restore a sense of community and restore American’s values.

When President Johnson spoke, he addressed the last of the GI Generation, who in 1964 were at the height of their generation’s political influence. These people lived at the end of the Great Depression. They had witnessed the threat of fascism. The president couched his remarks in military language, vocabulary his audience well understood. He asked whether his audience was willing to join him to create the Great Society; to join him in the battle to enable every citizen to escape debilitating poverty; to join the battle to enable all people to experience an enduring peace so that all will experience a richer life of mind and spirit.

The authors observe that President Johnson’s audience did not rise to the challenge. The Baby Boom Generation arrived on campuses the next semester, not to climb on the president’s band wagon, but to join the parade to protest the president’s war in Vietnam and the beliefs of the GI generation. The debate over abortion and other civil rights would divide the nation for the next forty years.

President Obama’s speech, in contrast, was delivered at the beginning of a new era of economic upheaval and political debate. He, as the president elected through the efforts of the Millennials reflected the attitudes and beliefs of this new generation whose numbers were greater even than the Boomers. He assured his hearers that government would help Americans respond to change. He identified what he termed “two strands of DNA.” One segment of society believes in a limited government; another affirms that government, though limited in its power, can help us respond to change. He said there are some things that can be done only when we work together, and government must keep pace with the times.
In addition to calling for togetherness of purpose, the president called for people to engage in discourse that did not question the motivation or patriotism of those on either side of the debate. This, he said, is what makes us Americans. We can, at the end of the day, look past all our differences; all our disagreements and still create a common future.

For his third point, the president called people to engage in public life. He invited them to take up the call of President John Kennedy who announced the creation of the Peace Corps on the very campus where President Obama addressed the students. In this call, President Obama stuck the resonating chord: the members of the graduating class, the millennials, wanted to serve. They wanted to be engaged and they expected to make a difference.

Prior to the president’s speech, Alex Marston, a member of the senior class, addressed his classmates. He pointed out that while they want change, they are afraid of it. He noted that he and his classmates grow uneasy as the world around changes. This statement provides opportunity for the book’s authors to ask a defining question: “was the country ready to embrace the changes the president advocated or would it continue to adhere to the beliefs and practices of its past?” This is the point where the challenge of the millennials intersects with the life and practices of the Seventh-day Adventist church, or any other organization. How will we respond when millennials interact with Adventism?

Wineograd and Hais, in their study of the millennials, inform us that this, the largest of any other previous American generation, will influence every aspect of society: how we learn, vote, entertain ourselves and how we worship. Millennials value community. As a diverse group, they are unified in beliefs that will change America and all its institutions. They are oriented toward one another, as evidenced by YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Yammer, Linkedln, and numerous other social networks.

In the workplace, millennials open up corporate life. They consult with their friends from other companies. They are not driven by individual values, although they have values. They are highly pragmatic. They solve personal and societal problems by working at the local level. Their methods are to bring change from the bottom up. They do not respect a top down management style. The millennials will manifest the same disruption in American society that we saw in the Arab spring and in the music industry. They will shake up every institution that thinks things can be controlled or directed from those at the top. It is not that they reject government. No, they look to government and other institutions to provide guidance and assist to implement policy.

Wineograd and Hais are emphatic: Millennials cannot be ignored! If America is to have a clear sense of where it is headed in the future it is essential to have a clear understanding of the behaviors and attitudes that drives this generation. Is it any less important for the Adventist church and its leaders on every level to be less concerned? Less aware? And if we continue on our present course what then?

If Wineograd and Hais are correct in their conclusions, the Adventist church is in for a major institutional shock as millennials mature and make their presence known in the local parish. We have not prepared our congregations to incorporate the thinking that millennials hold. Our hierarchical management style is incompatible with how millennials think and function. How our local congregations (remember — millennials work from the bottom up!) respond to the opportunities that the millennials provide may well determine whether we thrive as a Christian organization or whether we become the equivalent of the Shakers or Christian Scientists, as one more obsolete or irrelevant
organization on the religious bone pile.

William Noel 3 weeks ago Reply

Major institutional shock? Maybe not. If we keep driving millennials out of the church at the same rate we have been in recent years, by the time they take control there may not be much church left for them to take over. The Shakers, Quakers and other religious movements faded quickly into insignificance and oblivion because they became spiritually irrelevant to their youth. This should be an alarm call to finding ways the church can become attractive to them, a requirement many congregations will not be able to achieve.

Elaine Nelson 3 weeks ago Reply

The current "Occupy Wall Street" message that is being duplicated all across this nation is representative of the young and willing, but largely unemployed and untapped potential for changes that will be made in the coming years. Refusing to listen to their needs and concerns could mean the death of the institutions that will not listen; top-down management is dead in the water; corruption in the highest echelons of government, business and even the church does not go unnoticed. They are demanding a voice in the boardroom and a place at the table.

Ella M. 2 weeks ago Reply

Elaine,
But those in the baby boomer generations (myself included) thought they would change the world too and held protests. But most of them ended up being more materialistic than the "greatest generation" before them who went through the war. The BB spoiled their kids and gave them everything (generalizing here) and that has influenced the current generations in society. I don't think it is BB so much in the church that has held on to traditions but those before them who write a lot of letters. But on the other hand, SDAs are always behind the general society, so maybe they, too, were out of touch.

Horace Butler 3 weeks ago Reply

I'm not convinced that pigeonholing groups according to when they were born (Baby Boomers, Gen Xer's, etc.) is all that helpful. "People is people and folks is folks." Teenagers are teenagers, and always have been. Some get into trouble and some don't. Those who grew up in different eras have had different experiences, but they've all had to learn to cope with the challenges of that era. Human nature remains the same. Some fit the descriptions attached to their "group," and some don't. Reading the Bible and the stories of the various characters, most of us can see ourselves somewhere in there, whether it be the boastful Peter, the Pharisaical Saul, or the scheming Judas.

Are we really "driving millennials out of the church," or is it that we have failed to properly ground them in the truth? I suspect the latter. The generation previous to mine was good at spelling out
the rules, but not so good at articulating the principles underlying those rules. I studied them out on my own, as we all should be doing, anyway. My kids are in this group of so-called millenials. They haven't been driven out; they participate and have relevant contributions. Adult hypocrisy and parental abdication of responsibility in training children to discern truth from error might be a bigger factor than irrelevance. The true gospel commends itself to those who are searching for truth. It doesn't need bells and whistles to make it attractive. The attempts to make it user friendly have not impressed my "millenial" kids. They abandoned the youth tent at campmeeting a number of years ago because it seemed more like a rock concert than a religious service. Young people in every era want honesty, integrity, and a relevant message. If they want entertainment they can get that anywhere, but expect something better at church.

William Noel
3 weeks ago

Horace,

Good observations, but I view their combination and impacts very differently. The Adventist Church in general has a big problem with confusing tradition and rules for gospel truth. Where this is the predominant view the youth are leaving in droves with some estimates being in the area of 50% and higher. I am aware of a number of churches that used to have a considerable number of youth, but today the youngest member is retired.

I agree with you that those who understand the Gospel are less likely to leave the church. But where the church is dominated by those more devoted to tradition and rules than truth it can be very difficult for real belief to survive. I have lost count of those who were believers but whose faith could not live in such a church. I doubt I would be in the church today without the opportunity to be part of establishing a new congregation of true believers.

Horace Butler
3 weeks ago

I think that "those more devoted to tradition and rules than the truth" is a good description of a large number of church members, and they will not be able to teach their children the basics of the gospel. And it is kids without a firm foundation who are most likely to drift away. This not too different from how things were in the time of Christ. Only we are more at fault because of our easy access to the Scriptures, something the average Jew of 30 AD didn't have. And since parents have failed so miserably in this area of spiritual education, we need church leaders who can take up the slack, at least as far as possible. There's a limit to what they can do, of course.

William Noel
3 weeks ago

Horace,

You are absolutely correct about our need to both have a personal relationship with God and to teach our children to have such a connection. Even so, I am hesitant to accuse the parents of millennials with failure to do this because many of those parents were raised in churches and families where devotion to doctrine and tradition substituted for a connection with God. So the
problem has been growing for generations.

Elaine Nelson 3 weeks ago Reply

How does one, even a parent, teach their children to have a relationship? It's like telling them they must be a friend to the neighbor boy or girl, regardless of their personal feeling. One may love someone they have never seen, only what they've been told, but better that children not read too much of the Bible as they will find a God that orders killing and worse. Carefully select what they read even in the Bible. But, sooner or later they may discover what was left out. First, there must be trust and how can that be built with a figure only known on paper, the Bible pages?

Most children were taught about Adventism via the home, school and church. Realizing they were far from uniform, it is no wonder that more children leave the church when they become adults. They must find their own way, and no amount of urging changes their impressions learned early in life: behavior was the representation of Adventism.

Floyd Petersen 2 weeks ago Reply

Change is frightening to people. After serving on a city council for 20 years - 10 of them as mayor, the most important thing I lerned is that people fear change the most. Change is the unknown. Fear that we are not in control. We get comfortable with things as they are. Change requires energy. We would rather "suffer ills while ills are sufferable" than face the unknowns. Yet - a survey asked the question of a sample of seniors "If you could do one thing over - what would it be? the most frequent answer was "take more risk".

Gailon Arthur Joy 2 weeks ago Reply

“Our hierarchical management style is incompatible with how millennials think and function. How our local congregations (remember — millennials work from the bottom up!) respond to the opportunities that the millennials provide may well determine whether we thrive as a Christian organization or whether we become the equivalent of the Shakers or Christian Scientists, as one more obsolete or irrelevant organization on the religious bone pile.”

Our Hierarchal Management Style has never been compatible with the needs of a church endowed with the Three Angels Messages and will eventually not stand in the way as the foundation for the Loud Cry message so essential for a dying world.

A Heirarchy is specifically designed to maintain the status quo and to funnel the resources of the church through the hierarchal channels so frequently defined as “the regular channels”.

The irony is that as the hierarchal order solidified at the turn of the other century, the counsel spoke against it and repeatedly found ways around it to get the work done…and it continues to be the way so many projects are initiated and implemented, That will become the very future of
Adventism as we transition from Laodicea to the Remnant. And Millenials are uniquely educated and armed with technology to move this concept forward, but must first find it’s “First Love” commitment.

Rest assured, it will come, with or without the Millenials and will be transgenerational. And rest assured that Adventism will not become obsolete nor irrelevant from now through to the end of the Biblical Millenium and the beginning of eternity safe from the blight of sin. Believe it, live it and share it.

Gailon Arthur Joy
AReporter

Gailon Arthur Joy
2 weeks ago Reply

The current "Occupy Wall Street" message that is being duplicated all across this nation is representative of the young and willing, but largely unemployed and untapped potential for changes that will be made in the coming years. Refusing to listen to their needs and concerns could mean the death of the institutions that will not listen; top-down management is dead in the water; corruption in the highest echelons of government, business and even the church does not go unnoticed. They are demanding a voice in the boardroom and a place at the table.

Having just recently visited with and spoken with several dozen “Occupy Wall Street” spokespersons at their encampments, the one thing that is clear is they have no clear message and have as many issues as there are people.

There does seem to be one very definitely rare element missing in this group of purported reformers and that is they have no real singular purpose and are close to anarchistic in many ways.

Some are best described as “libertarians” with no intention to conform with social norms or accountability in any respect; Others have a varied but clearly “entitled” socialistic agendas that does seek to require the transfer of wealth from the haves to the have-nots, of which they feel they are a part of; There are others that I met best described as “independently wealthy” who sparingly share their resources with this movement but unspARINGLY share their left of center views, usually in a leadership role and most certainly as a speaker role; There are a few with a clear and concise message that sincerely wants the government to hold the real “wall street robber barrons” accountable for their sins against American society during the making of the mortgage crisis turned worldwide financial crisis; And a growing number are simply utilizing the growing crowd as a foundation for their own agendas, such as unions and non-profit organizations; But, the majority are just there for the big party and complain against anything that crosses their mind just to justify their presence and document that they “were there” much as so many memorialize “Woodstock” as an important moment in their past lives.

What is clear is that none seem to have real answers and do not appear to be grounded in any form of Christianity. In fact, each camp seems to have consistently a “medical services tent”, a “legal
services tent” and a “meditation tent” with heavy emphasis on a variety of eastern meditation and native American meditation seeded with the fairly indiscriminate use of marijuana as the sedative of choice. Alcohol does not seem to be in vogue but is present in various forms usually disguised as water bottles or flasks.

As with any movement there is a mixture of the sincere and the profligates but there seems to be a unanimous disgust with traditional American Institutions, especially financial and governmental.

One thing is clear: there demands are not taken seriously and before this un-organized mass of humanity is given a “voice in the boardroom and a place at the table” the institutions they abhor will crush this rebellion to sustain the “status quo”. Count on it, just as assuredly as the Vietnam War movement and the "hippies” that became its mantra were obfuscated and largely ignored.

And this is not the natural extension of the Islamic “Arab Spring” as it is clearly is not rooted in any religious purpose nor does it have a clear moral compass. Nor is it the “moral equivalent” of the Taxed Enough Already quasi organized movement a/k/a Tea Party. The tea partiers work and find solutions but the “Occupy” crowd preferably does neither!!! They view themselves as social reformers by profession.

Does it raise the social conscience and move us toward accountability and lay a foundation for the false reformation that seeks a moral solution, laying the foundations for the rise of the Remnant and the Loud Cry? One really never knows how events play out, but this crowd will definitely not get a “voice in the boardroom and a place at the table”. Believe me, these victims of various issues “need not apply”, but will be exploited by some then isolated and ignored!!!

They will be crushed and left to find their own way in life, frustrated and insatiable but many will likely find their way into a message of hope that we very definitely should share with them. I believe they will find Heaven a much better place than Shangri La!!!

Gailon Arthur Joy
AURreporter

Ella M. 2 weeks ago Reply

Interesting report. Are you an AU student or employee? How did you get your information?

Ella M. 2 weeks ago Reply

Response to original post: I am not so sure that the M generation stands out in wanting to make a difference. Most of those on this post probably dislike the top-down authoritarian style where a few people make decisions for the church.

Recent generations can attest that youth were even more ignored than they are now; and, of course, women were part of the wallpaper. Any suggestions by both groups were ignored until we just stopped trying. Maybe more of us stayed in the church than now but became inactive. I attended my senior year at an SDA school after being baptized. At a recent reunion not many
came, and I suspect that perhaps half the class or more no longer attended church. It was the same with college as we heard the reports of others. This drop-out is nothing new, it's just that the church didn't seem to care so much in the past.
From his bully pulpit in the *Adventist Review*, my good friend Cliff Goldstein has again waxed philosophical in an article entitled, “The Room and the Light.”

Cliff says he visited the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington DC which stimulated him to recall the distinction the late 18th Century Enlightenment German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, made between *phenomenon* (the world as it appears to us) and the *noumenon* (the world as it actually is).

Cliff then proceeds to do a quick analysis of, and commentary on, the implications of the distinction between these two concepts. To quote Cliff, “the exhibit at the Hirshhorn showed how much of what’s out there comes to us interpreted by our mind, a fact that leads to the conundrum of trying to cross the divide between reality as it is filtered, distilled, modified, and maybe even polluted by our minds, and reality as it truly is, apart from our minds — what Kant call the Ding an Sich, the thing-in-itself (a concept that I’ve come to doubt is even feasible).”

At that point, Cliff introduces a favorite concept of Adventist conservatives and fundamentalists; ‘fallen humans.’ To quote Cliff: “As fallen humans seeking to understand reality, we have three strikes against us getting it right: 1) the limits that our minds place on how the world appears to us, 2) the subjectivity of how we interpret what does appear, and 3) the tiny slice of reality ever within our view” He earlier suggested, “Because we’re so limited in what we perceive, it’s silly to make grand assumptions about all that we don’t which is mostly everything, based on the little that we do.”

What is Cliff’s solution to this fundamental problem? We must, “live by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor 5:7), because sight is not only subjective, limited, and contingent — it’s temporal as well.”

What always amazes me about this approach is that those who use it never seem to apply the implications of the category of ‘fallen humans’ to themselves. I assume the reason for this is that unlike other ‘fallen humans,’ they (the ‘nonfallen humans’ or ‘exempted fallen humans’?) have acquired some special source of over-information and over-understanding not available to the rest of us ordinary fallen humans, which exempts them from the consequences of being fallen. They have what they call ‘special revelation’ that allows them to by-pass the limitations of the rest of us. What this point of view seems to ignore is they also are ‘fallen humans’ and their purported understanding of how the purported ‘special revelation’ works is also subjective and highly limited. Cliff says it’s, “silly to make grand assumptions,” and then proceeds to do that very thing in most of his writings which, among other things, sometimes turn into jihads against current mainstream science.

Next time I talk to Cliff, I think that I will suggest he should go back to major research university and get a Ph D., degree in philosophy. He would have no problem in such a program since he is a smart man. In a good graduate program, he might just learn something that will help him realize what the differences between his current theological *phenomenon* (classical Adventist theology) and a larger theological *noumenon* (theology informed by the real world). As a concluding aside, Cliff is always identified as the ‘Editor of the Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide.’ I’ve always thought
that truth in advertising would suggest that his title should be ‘Editor of the Institutionally-Sanctioned Official Adventist Theology Sabbath School Bible Study Guide.’

Ella M. 3 weeks ago

I am quite in agreement with what Cliff states about the subjectivity of fallen human beings—all of them. I really don't see that he has made any exception for himself (did I miss something??) And I don't see any admitting of the writer's own "falleness" or subjectivity. So it is sort of Irv's word against his. What he seems to be saying is that he has chosen faith. He hasn't claimed any "special revelation."

I would suggest that if one wants to discuss "special revelation," certainly atheistic science claims to have its own "special revelation" far and above what they think any believer has. To use the writer's own words it "allows them to by-pass the limitations of the rest of us." May I suggest Irv go back to school at some seminary and and get a Th.D. to help him understand and perhaps be more sympathetic to the other side and enjoy a larger view of contemporary Adventist teaching. I would suggest Andrews University. But he may want to be more ecumenical and chose Liberty College instead. I also understand that Amazing Facts offers some sort of degree or certificate as well.

Ervin Taylor 3 weeks ago

I didn't realize that Ella M. had such an excellent sense of humor. What an interesting experience that would be: first Andrews, then Liberty College, and then Amazing Facts. Down, down, the rabbit hole.

Kevin Seidel 3 weeks ago

The problem of perception goes even deeper than Cliff realized. I'm interested in what living by faith means, especially when the perception flaws are in the mind. Wouldn't that affect our understanding of faith? How do we deal with a flawed faith?

Joe Erwin 3 weeks ago

I must confess that "fallen" humans, and the concept of "sin" no longer make any sense to me. My wife says I am an atheist, but I am not so sure. I certainly am not an "evangelical" atheist, in the sense that I feel called to convert all the people of the earth to my view. I just don't find myself able to honestly believe that God is as described by most believers. Of course, some people do harmful and inconsiderate things to others. They shouldn't. Treating others as you wish to be treated, in fact, giving all animate and inanimate beings due consideration seems to me to be an adequate ethic. I cannot believe that I entered my time on earth as a guilty party headed for eternal damnation and fiery hell and reliant on a confession of faith in something pretty incredible to avoid eternal
torment and reap the joys of paradise. All I can advise is that people who are able to believe in something like the SDA message just believe it and celebrate the joy of faith and what they regard as salvation. Science as a method of gaining knowledge and understanding can be applied by anyone to any problem. But things that are "spiritual" or in some other imaginary non-physical dimension cannot really be addressed by anything other than suspending one's rationality. So, just do that, if that is what works for you. But if you commit to science as a method, you have to recognize that observations, and measurements, and research designs are often flawed in some sense. Only with much research and many repetitions do general principles survive. Interpretations based on physical realities (fossils, morphology, genomic sequences, etc.) must change in the light of other evidence. Evidence builds. Approximations of truth emerge. Understanding is refined. It seems to me that attempts to live up to some etherial spiritual standard just leaves one frustrated and confused. I can sort of understand how someone might thrive on the joys of faith without over thinking it, while living in an objective physical world.

Ella M.

Joe,

What you describe is a distorted picture of Christianity, yet it is one that most secular nonChristians hold (and some Christians). Actually I have yet to meet anyone who was not self-centered to some degree, and that basically is what "fallen" means. It is a state of being that makes us unsuitable for life in a new earth. Yet through Christ all (not just those who have heard about Him), have access to salvation through the Spirit. Only if they reject that Spirit of love will they be blotted out. For the saved it is "pleasures forevermore." Of course, you know that Adventists do not believe in eternal torment.

I am glad that you choose to not usually demean the beliefs of others. For me, I would have to "suspend my rationality" to believe that my computer evolved or created itself and much more human life.

If one is not confused at some time in life, they aren't living.

Seminary Student

That would be good, Ervin amazing facts four month training costs $4,200, they teach you on how to give bible studies and they have a class called "ask the Pastor" where students ask questions to Pastor Doug. Here at Andrews is a little bit more expensive and I don't think you would like the cold weather. If you have a good GPA you would only need to pay about 60k.

William Noel

Seminary Student,

Why would anyone want to go to one of those schools when they can get all the training (and power!) they need from the Holy Spirit?

I want to suggest that you read the book "Unchristian." It's a real eye-opener about how the
cultures of North America relate to Christians. One of the big lessons is that traditional evangelistic outreaches drive more people away from the church than they attract. So we need to use other methods to win souls. When I asked God that question and to show me the ministry He wanted me to have, the answer He gave me was a surprise. I lead a team at my church that does home repairs and other things for people. That ministry is bringing people into the church without preaching or giving a Bible study. That ministry with others has our church growing faster than all other churches in the conference except Spanish-speaking churches.

I'm going to make you a prediction: when you seek the Holy Spirit and accept the ministry He gives you, there's a greater than 90% chance that ministry will have nothing to do with preaching, teaching, giving Bible studies or any other traditional outreach method.

Elaine Nelson
3 weeks ago

Those graduates of Amazing Facts are like the old army's "90-day Wonders" one wonders how they got such quick promotions!

Having Doug answer all the questions would surely avoid the influence of several teachers and guarantee duplicates of Doug. At only $1,000 a month, it's still not cheap, but then what should one expect--unless such graduates become their next pastor. Pity the congregation that is much better educated than such a pastor.

Joe, your suggestion of the world's best ethical standard--"Do unto others--" has never yet been improved upon. No matter one's religious belief, this can be applied to any and all situations. Of course, it has not, and there's the problem. It is much older than the Bible and is found in more than a dozen cultures throughout the world, testifying to its longevity as the most practical of all rules for living.

William Noel
3 weeks ago

Erv,

I like your suggested alternate title for the Sabbath School quarterly.

Ron Corson
3 weeks ago

To quote Cliff: “As fallen humans seeking to understand reality, we have three strikes against us getting it right: 1) the limits that our minds place on how the world appears to us, 2) the subjectivity of how we interpret what does appear, and 3) the tiny slice of reality ever within our view”

I have always thought that those three things are the greatest reason to accept the idea of universal salvation. Interesting to see them coming from Cliff!
Elaine Nelson 3 weeks ago

Bingo! If we accepted those premises, it ultimately leads to universal salvation. Is there another possible conclusion?

Seminary Student 3 weeks ago

I found one more school for our friend, Ervin. It is Hartland College the president is Colin Standish. Pastor Doug in amazing facts has a class called "ask the pastor" and Colin Standish at harland has a class called "ask sister white". They even have "buggy rides". It is a 19th century village not Amish community, it is Adventist.

Ervin Taylor 3 weeks ago

Colin Standish has a class called "Ask Sister White." You must be joking. I didn't think conservatives had a sense of humor. But I am wrong.

Ella M. 3 weeks ago

Maybe it is through a seance!

Anonymous 3 weeks ago

mmm. "...the Institutionally-Sanctioned Official Adventist Theology Sabbath School Bible Study Guide."

I thought it was "GC's Best Money Spinner"!

Doctorf 2 weeks ago

When people like Cliff talk about "fallen" people I ask fallen from what? Some perfect state? Please provide me with one bit of evidence that life including people were in some "perfect state." The concept of sin to me is a feeble theological attempt to describe why humans who can act with such grace, compassion and love can also act horribly. The interjection of this mysterious "sin" factor hardly explains the dichotomy in human behavior.

Seminary Student 2 weeks ago

Doctorf, so you don't believe in what people say "the devil made me do it"? Interesting comments. What would be your explanation for human behavior then? Do you think that human beings are perfect? Do you see humanity reaching to a higher esphere I guess you disagree with what we believe about wickedness is increasing. Do you consider yourself a Seventh day
Adventist Christian? according to the bible and to experience there is something really bad in our world and that is sin. Today, as I was walking I saw a man who could barely walk, he had some big tumors in his legs. I felt so bad seeing that person suffering, I told my wife, we live in a world of sin. You can not look around you and say that everything is normal.

Elaine Nelson
2 weeks ago

Seminary Student,

What would people do without the devil to blame for everything that is unpleasant? Do you believe that every action of humans is either caused by God or the Devil? That's an interesting categorization to be able to simply divide everything in two classes.

When you eat your breakfast, did the Devil or God make you do it? When you study, who is behind it? Driving your car; talking with a friend; scanning the internet; watching the news? Can each of these be put as either the action caused by God or the Devil? If rain falls on the raisin farmer and destroys his grapes; but it falls on the orange grove which is beneficial to their growth, who is behind that event? Very simplistic ideas.

Doctorf
2 weeks ago

Seminary Student,

Good questions.

I think some neurological explanations for human behavior are adequate and are being illuminated via neuroscience. Schizophrenia can be explained in part by protein mutations in the post synaptic density of glutamate neurons same with autism. With regards to very evil behaviors I suspect they are genetic as I do not think people necessarily choose to be evil. For example Aspergers syndrome where a person may be an intellectual genius but have no "social intelligence."

Getting more evil? No, it has always been around but we have much more effective 24 hr/7 ways of communicating poor human behavior. Thus, I suspect the the number of bad deeds remains as a constant % of the human population.

When you say "everything is not normal" what is your reference comparison? If it's the garden of eden perspective that is hard to digest as that story to me is a myth.

When you saw a man walking with tumors, I would remind you we are living longer and healthier than any time in our past due to advancements in medical, nutritional and exercise sciences.
Taylor,

Conservative Christians certainly do not claim to be un-fallen, we claim to be fallen humans who have encountered God's grace. Also those of us from an Arminian perspective would not claim that this is a special gift unavailable to the rest. The Holy Spirit is working throughout the entire world desiring to lead all to truth. God is not willing that any should perish. You may disagree with this perspective of God and truth, but it is disingenuous of you to claim that we deny our human fall, or that we view others as also being unable to encounter the same grace we have. You know full well that Goldstein does not hold to either of those positions. It should be possible to argue with Goldstein's theology without mischaracterizing it.

Elaine, I was kind of joking with the idea of "the devil made do it" many of us like to blame someone for the bad choices we often make. We all have "freewill" and according to what we put in our brains is how we make those decisions. But my main issue is looking around us, we can see children dying of cancer, etc. The bible says that death is the result of sin, that God does not enjoy seeing us suffer, that he suffers with us. But the hope that as a Christian I have is that death will be destroy and Paradise will be restaured. That is biblical, and I have chosen to live by those principles.

To John Mark: You address a serious point. I'd like to respond to his statement but I'm not sure I understand it. I can't locate where I said anything about Cliff not accepting "our human fall, or that we view others as also being unable to encounter the same grace we have." Would John Mark please rephrase his concern so I can respond.

To SS: You say that "The bible says that death is the result of sin." Being a Seminary Student I trust you know that it is Paul who said that. Might I ask you "What kind of death" is Paul talking about? Being a Seminary Student, surely you have the correct answer to that question.

Ervin Taylor, perhaps I misunderstand this statement:

"I assume the reason for this is that unlike other 'fallen humans,' they (the 'nonfallen humans' or 'exempted fallen humans') have acquired some special source of over-information and over-understanding not available to the rest of us ordinary fallen humans, which exempts them from the consequences of being fallen"
In the parenthesis you offhandedly suggest that "they" (who I assumed to be Goldstein and his ilk) view themselves as "nonfallen humans." Next, you portray them as believing in a truth source "not available to the rest." You know full well that no Conservative Christian views himself as a "nonfallen human." I think you should also know that from Goldstein's perspective the "over-information" and "over-understanding," (IOW special revelation given to us by grace) is certainly "available to the rest of us ordinary fallen humans." To put it another way: no conservative Christian views themselves "unfallen humans" and only Calvinists view themselves as having something unavailable to the rest.

Ervin Taylor 2 weeks ago

Thank you for the clarification. You are quite correct that one would think that non-Calvinists would not view themselves as having some special source of truth. My comment indeed suggested that, in my view, my good friend Cliff and others who share his views behave as if they have some special source of truth direct from God, i.e., they think that their interpretations of Biblical texts provides "special revelation" to them which is superior to that of some other human understanding of that text. Now that is not surprising—we all have a tendency to think that our interpretation of some passage of the Bible is the correct one. However, the rational ones among us know that humans are very error prone and have a difficult time getting anything right about the kinds of topics usually subsumed under what we call “religion.” In my view, my good friend Cliff says that he is very limited in his understanding and then proceeds to give a lie to his own statement by saying that he has a source of “special revelation” by which he gets around that problem. Might I ask John Mark where my interpretation of this line of argument has gone wrong? (May I make sure that it is clear that I am not questioning Cliff or anyone else’s sincerity or intelligence, just their world view.)

John Mark 1 week ago

You are right that Goldstein and other conservative Christians believe in a connection to Divine truth that is superior to human understanding. Your only mistake was in claiming that we view this connection as something "not available to the rest." You are also correct that we believe there is a right way to interpret Scripture and a wrong way to interpret it. While, we would not claim that there will be complete agreement between those who interpret the Bible correctly we would argue that it will show beliefs to be false and others to be true. You seem to hold the modern view that any theological claim to be right and others wrong is hubris.

On a different but related note, I wonder if you have ever read, "The Cognitive Principle of Christian Theology" by Fernando Canale. In this book, he attempts to construct a distinctly Sola - Scriptura (which he believes will also be a distinctively Adventist) hermeneutics approach. I haven't read much of the book yet, but I'm taking the class from him, so I have a pretty good idea of the approach. I don't know that I agree with all of it, but he's definitely quite thought provoking. The debate between progressive Adventists (and I don't mean in the standards sense, I mean in the broad theological sense) boils down to a debate about hermeneutics. If we don't understand each other on that then we're just talking
past each other because we have different foundational principles.

Ervin Taylor 1 week ago

I have been remiss in not having immediately noted the excellent observation that Mr. Mark made that the "debate between progressive Adventists . . . boils down to a debate about hermeneutics." I would very much agree. He continued "If we don't understand each other on that [point] then we're just talking past each other because we have different foundational principles." Well put. This is why I share Mr. Mark's interest in Dr. Canale's views and why I published a review of one of his books. One question that this observation generates is what happens in a faith community when you have members who make different assumptions about these foundational principles. If these differences can not be reconciled, what should happen? I would very much like to known Mr. Mark's view of this.

John Mark 6 days ago

Dr. Taylor,

I read your review of Canale's book which is part of why I brought him up. I look forward to his response. He attacks liberal theology and classical theology on its timeless ontology, which is a realm conservative Adventist theology, to my knowledge, has not ventured into before. I would be interested to see the liberals and conservative dialog on this deeper level.

Your final question leads to a question of identity. That is, what makes a person a Seventh-day Adventist. The question as I see it, is: why is there a Seventh-day Adventist denomination. If one's beliefs go against that reason for existence, then it makes more sense to leave and fight against the organization than stay and try to change it. So I would say one's hermeneutic needs to at least fit within the purpose of the church. I don't yet have a full answer to what that purpose is, but it certainly seems like it would include central doctrines of Protestant Christianity plus the Seventh day Sabbath, soon Second Coming, and Sanctuary doctrine.

I should make it clear that I don't favor purging the church of those who don't agree with our identifying doctrines. I think that is mostly a straw man. People like Goldstein, I think, are mostly just puzzled as to why these people choose to stay. I do think the Church should make these core beliefs a requirement for ministers, as it would not be honest to spend the money of faithful Adventists to support a non-Adventist message. It also makes sense to require belief in our identifying beliefs in order to become an Adventist. However, I don't know if that is a terribly important issue, since there really is very little reason one would want to join the church if they didn't believe the message - and that is one reason why I don't see liberal theology succeeding in the church.
Gregory Matthews 2 weeks ago

Joe: It is good to welcome to this web site my High School friend, former college roomate and one who is a distinguished scientist in his field. Was this your first post? This one is my second.

As to "eternal torment:" I would not want to accept a god who preserved people's lives so that they could be tortured. Well, enough of that. I hope to read more of your comments.

Elaine Nelson 2 weeks ago

Seminary Student:

The belief that each of us has "free will" is a complete fallacy. We are all subject to our parents and training, education, national origin, and much more. Are you contending that the slave "boy soldiers" in the horn of Africa have free will to choose or reject their being conscripted into the army? Does a underage girl in Afghanistan have free will to choose NOT to marry the man her family has chosen? There are hundreds of like situations were free will is a hollow concept devoid of practicality.

Doctorf 2 weeks ago

Elaine,

Well said and I might add there is a genetic component to behavior that we are just starting to understand. When further illumiated the "free will" discussion will get to be very controversial.

Gailon Arthur Joy 2 weeks ago

What is clear is that the Blog Author applies the same arrogance he seems to embrece and embue upon Clifford Goldstein. I found no "evidence" that Goldstein found himself "unfallen" or otherwise exempt.

This entire premise is the paranoid assuption of the "learned author" who is commonly declaring himself of superior intellect and to " have acquired some special source of over-information and over-understanding not available to the rest of us ordinary... humans," and even exalting himself above the Most High as it relates to Creation and the Biblical record. In fact seems to deny the very existence of the Most High.

The author can consider himself worthy of being ignored!!!

Doctorf 2 weeks ago
Well Gailon preachy comments as usual. I re-read Dr Taylors summary. It is intended to evoke a serious discussion and is not an attempt to declare himself of "superior" intellect. Just because Dr Taylor does not reinforce your faith position he denies the existence of the most high? Where do you get that from?

**Doctorf**

Trevor,

Indeed, but I don't need Dr Taylor to discredit Dr. Goldstein. Goldstein does that all by himself. I read his SS quarterlies for yrs until I finally just threw them into the fire. Actually they are good for something.

**Trevor Hammond**

Doctorf Sir,

You address me yet as you can see I have no other posts on this blog 'sides this one... Howbeit?

♥T

**Doctorf**

Trevor,

I see your point. I was responding to a comment that said Mr Joy has a right to his opinions. Yes he does. My point was after reading the OpEd offered by Erv and reading most of his OpEd's I do not get the impression that he uses the forum to impress anyone with his intellect.

**Trevor Hammond**

Ah yes, Doctorf - I have forgotten again, that the pen is mightier than the sword: but the censure is even mightier... ☺. By the way, phobia of the Sabbath School Lesson by many cultural Adventists isn't really warranted. Just take a look at this quarter's study on Galations. I would humbly suggest that it may not be necessary to through the baby out with the bath water.

♥T

**Trevor Hammond**

oops typo - throw the baby out...

**Doctorf**

Trevor,
I suspect that these lesson quarterlies are useful to some but I have outgrown them. I know what Adventists believe and my journey has become more of a quest to understand why people of particular faiths believe the way they do. Getting back to the point of the OpEd posted by Dr. Taylor, Cliff says we are not to trust sight as its subjective and temporal, we are to have faith. I do not understand for the life of me why if one is skeptical of the senses why they would not apply the same skepticism to faith as it too is subjective and temporal.

Trevor Hammond 2 weeks ago

Hey Doctorf - Sir,
So would it be too much to ask for maybe just 3 good reasons for thrashing the SS Lesson.

Here are some good reasons why I enjoy the SS lessons:
1] It has drawn me into a closer walk with God in Christ Jesus.
2] It encourages personal daily bible study and searching of the scriptures
3] Keeps me out of mischief and provides a daily systematic structured study which we can share and thereby edify one another during the weekly discussion, especially when a humble, teachable and pleasant atmosphere prevails during classes.

On the other hand, what then would you suggest? That we publish a cultural Adventist study guide customised for the average culturalist guru? It could contain but not limited to issues like:

- evolution, thiestic evolution, death before sin, homosexual activity ain't sin, humanism is the way, liquor is slicker for the believer, adornment enthusiasts, affluenza positive persons, once saved always saved cheap grace supporters, tithe is for non-thinkers approach, turf the IJ-Sabbath-SOP-1844-Sanctuary-faith-based-biblical-historical-approach to Adventism and go for a free for all atoday approach (albeit with censureship for Tradventists). Not forgetting the Cliff Goldstein is public enemy no. 1 for culturalists study guide...

♥T

William Noel 2 weeks ago

Trevor,
You illustrate the contrasts in how differently people view the quarterly. I am glad you find it useful. Personally, I find it too boring to give more than a glance. I get a far greater blessing from sitting down with my e-concordance and doing topical searches to see how things are described or used through the Bible. I've discovered some real gems that way.
Ervin Taylor 2 weeks ago

The reasonable ones among us will be able to consider the source of the denigrating comments and understand the mind set of the person saying it. Perhaps we really should feel sorry for them. "Doctorf" is smart and very able to evaluate the views of my good friend Cliff Goldstein without any help from anyone and especially from me. However, I must say that I am a little surprised that "Doctorf" still reads the SS quarterlies. Everyone I know has quit reading them a long time ago. Using them to start a fire on a cold winter morning has possibilities. I still skim them quickly to keep up on what the church establishment thinks the average "Adventist in the pew" is supposed to think and believe. (PS Cliff does not hold a doctorate as yet. But as I said he is smart enough and he would have no trouble getting one from a good institution. Perhaps back at Johns Hopkins where he got his MA.)

Doctorf 2 weeks ago

Erv,

You are correct, they are not on the top of my reading list. I get them sent to my home and not quite sure why I am on the mailing list. Maybe my dad put me on the mailing list in 2007 before he died as kind of humorous reprieve. I also get the PUC recorder always on time and never requested it but receiving the A-Today hard copies is a little more capricious. Sometimes I get them and sometimes I do not :). But, I will get that worked out.

From reading Cliff's comments on this blog and other things he has written he is no doubt an intelligent word smith and I can understand why the SDA review utilizes his talents. Cliff has very concrete views with regards to who is and who is not an SDA and I appreciate his honesty. With Cliff you always know where he stands. I suspect I would have a great time with him discussing theology and religion over the dinner table. I wish I could have the opportunity to meet him.

With regards to the concept of "fallen humans" I do not understand the theology because there is no clear frame of reference as to what the original state of human existence was in the "beginning." I certainly subscribe to the notion that we are "flawed" as biology is not perfect. In addition, if God is offering grace for our flawed condition I am in no position to reject such grace. When General Patton was paralyzed and in a hospital a catholic priest came to minister to him and the generals aide reminded him he was "not catholic." The General responded with "hell, look at me, I will take all the help I can get, please come in father." Thus, like Patton, if God's grace extends to my flawed condition, I will take all the help I can get.

songbird 1 week ago

I think many on here might find the magazine "Proclamation" very interesting. The last issue had an article called "The Great Controversy Worldview" that I found not only interesting, but riveting. Of course the writer of the article and the publication formed the original charter, Former Adventist Fellowship. The website talks a lot about what I see on here. Colleen Tinker was the author's name of that amazing article.
Seminary Student 1 week ago

Interesting comments, I would like to know if our friend Ervin is so against almost everything that the church teaches. What would you like to see in our church? Should we get rid of the name? I know in your view six literal creation has to go, Sabbath? IJ. What would you like to keep if anything.

Ervin Taylor 1 week ago

"Official" Adventism can proclaim anything that the church's political system can decide defines "official" Adventism. But don't expect many of us to accept the "official" party line. In practice, each local SDA church determines what "Adventism" means for the group of people associated with that church. In some Adventist churches, individuals must hide their theological objections. In other Adventist churches, such as one I attend, there is no need to hide your views as everyone is free to accept or not accept "official" Adventist theology, i.e., there is freedom of expression and belief. No one worries about what others believe. Would not everyone wish to belong to such an Adventist Church?

Ella M. 1 week ago

Doctorf,

I think most of you realize on an intellectual level that the SS lessons are written for the world field and for people so varied in education, understanding, age, and mindset, that it would be impossible to meet all their needs. I think they do a great job considering the diverse readership. One doesn't have to use them, but they give the feeling of a global family.

You mentioned something important: "I think some neurological explanations for human behavior are adequate..... With regards to evil behaviors I suspect they are genetic as I do not think people necessarily choose to be evil. For example Aspergers syndrome where a person may be an intellectual genius but have no "social intelligence."

I agree with the roots of "bad behavior" in those who are mentally ill--it is like having a physical illness which may be inherited. For example those with ADD have a difficult time being organized or disciplining themselves. It can be a life-long struggle like Paul's dilemma. But God's grace is sufficient for one to live with it and still be a success in their sphere of influence. That is why we can't always judge one's Christianity by their behavior.

I once corresponded with a serial killer in prison. Voices told him to kill, and he felt he had no choice. In prison he became a Christian, and took medication. He said that the voices were still there, but they no longer bothered him--he ignored them and became a Christ follower. He repented and was forgiven. He no longer had evil desires triggered by the voices.

What I am saying is that God will save anyone who turns to Him and does not reject His spirit. (I tend to believe in universal objective justification.) Being "good" doesn't mean we are not "fallen" (theological term--find another one if you don't like it--try "selfish"). Whether one believes the Adam and Eve story to be myth or not--it is truth in a story. It means that God will find a way to save us in spite of our wrong choices. I believe He did that through His Son, Jesus,
and they planned it before the foundation of the world so that all might be saved.

**Elaine Nelson** 1 week ago

"I once corresponded with a serial killer in prison. Voices told him to kill, and he felt he had no choice. In prison he became a Christian, and took medication."

It was a combination of becoming Christian and taking medication, wasn't it? Having some reason to change his life and the medication made all the difference. Prayer works best when used with good medical advice.

**Philip Law** 1 week ago

At the base of this dialog lies the question of how imperfect beings get to know Truth. Does the notion that there is such a thing as Truth in itself a flawed cognitive exercise of futility?

Physics deals with relatively idealized simple objective realities perceived by imperfect minds including Newton, Maxwell, and Einstein, etc, its relative simplicity offers an interesting platform as a model to get at Truth.

Commonality of perception of physical phenomena irrespective of any single observer constitutes objective states of the physical world. Theories governing such phenomena are attempts to formulate the underlying working principles or Truth of the physical World.

A great assumption is the physical universe is comprehensible. The logic circuitry of imperfect human mind is capable of fathoming the working of that Universe. Hence the first step a physicist takes in studying physics is his assumptive faith that he can get at albeit in increasing degree of proximity to how the universe operates or the Truth of the Universe.

Conflicting theories are put to the test by experiments. The falsification of a theory gets at crucial deciding tests of competing theories. The outcomes of those tests are the ultimate deciding evidence of reality. The theory that best predict the state of our world at one space-time point from another point wins. It is Truth up to that moment.

Thus physics evolves from a gross descriptive of ancient time to the absolute rigid space and time Universe of Newton. Einstein extended Newton’s Universe to a relativistic space-time continuum framework of our Cosmos.

The Quantum phenomena resulted from one of Einstein’s postulates had the Grand Master perplexed for ‘God does not play dies.’ Nevertheless the quest for Truth in Physics marches on. On this point I argued that our God does not need an infallible Scripture to reveal His Truth. Only lesser gods require infallible scriptures to affirm their ‘truthfulness.’ As an extension to that
assertion is there is hope that fallible human being can know the Truth just as Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle had brought human observation threshold to unprecedented precision.

Now the Truth of God includes but transcends the physical realm into the Spiritual realm. I like to open up that discussion to the Spiritual quest for Truth. Any taker?

Ervin Taylor
1 week ago

Mr. Law suggested that "... God does not need an infallible Scripture to reveal His Truth. Only lesser gods require infallible scriptures to affirm their 'truthfulness.' This is a very interesting point. I wonder if he would consider expanding on it. I think I agree but would like to make sure I understand the context..

Philip Law
1 week ago

Ervin,

I should have used the more conventional 'inerrant' rather than 'infallible'. Some obvious discrepancies of Scripture had caused some ex-belivers to throw out the baby with the bath water and turned atheistic or agnostic.

My thinking of our God not needing an inerrant Scripture arised from a dilemma of teaching a Sabbath School class to a group of junior high students by using parallel gospel accounts of an event and ran into the problem of how to explain to them about obvious discrepancies among the Gospel accounts. Unlike adults, junior youth tend to see things more black and white.

While contemplating the dilemma I thought of the apparent inprecision of a fuzzy ball picture of the electron cloud surrounding a proton as the quantum mechanical picture model of the hydrogen atom being a more accurate portrait of the atom than the exact orbit of an electron around the nucleus. The wave equation of the s-orbital is exact but the location of the electron at any moment is probabilistic.

In stead of resorting to explaining away discrepancies due to translation or other 'alabis' I told the students that God is so great that He does not need inerrant accounts to affirm His Truth. Eye witnesses account of an accident scene is a sufficient paradigm to establish His Truth since He used fallible human agents to write down Spirit inspired Words of God in contrary to other religion or insecure Christians claiming inerrancy of 'scripture' in its original tongue. I did allure to the probabilistic model of the electron orbital. They were very receptive to the idea.

It seems profound but it is just that simple.
Anyone who seeks to explain theological topics that the most learned minds of Christian history have had trouble explaining to other learned minds and do a reasonable explanation of these topics to a group of contemporary junior high and high school students in an Adventist Sabbath School should be lauded and given some type of award. My hat is off to anyone trying to be intellectually honest while explaining traditional Adventist theology with a straight face before any teen age audience. (Now I know that those heading up GYC do this, but there are serious questions about their actual success rate in convincing their audiences of the logic of their arguments. They base their arguments on authority. But that is another topic)

I would think that there are many who would appreciate the approach that says that God does not need an inerrant Scripture. One might mention to these students (and adults who may not be aware of the fact) that the idea that the Bible is inerrant or infallible is not a Biblical concept at all but was an idea invented by apologists in post-Biblical times and mostly in the 19th century). Instead of explaining away discrepancies, accept them as the natural result of human fallibility.

I’m going to have to think a little more about the analogy between the concept of probabilistic model of an electron orbital and statements in scriptural narratives about certain events and concepts. My gut reaction is that this analogy has real possibilities. What do others think?

Whether inerrant or infallible, how does that relate to the common definition of the Bible as "The Word of God," something that cannot be found in scripture? For those who confidently believe that every word is the "Word of God" it poses a dilemma, yet is so commonly used as to be considered a doctrine.

Some in AT admitted openly their reservation to the Bible, to the level that is “another book”. Well this is not the first time that heard that (the secular atheism systematically attacked the Bible for centuries) what surprised me is the ones in AT, at one point of their lives were or are SDA, that is SAD.

Honestly I ask my self what happened? It’s possible that they never experimented the saving power or the Bible? “The word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart”. My prays go for you that you can experiment the transforming power of the word of God.
I suspect that my personal experience with God was as direct, profound, and valid as that of anyone else. As I've mentioned before, I eventually could not honestly sustain that experience. Subjective experience, regardless of how profound it may seem, is not a reliable substitute for authentic evidence.

For those whose subjective experience is sustaining, fine, far be it from me to discount your beliefs. But, for me, it just is unconvincing as a basis for accepting all that accompanies it. It somehow seems just immaginary.

Subjective experience is just that: it cannot be transferred or taught to someone else.

The Mormons get a "burning in the bosom" which is their subjective experience; Pentecostals also experience a highly demonstrative expression of the Spirit of speaking in tongues.

Many Protestants have such an experience with the Bible. Catholics get it in their adoration of the Cross or the Virgin Mary. Whatever floats your boat.

Yes, and some people have overwhelming emotional reactions to rock and roll....

But surely there must be something more reliable than the subjective experience. I am not a denier of subjective experience, I've had wonderful subjective experiences, whether attributable to something spiritual, visual beauty, ecstatic sex, the warmth of human kindness, or whatever. I think it has to be more than "whatever floats your boat." There is an element of self-deception and wishful thinking that creeps in if we rely too heavily on subjective experience. On the other hand, I can accept subjective experience as private and personal--and fascinating and unreliable, especially if asserted as EVIDENCE. The "I believe it because I feel like it is true" phenomenon.
Elaine Nelson

1 week ago

Joe, are we not in agreement that subjective experience is all that there is? You have described them. It is when such experiences are considered to be "taught" or the normative where most of the problems arise. Can one "order" such an experience?

Joe Erwin

1 week ago

Elaine, of course, "experience" implies private awareness that is exclusive to the person having the experience. As with any other kind of knowledge, there are big gaps between the actual phenomenon and the interpretation that is made of it.

Private knowledge differs from that which can be sensed by more than one person. Of course, one's interpretation of private experience can be reported, and the reports of private experience can be the data which are studied scientifically.

More on this later....

David

1 week ago

Being trained with rigor in research and medicine I can go any night to my bed and smile knowing that my pioneer work is saving at least 400,000 lives of newborn per year around the world. Two other original innovations already are also showing great results. So I know first hand what "evidence base is".

Been an adult and after tried almost every single think, I was privileged to experience (if you wanted to call subjective experience that is fine with me) the saving power of God. Nothing compares to that, the internal peace and serenity, the joy of sharing, and many other positive experiences. You are right the subjective experience is very personal is only between you and the Creator. Is like pain or love no matter how well is described it will never be understood until is tried. No wonder the blind man in John 9 stated "I Was Blind, But Now I See"

Joe Erwin

1 week ago

David, I'm pleased to know of your good work, and I am not in the least inclined to argue with your personal experience. It is possible that I would not understand or explain the experience in the same way as you do, but, it is also possible that I would--if I had the same experience.

Could it be that my countless earnest hours of what I thought were sincere prayer, along with years of scriptural study, spiritual surrender, deeply felt belief, were just not enough? I never really believed in predestination, but perhaps what I had to offer was just a Cain's offering--not what God wanted. Could it be that many are called, but only a few are chosen? Regardless of what they say or do or believe? Perhaps my belief and surrender were too naive, or maybe, not naive enough....
David

Joe
Probably as you I tried almost all and I meet all kind of people (intelligent, brilliant, beautiful, millionaires, celebrities, presidents, poor, sick, comedians, etc) and I never wanted to change places with them. The only time I desire that, it was when I meet with a person several years ago. By the standards of this world she was not much, but she had a life full of joy, action and serenity. She introduced me to the Bible and to the Lord. When I decide to pray and ask for forgives, an overwhelming joy and peace came to me. Is difficult to describe but that was best experience I had. I learned the essence of Christianity (summarized by Paul. Faith Hope and Love) is practical. Maybe for some people this is an illusion but for me is a reality. This reality is contagious, some of friends even my wife also experimented the same. Don’t give up.

Joe Erwin

David and others, please do not be offended by what I am about to say. I do not intend to influence you to alter your faith experience in any way. If you are happy, good for you. Celebrate that, be joyful, and share love with everyone. Do, please, reject hateful and bigotry and live up to the teachings of your faith.

The experiences I had 45-55 years ago included great joy and peace, along with agonizing and soul searching over how to maintain that within the context of the church and its restrictive teachings that seemed to me to be somewhat at odds with the good news of salvation. Fortunately, I gave up on what I came to believe was a deceptive illusion. Even while my faith experience was strongest, I found the threat of everlasting torment versus the reward of eternal paradise to be disingenuous. I felt that the Christian life itself was terrifically rewarding, and I did not see how rewards or punishments had any place in the order of things. I found the endless hand-ringing over minutiae that is so common among adventists very unseemly and trivial. I feel so fortunate to have escaped all this guilt and sin and trivia. Instead, I have lived a full and rich and mostly joyful life with very few regrets. I'm so glad I did not spend my life avoiding wine and cheese and milk and various delicious foods. I'm so glad I did not spend my life trying to figure out how to avoid understanding the abundant evidence that amplifies understanding of our origins and environments.

I guess I check in here from time to time to see if I missed anything. My impression is that I did not miss much. The same discussions are going on here as at PUC 50 years ago. The world is a wonderful place, with all its beauty and diversity. How sad to judge people who have different orientations or perspectives, rather than loving and valuing them for who they really are.

Kendra, thank you for writing an important essay. Some in the church will agree with you. Others, especially those whose expressions of holiness are strongest, will claim you are being a tool of the devil. Don't let their hatefulness discourage you. Your message is far closer to the message of Christ that is that of the homophobes.

Ervin Taylor

What Mr. Erwin has said is totally on target, especially the last paragraph. We should all look
forward to his continued enlightened comments. I also hope that Kendra will continue to write these types of essays. As long as we have holiness-oriented individuals evoking God as their authority, there will be a need to provide a balance that points to a larger perspective.

Joe because your post was referring also to me here is my reply.
My faith is founded in a solid conviction. My acceptance of Jesus as the Christ somehow was done with extraordinary events comparable to the ones of the apostle Paul. Already passed several years and I don’t regret my new life of faith, hope, and love. I don’t have time to duel in restrictions because my focus is doing positive things. My life has been blessed in every single aspect and I was able to accomplish more that I could imagine. Still I have 25-30 years more of productive professional life and I plan to make count every single minute. I prefer to engage in positive projects trying to alleviate to the much suffering that exist in this planet full of diseases. I’m glad the days of thinking that we are product of random event are long gone. Also I don’t miss my past habits including the vine that once almost literally kill me with pancreatitis. Again joyful I can say, “I was blind but now I see”

David, I am pleased for you, and am especially glad that you are committed to doing positive things, motivated by faith, hope, and love. You have already accomplished much, and over the next 30 or more years will surely do much more. The time will pass quickly. Take it from me, at age 70 I look back and wonder where the time has gone. Thanks to great collaborations and partnerships, much more has been accomplished than I could have dreamed possible. It seems quite wonderful to me that you and I can converse in a positive way, each with differing points of view, and that we can both be joyful and celebrate our lives, and each feeling that our own epiphany provided life changing insight. We share the experience of feeling that we once were blind, but now we see—that we have found new freedom in amplified knowledge. That we can simultaneously experience joy and tranquility with very different world views speaks well of the wonderful diversity of life experience. Live and be well.
Because systems of criminal justice are inherently flawed to the point that few question whether it is probable innocent people are occasionally executed and guilty people are occasionally exonerated, I am against the death penalty. Whether someone is executed by the state is often directly dependent on the quality of the legal defense the accused can afford immediately or soon after being charged.

There is nothing worse, in my view, than an innocent person being executed for a crime that, by definition, he or she did not commit. Whatever is gained by the existence and imposition of the death penalty is not worth the occasional and perhaps inevitable execution of people who are not guilty of the crimes with which they have been charged.

It is no more evil, in my view, to murder someone in cold blood (will malice aforethought) than it is to put someone to death who may actually be innocent. The willingness to do this - that is, to put someone to death who may actually be innocent - is the evil that precedes and enables the actual act of executing someone who may be innocent. Without the societal willingness to do this, it would not happen.

This is, of course, reminiscent to what happened to Jesus at the hands of Pilate. Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent but, for reasons of political expediency, was willing to satisfy the blood thirst of those who wanted Jesus dead. Conversely, the willingness to die for something that you did not do in order that the guilty does not have suffer the penalty that they deserve is the opposite of the willingness to kill someone who is, or may be, innocent. The former is motivated by love; the latter is motivated by the opposite of love - indifference.

The willingness to execute someone who may be innocent is very, very similar to the willingness to execute someone who is certainly innocent. Perhaps the difference is similar to the difference between that of hate and indifference; in either case, love has nothing to do with it.

As far as hate crime legislation is concerned, to be against such legislation is an admission that you are not willing to give a harsher punishment to the perpetrators of such crimes; and you are therefore willing to protect those who are most often accused of such crimes (no matter who they may be) from harsher penalties.

In hate crime legislation, no one is excluded or treated differently. Such legislation applies to anyone and everyone no matter the race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or political persuasion of the accused/perpetrator.

Now, for those who may, in general, actually favor harsher sentences for crime, to NOT be in favor of harsher penalties for hate crime convictions is evidence of a curious hypocrisy at best. They are, for some strange reason, in effect protective of those who are the more frequent perpetrators of such crimes (whoever they may be).

To be clear, not to mention consistent, I would have much preferred that James Byrd's murderer(s) in
the Texas dragging case been given life in prison without the possibility of parole.

If, because of his race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or political persuasion, they had "just" beaten him up — instead of having dragged him to his death — they should then have simply received a more severe sentence than would normally have applied; very much like the aggravated circumstance penalties for assaulting or killing a police officer, or for using a gun in the commission of a crime.

Hate crimes, of course, are not punishments for thoughts; they are punishments for actions. Much like gun crimes are not crimes because of guns, they are crimes because of actions. If someone acts with criminal intent on a thought (which anyone is free to have), it is like acting with criminal intent with a gun (which most adults are likewise free to have).

In point of fact, I actually favor stricter sentences for murder than most currently meted out; in that I do not believe that parole should be considered for people who have been convicted of murdering someone. Life means life, 30 years means 30 years, etc.; I am simply against the death penalty for the reasons I have stated above.

It is my view the legal authorities in Georgia recently committed legal manslaughter; simply because—over two decades later—it was not obvious that Troy Davis was guilty beyond a reasonable doubt; and they were hoping the U.S. Supreme Court would bail them out.

Did this also make the Court — by perhaps even a 5-4 vote — “guilty,” beyond a reasonable doubt?

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**Ron Corson**

3 weeks ago

Stephen wrote:

"Hate crimes, of course, are not punishments for thoughts; they are punishments for actions"

If that was true there would be no reason for the addition of a hate crime. Because the action would be identical to the action of someone who committed the crime without hate. But I see the reason you want to believe that incorrect idea. I mean it does sound awful to want to punish thoughts...but that is what hate crimes do. Oh yes and gun crimes are in fact crimes involving guns, yes because the gun was used in the crime. You do seem very confused on this article.

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**Horace Butler**

3 weeks ago

The idea that a person should face a stiffer penalty because it was a so-called "hate crime" is ludicrous. Murder is murder, pure and simple. If someone commits premeditated murder, they should be prosecuted to the full extent of the law, whether they murdered them for their money, or because they hated the ethnicity of the victim. All premeditated murder stems from hatred of some kind. You beat a guy up to steal his wallet, or you beat a guy up because he belongs to a different ethnic group. What's the difference? The guy gets beat up. It's assault and battery, no matter why you did it. You don't help the guys wounds heal any faster by a stiffer sentence for it being a "hate
crime."

As for the death penalty, I agree that it is despicable to execute someone if there is reasonable doubt as to their guilt. But the Bible does give the state the authority to execute murderers. *Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.* Gen. 9:6.

**Horace Butler** 3 weeks ago

Enacting hate crime legislation borders on the idea of unleashing the "thought police." I can imagine a scenario in which someone acts in self defence and kills someone of another ethnic group, but when it is found out they were prejudiced against that ethnic group, they get convicted merely because of their erroneous thinking.

**Stephen Foster** 3 weeks ago

So, are you both in principle against aggravated circumstances sentencing (in general), or only (against them) in relation to hate crimes?

Would you consider yourselves "hard" on crime generally; but have a somewhat nuanced, evolved, or enlightened position relating to hate crimes?

Would you acknowledge that opposition to aggravated sentences for such criminality is protective of those who engage in such activity; as opposition to the death penalty is protective of those who have actually murdered someone?

(Remember, to be convicted of a hate crime, it must be "proven" that criminal action resulted directly from previously expressed motives.)

**Horace Butler** 3 weeks ago

Obviously each case must be decided individually, and mitigating circumstances must be considered, but we already have laws against violent crime: murder, assault, rape, etc. I question the need to add another category. If the penalty for murder is life or execution, do we increase it because hate was involved? As I said before, murder and assault have always involved hatred to some degree or another. I'm unaware of any method of executing a person twice or of increasing a life sentence beyond the grave. If the penalty for assault and battery is 10 years, do we make it 20 because the perpetrator happened to have a bias against the ethnic group to which the victim belonged? It would be too easy to attribute the motive of hate to any violent crime, especially if the ethnicity or sexual orientation of those involved were different. I think this opens a door to a path that should be avoided, or we may wake up some day to find monitors in all of our rooms, listening for any signs of disloyalty (interpreted as hatred) to Big Brother.

I'm not sure how to answer your questions. Violent crime deserves a proper punishment, but I'm
not convinced that adding the category of "hate crime" will solve anything. It has the potential of turning bigots into criminals simply because they are bigots. Some of the reactions to ill advised politically incorrect statements by various individuals of late seems to be taking us in that direction. Freedom of thought and freedom of speech are close cousins. To restrict the one is to restrict the other. From creating a class of crimes prefaced by the word "hate" it is a short step to making it criminal to voice "improper opinions."

Stephen Foster

Since you are not quite sure how to answer my questions, Horace; allow me to suggest that you try to address them one at a time, or individually.

We do, after all, certainly have aggravated circumstances sentencing for crimes committed with guns. (As an example, armed robbery is generally treated differently than is other larcenous crime; even if the gun is not fired, and is legally owned, licensed, and registered.)

Stephen Foster

If either of you—or anyone else, for that matter—don’t mind, I would sincerely appreciate answers to my three (3) questions above; each of which can technically be answered with a “yes” or “no.”

Elaine Nelson

Stephen, only simple questions can be answered "yes" or "no." Those you asked do not fit that requirement.

"are you both in principle against aggravated circumstances sentencing (in general), or only (against them) in relation to hate crimes?

Both and neither.

"Would you consider yourselves "hard" on crime generally; but have a somewhat nuanced, evolved, or enlightened position relating to hate crimes?"

Nuanced.

"Would you acknowledge that opposition to aggravated sentences for such criminality is protective of those who engage in such activity; as opposition to the death penalty is protective of those who have actually murdered someone?"

Neither.

Now if you would kindly answer this question with either a "yes" or "no":

When did you stop beating your wife?
Elaine,  

Yeah, I see your point; and on reflection, you’re probably right. I suppose that I was just looking for ways to make it easier to address these questions; because Horace had indicated that he was not sure how to answer them.  

Although I could not determine whether your answers were facetious to reinforce your point, or genuine responses; what I believe their answers should actually be are as follows, respectively 1) that they are only against aggravated sentencing insofar as hate crimes are concerned, but are not against this option in sentencing generally, 2) Yes, meaning they are “hard” on crimes generally, but have either a nuanced, evolved, and/or enlightened position as relates to hate crimes because of fear of the slippery slope syndrome (regarding “thought police”), and 3) while I anticipate their answers to be “No,” the reality is that I believe the correct answer to be that, in point of fact, opposition to harsher sentences for hate crimes is a tacit protective act toward those accused of such activity; in the much the same way that opposition to the death penalty tacitly provides protection to the lives of those accused of capital offenses.

Elaine Nelson  

The law only recognizes degree of homocide: involuntary (or accidental), premeditated, and 1st, 2nd, & 3rd degree, and motive should not be considered, as murder is murder. Killing, as in war, is not considered murder, although in most circumstances to deliberately shoot to kill is considered murder, so the circumstances do affect the charge.  

I'm uncertain, has "hate crime" been legislated yet? And how is it defined?  

Homicide has many descriptions. Currently, Michael Jackson's physician is on trial for his death. It appears he was very negligent as a physician, but he did not "kill" Michael. This is an example of one of the many degrees of homicide which may be prosecuted.

Nathan Schilt  

What punishment would you find acceptable, Stephen, for someone who "might" be innocent?
How about life without the possibility of parole for Troy Davis? Would you be okay with that? Surely not, since you believe he was legally innocent! If the person who is willing to impose the death penalty for someone who "might" be innocent is guilty of murder, then isn't the person who is willing to imprison someone who "might" be innocent guilty of kidnapping and false imprisonment? Have you not, by so dramatically taking away a man's freedom, deprived him of life in a very real sense?

Your moral views on this topic, Stephen, are so idiosyncratic and exceptional in the context of human history that it seems to me you should hold them very lightly. The ability of the state to hold a person criminally responsible is predicated upon proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt, to a moral certainty. Does that standard, for you, mean "might" be innocent? If so, then why not advocate a higher standard? To better understand your argument, which implies that you'd be okay with the death penalty if the "possibility" of innocence could be eliminated, I would like to know what level of proof you would need to find the death penalty acceptable.

I do not want to debate the Troy Davis execution, or the mainstream media's highly selective and biased reporting of the story. But the case has gone through multiple filters in a justice system predicated on the maxim that it is better for ten guilty people to go free than for one innocent person to be convicted. Neither jurors nor judges reviewing the case thought that Troy Davis might be innocent. You did not hear or weigh the evidence according to the rules of law. So your belief that a legally innocent man was convicted and executed is not really an argument against the death penalty. It is an argument against the justice system that yielded a conviction. I'm curious...have you ever written to protest an acquittal or reversed conviction of someone who was clearly guilty of a heinous crime? Does such a result ever cause you to think that our justice system might in some ways provide safe havens for crime to flourish and go unpunished? Can you think of someone convicted and executed who did not fit into the "might be innocent" category?

Do you believe that in the moral realm, all possible doubt cannot be eliminated, and therefore, everyone charged and convicted of a criminal offense "might" be innocent? If so, then a legal determination of guilt is morally impossible, and your "might be innocent" rationale becomes a tautology.

Stephen Foster

It is really, really, this simple. Death is a worse fate than life; whether in prison or not. Now, if people are literally being physically tortured for the rest of their natural days, which would be indisputably unconstitutional in America (and which, of course, they are not), death would then clearly be the more humane approach. However, since this is not the case, it is evil to be willing to execute someone who might be innocent.

To the extent that someone might be innocent in cases where the death penalty is not on the table; the "beyond a reasonable doubt" standard is theoretically appropriate, in my view, for conviction and sentencing.

To argue whether life in prison is tantamount to death by execution is not worth the time of
either of us. If you are really in doubt about that (yourself), I would suggest that you conduct a poll among death row inmates.

Ella M. 3 weeks ago

I may not know the facts in the Davis case, but I know a lot of people more knowledgeable than I seemed to believe in his innocence. Such support should have made a difference in the outcome as it reflected a large degree of doubt.

I am opposed to the death penalty with the possible exception of serial killers. Not only are these more of a danger, but probably lead psychotic, miserable lives.

Ron Corson 3 weeks ago

While I disagree with practically all of Stephen's points I will say I agree to the the position of getting rid of the death penalty. Not just because it often becomes more expensive through the appeals process then keeping the person in prison for life but on the more Christian philosophical view that a person can change and be a witness for God in prison. I think it was Carla Faye Tucker that settled me on this idea. She became a Christian in prison and helped her fellow inmates. She did not request a stay of execution and acknowledged her murder and was executed. To me that is a light taken away from the job of Christian Ambassador to a group of people that few others could ever reach. So as a Christian the higher calling is to preach the good news even over public punishment laws that are traditionally based upon Judeo Christian beliefs, they may be right and good in most instances but to protect the exceptions where Christ can be proclaimed I will as Governor Perry said "err on the side of life".

Elaine Nelson 3 weeks ago

The Innocence Project has released more than 250 prisoners scheduled for the death penalty with their careful analysis of the cases. Many had very inept defense attorneys, police lied on the witness stands, judges and prosecutors who needed such cases to prove their were tough on crime, and falsified evidence.

With the possibility of life without parole at least there will be no cases that will afterward be found innocent, as has happened, and simply for the heavy costs of those on Death Row: they can live 20-25 years with repeated appeals that are costly and without end. It costs much more to have them on Death Row than in for life, and prison costs are now eclipsing education costs in many states. This must stop.

Jim Miller 2 weeks ago

Something not usually considered in the question of the death penalty. Ancient Israel did not have the facilities for life imprisonment. Their imprisonment capacity was extremely limited. If there is someone in the community who has murdered and is likely to murder again, they either can execute the murderer, or let the murderer live and probably murder again. In that society there is
good reason to execute a person deemed dangerous, even if occasionally you execute an innocent person. Not executing a dangerous person perpetuates the danger in the community. Modern societies have the capacity for life imprisonment. Therefore, the death penalty is not necessary to protect the community from the violent person. And if the death penalty is still used, it should be reserved only for the most extreme cases where the evidence is overwhelming.

Gailon Arthur Joy 2 weeks ago

Regretfully, none of our opinions really matter. I personally support the death penalty as an essential weapon of law enforcement and appropriate retribution for the crime of murder, period. However, the death penalty will be expanded with time, not repealed, and applied to even “Sabbath Keepers”.

Therefore, we, at least those of us that believe the Seventh-day Adventist Message, know that we will be subject to a death penalty for a crime we did not commit, just as our Lord and Saviour suffered the penalty of death for a "Crime He Did Not Commit". And we will live with the stress of that reality as we make our choices as events will soon unfold. And it will weigh heavily upon our soles as we pass into the Time of Jacobs Trouble uncertain of our connection with the Spirit and the status of our Salvation. No sedative will be prescribed and if caught we will most certainly be martyred, uncertain of our Salvation.

Only the cement of Faith well exercised and developed will get us through, despite the weight of uncertainty.
The rest of humanity faces an absolute death penalty. This reality should move us to share our Faith and give opportunity to thousands upon thousands of lawbreakers to avoid that most certain penalty and partake in the certainty of Heaven and Eternal Life, the pardon already earned by Another that died for us, innocent but willing that we be saved.

May we always be found in the Blessed Faith to avoid the final death penalty.

Elaine Nelson 2 weeks ago

There have been far too many innocent people condemned and on death row for years, only to have their convictions overturned because of faulty evidence or inept defenders, and lack of DNA. It is a sentence that cannot be revoked.

Studies have shown that it has never been a good deterrent and is very unevenly used. Why does Texas have a far larger percentage of executions than any other state but not the largest population?
Connie Severin 1 week ago

It may not be the best deterrent; however, it guarantees that the criminal will not go free to kill again. The two that murdered almost an entire family in front of the father in ?Connecticut? should never see the light of day. My fear is of the numerous cases let out early by either overly sympathetic or activist judges. What's the average stay for life imprisonment these days? 10 years maybe?

Elaine - what do you mean by percentage of execution? If you mean per capita, why should state size make a difference? If you mean percentage of "death" verdicts compared to those condemned to life in prison, again, why does population make a difference?

Elaine Nelson 1 week ago

The percentage clearly shows that in some states, notably Texas, has the highest number and percentage of executions that any state. FYI, percentage indicates how many per population.

Overwhelmingly, the death penalty has had no deterrent effect as numerous studies have shown. Also, there have been more than 200, on death row awaiting execution who were found to be innocent by DNA. Because there have been so many unjust people sent to death row it is fraught with many errors: inept defense attorneys, perjured witnesses, and more. If your loved one were accused, would you not want the very best defense available? Most who are on death row have been penniless and unable to get a top-rate attorney.

How do I know this? Two very close relatives involved in law enforcement for many years. For those who assume that everyone there deserves it, please be better informed. Also, when one says they will not be able to kill again, there have been murders in prison.

Jim 1 week ago

I wonder do we put people into prison to punish them, or to isolate them from society to prevent them from doing more harm? Personally I am against the death penalty. Life in prison is a very harsh sentence. BTW many lifers have become SDA Christians. Everyone is redeemable. Jesus saves to the uttermost.

Elaine Nelson 1 week ago

Things they are a-changing! With the costs of prisons in the state of California exceeding the education budget, many prisoners have already been released because of overcrowding. Usually non-violent criminals. When the ratio of prison costs to education are upended, things must change or it will become a state with more jails than schools.
Andreas Bochmann
1 week ago

From a European perspective the death penalty is seen as quite barbaric, and the media of any political color were quite unanimous when it came to the case of Troy Davis. Obviously, for Christians the "public opinion" is not the ultimate criterion (but - as this blog shows - we are influenced by it!). Thus - simple question: What would Jesus do? John 8:11; Lk 6:27-35; John 10:10 just to name three texts. Too idealistic? Maybe - the Christian gospel is quite idealistic. And about the Tucker case .... I watched the relatives of the victim come out of the prison after her execution (yes, it was on European TV). What struck me - they didn't seem any happier or more peaceful. Revenge does not bring peace or "satisfaction" (in the original latin sense).

Horace Butler
1 week ago

Ah yes, WWJD? But I see that the texts quoted only present a one-sided picture to the character of Jesus. It should not be forgotten that it was also Jesus who voiced the words found in Gen. 9:6, as well as those recorded in Deut. 32:41, and those quoted by Paul in Rom. 12:19. Loving our enemies does not mean that evil must go unchecked and that the perpetrators get off with light punishment, all in the name of forgiveness and political correctness.

Elaine Nelson
1 week ago

"Evil must go unchecked."

The U.S. has one of the best justice system and yes, they are not always met with complete public approval. There are attorneys, judges, juries who are responsible for punishment and sentencing. What suggestions for improvement are offered?

Horace Butler
1 week ago

Because the system is run by fallible human beings it will never be foolproof or perfect. The concept of "reasonable doubt" is an important one, and should play a part, especially when the death penalty may be imposed. The shenanigans that are used to keep legitimate evidence out of court should be eliminated. I know someone who is serving a life sentence for a crime of which he is innocent. The evidence that would have cleared him was not allowed in court. This is just as much a travesty of justice as when someone who is clearly guilty gets off on a technicality.

Tom
1 week ago

Texas ranks second in population. Only California has more people. My guess as to why there are more executions in Texas is that the death penalty is carried out in Texas, whereas here in California there have been so few executions for capital crimes where the death penalty is given, that the ranks of those on death row just keep rising.

As for the argument of whether it is a deterrent, it can't be argued that it isn't if the sentence is carried out. No chance to get out and murder again if you are dead.
Stephen Foster 1 week ago

Tom,

The points that should not be lost are that it is **evil to be willing to execute someone who may in fact not be guilty**; and that our system of criminal justice is sufficiently flawed to the extent it is clear that there is no possibility of infallibility.

Tom 1 week ago

Our criminal justice system has come a long ways from the days when lynching was a common practice. DNA has given us a new degree of evidence we never had in the past. Today a defendant has recourse of numerous appeals and no stone seems to be left unturned to determine guilt or innocence in capital crimes. The benchmark is reasonable doubt. To rise it to possibility of infallibility is unreasonable.

Capital punishment should be a last resort sentence, reserved for the most hideous murderers. I do not believe it should be used for anything less, such as treason.

Stephen Foster 6 days ago

Tom,

While DNA evidence is an obvious improvement—and provider of some “evidence” of how flawed the criminal justice system has been—it is by no means a forensic panacea for all criminal system injustice.

You have the impression that “no stone seems to be left unturned to determine guilt or innocence in capital crimes;” but, as was apparent in the Troy Davis case, prosecutorial professionals perceive an interest in maintaining an appearance of systemic integrity in cases where there is no physical or forensic evidence, or any impeccable eyewitness testimony. In this particular case, the so-called “reasonable doubt” threshold certainly appeared to have been essentially erased, decades after the original conviction.

Besides, reasonable doubt is in the eyes of the beholders—and with enough money, can be literally purchased—as evidenced by numerous high profile cases in the past.

If there is any doubt that an individual is guilty, it is evil to execute said individual. Clearly, it is my view that it is systemically evil to be willing to take the chance of executing someone who is not certainly guilty.

With money, human frailty, and the manipulation of emotions all integral to human systems of “justice,” the death penalty is something that should be relegated to history books.
Horace Butler

"With money, human frailty, and the manipulation of emotions all integral to human systems of “justice,” the death penalty is something that should be relegated to history books."

Considering how corrupt man had become before the flood, it is interesting that God spoke the words of Gen.9:6 after the flood was over, knowing how evil the world would again become. Does that text no longer apply to us? Should we relegate it to the dustbin of history?

Stephen Foster

I am certain that you realize that we do not live in an antediluvian or postdiluvian theocracy; nor has our society adopted the Divine edicts as constitutional law.

While we find no fault with the biblical principle of reciprocal justice, I have grave doubts about, and significant problems with, modern systems of criminal (and civil) justice.

Nathan Schilt

Because you have rhetorically framed the argument to dictate the conclusion you desire, Stephen, you foreclose the possibility of an honest debate where differences of opinion are respected. Who do you know that is content to see someone who "might be innocent" sentenced to death for a heinous crime? I have never heard anyone express the view that it is okay to execute someone "who is not certainly guilty." So it seems to me that you have really set up a straw man on which to found an implicit argument that those who support the death penalty are evil. All moral citizens would agree that moral certainty should be a prerequisite for not only implementing the death penalty, but convicting a person of any crime. They just differ about what constitutes certainty.

That's why unanimous verdicts are required in our justice system - because we believe it is better for ten guilty people to go free than for one innocent person to be convicted. That is the most formidable standard of morality the world has ever seen. But it's not good enough for you.

I assume you would concede that SOME who are executed for terrible crimes are certainly guilty. If society chose to follow the Stephen Foster standard of certainty, would you be okay with the death penalty? Many moral, intelligent people believe that when one deliberately takes the life of another, justice is best served, in certain circumstances, by requiring the murderer to forfeit his life. The reality that miscarriages of justice have occurred, and will occur in the future, should not cause us to shrink from the solemn duty to do justice. When the quest for perfect justice, and the realization that it can never be achieved in this world, paralyze us from humbly and fearfully implementing justice in human societies, our justice will become an impotent oxymoron.

Stephen, you laud societies such as that of France, where the death penalty is outlawed. Nonsense! They just have different ways of making sure that justice is done. Do you know what prison life is like for the most violent criminals in France? I have heard that the French have made a verb of the word "suicide." They have a word that means "suicided". It's what happens when someone who has
committed a heinous murder or series of murders is being interrogated by the gendarmes at police headquarters. While "no one is looking" the murderer suddenly bolts and jumps out a tenth story window to his death. RIGHT! The French knowingly say he was suicided. That's what happens when a society obfuscates justice in the name of justice.

Jim
6 days ago

Maybe, we should take another look at the past and future events as depicted in The Great Controversy?

Stephen Foster
2 days ago

Gailon, Jim, Andreas,
You make excellent points, especially as relates to how the death penalty could be used for those who may be considered subversive, for religious reasons.

Nathan Schilt
1 day ago

That is indeed interesting. How does one account for the fact that those who repudiate traditional values and advocate violent overthrow of Western governmental institutions are, and have been, vehemently opposed to the death penalty? These are the same folks who are defecating on police cars, parading Marxists slogans, and shouting "death to capitalists." They are backed by some pretty scary forces that believe in world government. (Does world government figure anywhere in SDA prophecy?) Contrast the venom, vulgarity and destructiveness of "peace" demonstrators and protesters of Western values and institutions with the decorum and cleanliness of Tea Party rallies, Christian mens' rallies, or The Glenn Beck rally.

"Peace" is of course a somewhat different issue than the death penalty, though they are philosophical siblings. So it is worth reflecting on the reality that the biggest supporters of peace movements in the Twentieth Century turned out to be champions of state sponsored murder. It is not difficult to see how today's death penalty opponents could be sharpening the guillotine tomorrow. Those who are prepared to trample on freedom for the greater good will not hesitate to use the death penalty, once it seems useful and necessary, against those they hate and those who are considered subversive.

Right now, in the Western world, it is overwhelmingly those who despise Christians that oppose the death penalty. As they gain power and align their utopian visions with totalitarian methodologies that are the envy of our intellectual elites, I suspect we will see prophecy soon fulfilled in ways we did not imagine.
Nathan, 

Let me try to address your concerns with my admittedly strong—perhaps even dogmatic—opinion, and then address concerns that you have expressed that are not representative of my opinion; but are themselves straw images of your representations of my opinion.

My concern with absolute certainty of guilt as it pertains to the administering of the death penalty is, of course, based on the principle that, as you put it, it is indeed “better for ten guilty people to go free than for one innocent person to be”…EXECUTED. I have substituted your use of the word “convicted” with “EXECUTED” because that is precisely what I am arguing; that where there is not an absolute certainty—what John McLaughlin would categorize as metaphysical certitude—of the guilt of the accused, the death penalty should never be considered, much less administered.

The fact that miscarriages of justice are inevitable, and that this is a readily acknowledged and self-evident fact of societal life is the very basis of my case. It is both morally and logically untenable to be willing, in the name of our “solemn duty to do justice” no less, to take the chance of occasionally executing innocent individuals so that SOME/MOST guilty people may get what they have coming to them—that is, of course, if we believe it is “better for ten guilty people to go free than for one innocent person to be...” executed.

The unanimous jury principle and the “beyond a reasonable doubt” standard are sufficient for convictions. I would, however, remind you that convictions and executions are not the same thing. My concern is about executions wherein, to answer your question, “the Stephen Foster standard of certainty”—where the guilt of the accused and the circumstances under which the crime was committed are as certain as life and death itself—in tandem with “the Stephen Foster standard of equal justice under law”—where everyone, regardless of wealth or the lack thereof, gets an O.J. Simpson quality “Dream Team” defense—would permit the death penalty to be administered; but short of these standards, no way.

As for your France reference/straw man, I have no idea where you get the idea that France’s system of justice, with which I am totally unfamiliar, is one which I “laud;” as I didn’t reference other societies in this context at all.

What sense does it make to apply an oxymoronic standard of "metaphysical certainty" to the realm of human affairs? By metaphysical standards, it is quite possible that the execution you think is taking place is simply an appearance, and the essence underlying the appearance, if indeed there is one, is in no way extinguished by the ritual we call capital punishment.

What superior knowledge or insight are 21st Century elites privy to that enables them to assert moral hegemony over history? The same evidence which creates uncertainty (DNA, for example) may also increase certainty, leading responsible, moral people to fine tune their
standards of justice while maintaining the integrity of the principle that human beings sometimes commit acts so heinous that they forfeit their right to live. Your opinion that the very nature of capital punishment mandates an entirely different moral vocabulary than life in a dungeon is simply that - your opinion. It seems remarkably arrogant of you to assert, without new knowledge or information, that millions - probably billions - of intelligent people, now and throughout history, who disagree with you are benighted fools and moral cretins.

Throughout its history, humanity has been aware of its frailty. It has also recognized that, to the extent human finitude is a trump card to preclude acting on principles of justice, justice is sacrificed, since perfection is not possible. How many executions of innocent victims have been carried out by criminals who have gone free because legal barriers to truth finding have been erected by courts in the name of justice? How about trading those artificial barriers (Exclusionary Rule and Miranda) for the death penalty? Those who purport to know cosmic justice inevitably see it as a shield against imposition of consequences and personal responsibility for actions - a shield which prevents society from protecting itself against evil, since after all, it is society itself that is responsible for the evildoer. Justice itself seems to be the primary collateral damage of the chimerical quest for cosmic justice.

I accept and respect your political position on this issue, Stephen. But when we turn our political beliefs into universal moral mandates, characterizing those who disagree with us as immoral and evil, we sow the very seeds of hatred and evil that we puport to be uprooting. We also end up with a patchwork quilt of illogical, idiosyncratic morality that has no qualms about destroying innocent human life at conception, but sacralizes the lives of vicious predators. I am not suggesting that you support abortion, but most people who share your moral views on capital punishment do support abortion. Is it merely coincidental that they are also (with the exception of Jews) overwhelmingly non-religious and anti-Christian?

Stephen Foster 4 days ago

Obviously Nathan, you have not watched The McLaughlin Group. Otherwise you would have recognized the “metaphysical certitude” phraseology is similar to the late Johnny Carson’s Carnack the Magnificent reference to “hermetically sealed” envelopes. I’m not even sure what “metaphysical certitude” literally means; and it is doubtful if McLaughlin does either. It is simply meant to convey certainty.

The point of course, is that the death penalty should not be considered in cases where there is any question as to who did it; and under what circumstances.

For some reason, and I think I know what it is, despite the fact that I am focusing on the death penalty, you insist on including all criminal justice in your argument(s). I believe you are doing this because you have a philosophical approach to the law that you believe to be under attack. What I am attacking is the morality and logic—or lack thereof—that undergirds the societal willingness to risk the execution of innocent individuals, in the name of justice.

What abortion has to do with my arguments about the death penalty (or hate crimes) is truly anyone’s guess. If by chance you wish to frame an argument or make a case against abortion...
or reproductive rights—as I have against the death penalty—you have a blog here in which you can do just that.

As for the raw numbers of people who may disagree with me, since when does what the vast majority of human beings think or do or believe, over millennia, determine what is right or wrong, moral or immoral, logical or illogical?

Nathan Schilt 4 days ago

You continue to wage battle against a straw man, Stephen. No one - at least no one I have ever heard of - thinks it's okay to execute someone who might be innocent. If you accept that human certainty of guilt is sufficient for a heinous murderer to be executed, then most people will agree with you. I misunderstood you to be setting a definitionally impossible threshold of absolute metaphysical certainty. It appears now that you are not philosophically opposed to the death penalty as an appropriate punishment, assuming there is certainty of guilt. You simply believe it is evil and immoral to impose the death penalty unless you personally are certain of guilt. And since no one is likely to make your subjective sense of certainty the final judge of whether certainty of guilt exists, you want to suspend justice when it comes to capital punishment. Strange logic…

If you do not see the irony of opposing the death penalty, while supporting abortion as a right, then explaining it to you won't do any good. The wisdom and experience of the ages is certainly not the final arbiter of truth or morality. But it is a valuable source of authority and should inform our moral framework. Without new data, information, or arguments (you have offered none) we should be quite humble about taking up the moral sword against those who have gone before.

Lucky for you, moral certainty is much easier for you to find in your own head, in the context of your subjectively held values and opinions, than it is when it comes to objective evidence of guilt unanimously adjudged to be certain by twelve dispassionate jurors and multiple appellate courts. I guess "certainty" means exactly what you intend it to mean - nothing more and nothing less. That's not justice; that's the Stephen Foster rule of law.

Stephen Foster 4 days ago

I don’t mean to offend you, but it is disingenuous to imply that since no one wants—or perhaps has ever publicly advocated—the execution of innocent people, that therefore no one is willing to risk executing innocent individuals. Since we know that innocent individuals have been, and will continue to be, executed, what difference does it make—especially to those who will be or have been innocently executed—that no one either wants this to happen, or have advocated that it should happen?

The very suggestion that since no one is theoretically/officially in favor of executing innocent individuals, that therefore no one is willing to risk executing innocent individuals is the quintessential straw man argument! Anyone who is in favor of the death
penalty in any case wherein there is any possibility that the accused is not indeed the actual perpetrator is in effect stating that they are willing to risk executing someone who may not actually, as opposed to “legally,” be guilty; and this is evil.

Now, it is only evil if in fact one truly believes that killing an innocent human being is evil; in which case voluntarily and unnecessarily risking the possibility of doing so must also be evil.

This may be arrogantly dogmatic. So what? Surely you would agree with me that unnecessarily killing innocent individuals is evil—even if it is legal—would you not?

Nice try, but individual/unanimous certainty of guilt on behalf of jurors is not nearly enough. Individual jurors generally do not prescribe the parameters or create the criteria under which the death penalty is considered. (Correct me if I’m wrong—since this is your field—but neither do most judges.)

Insofar as convictions are concerned, unanimous certainty of guilt is, again, an appropriate moral standard for the “beyond a reasonable doubt” principle or threshold. A standard of absolute certainty, with there being absolutely no possibility of any other scenario of occurrences to have taken place, should be the standard for the absolute punishment of certain death.

If this is too high a threshold for any executions, then so be it.

We have radically different world views, Stephen. You seem to see the world idealistically in terms of good and evil. Those who share your sociopolitical views are good; those who oppose them are evil. I have a much more cynical view of human moral pretensions and the cardinals of goodness who commit unspeakable evil in the name of justice and compassion. I see evil as an intractable, insidious presence in every realm of human activity. I agree with Solzhenitsyn that the line dividing good and evil runs through the center of every human heart. Tragic and unnecessary destruction and loss of innocent human life is the fate of all systems administered by human beings. We see "through a glass darkly" and argue over whether your system or my system prevents greater evil than the evil to which it opens the door. Politics is much more a trade-off between systems that can at best mitigate evil for a season or two than a choice between good and evil.

To support the execution of someone whom one believes may be innocent is indeed immoral. It does not follow, however, that the metaphysical possibility of being wrong renders the execution absolutely evil any more than the risk that I run of killing my children, by putting them in the car and driving them down the freeway, renders that act irresponsible or evil.

It is possible that the murderer you keep alive may murder again, either in or out of prison. That possibility does not make your anti-death penalty argument immoral. But
it does underscore its moral incoherence. You implicitly believe that it is evil to execute someone whose guilt is morally certain, even if it opens up the possibility that many who are certainly innocent will be murdered as a result of your "compassion." This is a perversion of justice. There is a Talmudic saying: "Those who are kind to the cruel will in the end be cruel to the kind." Those who use abstract notions of justice to shield evildoers from justice end up using abstract notions of justice as a sword against the innocent.

Elaine Nelson 5 days ago

In the news today, a man incarcerated for 30 years, was freed because the DNA evidence, plus prosecutorial ineptness, even criminal was allowed to be used in the trial. This is another of the 200+ convictions that the Innocence Project has overturned. So much for certainty of capital punishment.

Tom 3 days ago

Stephen
I agree that a higher threshold than beyond a reasonable doubt should be applied if the defendant receives the ultimate sentence of capital punishment. Does Sirhan, Sirhan killing Bobby Kennedy point blank with a multitude of witnesses watching on, and millions more seeing it on TV, satisfy you that with absolute certainty he murdered the senator? The guy should have been given the jolt in the hot seat over 40 years ago, but when the death penalty was temporarily tossed out by the Supreme court in 1969, his sentence was commuted to life.

Stephen Foster 3 days ago

So, Nathan, you appear to agree, in principle, that it is better that ten guilty persons are exonerated than for one innocent person to be convicted; but you appear not to agree, in reality, that it is better that ten guilty persons not be executed, than for one innocent person to be executed. Strange logic indeed…

Tom,

The Sirhan Sirhan assassination of Robert Kennedy is an example of the kind of absolute certainty to which I refer. If you couple that with a (universal) Simpson-quality “Dream Team” defense, we can talk.

Nathan Schilt 2 days ago

Not sure how you made that leap, Stephen. The fact that a lot of murders are enabled by the rules of our justice system is simply an illustration of my point, not an indictment of the system. I can also assure you, based upon my experience as a prosecutor in the distant past, that vastly more
than ten guilty people go free for every innocent person that is convicted in our American criminal justice system. I would be deeply troubled if one out of every ten persons executed was innocent. That is way too high a figure for me. It would not cause me to question the justice of the death penalty as punishment, but it would cause me to question the justice of the society implementing the death penalty under those circumstances.

Stephen Foster

Obviously Nathan, I made the connection based on your comments on this thread. I won’t bother to put the quotes side by side, because I think that you get the point. Besides, my question at this juncture is what ratio of innocent people being executed is theoretically sufficient to get you to conclude that, though the death penalty itself may well be a just punishment for many, the societal implementation of this penalty is too problematic—in terms of the likelihood of innocents being convicted—to be considered unjust to continue?

My point—and my standard—is that we should never, ever, take the chance of executing anyone if there is any possibility at all that they are innocent. The execution of one innocent person is enough to stop executing everyone; if necessary.

Stephen Foster

I suppose that the last sentence in the first paragraph should actually have ended, "...—to be considered just to continue."

Nathan Schilt

I understand your argument, Stephen - that executing a human being is so consequential that it should be treated very differently from "mere" deprivation of liberty and happiness through incarceration. But one could as easily argue that the taking of another's life by murder is of such consequence that justice favors lowering the due process barriers that delay execution and impair the discovery of truth. Overwhelmingly, murder convictions and death sentences are overturned on appeal not because of doubt as to guilt, but because of technical procedural "errors" invented and ferreted out by judges who are philosophically opposed to justice as punishment. Resolution of these issues depend on one's values and worldview, not logic and reason.

Nathan Schilt

So I take it, Stephen, that you are unwilling to look at the negative tradeoffs imposed by eliminating the death penalty? The maxim that it is better for ten guilty people to go free than for one innocent person to be convicted is just that - a maxim. I don't believe that perfect justice is possible in this world. Nor do I believe that the certainty of good faith human error occurring occasionally is a reason to suspend the imposition of justice. If we agree that justice requires that a murderer should, under certain circumstances, forfeit his right to life, it does not make sense to me to erect impossible barriers to doing justice.
Logically, the same rationale you use to abolish the death penalty could also be extended to deprivation of liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It's just a matter of degree. In fact, most activists who oppose the death penalty also favor other laws and policies that result in more crime going unpunished.

Stephen Foster

Perhaps you should re-read the blog once more Nathan. I don’t consider “the negative tradeoffs imposed by eliminating the death penalty”, whatever they supposedly are, to be worth the risk of executing an innocent individual.

Are you now indicating that you don’t necessarily subscribe to the “maxim” that it is better for ten guilty people to go free than for one innocent person to be convicted? If so, perhaps then you don’t personally agree with the “beyond a reasonable doubt” standard; or perhaps with the unanimous jury verdict standard, which you have said is based on this “maxim.”

Frankly, I agree that if ones values and worldview in this civil matter are neither undergirded or informed by, nor defended with logic and reason, then there can be no resolution with a differing view that is.

If you choose to make a case that the rule of law should be relaxed for those accused and/or convicted of murder, again, you have a blog in which to make that case.

It is a greater affront to justice if innocents are ever executed than if guilty murderers are held behind bars for the remainder of their lives. How is justice possibly served when—not if—the state occasionally, even through “good faith human error” (which I don’t but for a millisecond), executes an innocent person? “Good faith human error” might occasionally explain an unjust conviction; but never an execution. Finally, again, the difference between death by execution and life behind bars (or unhappiness?) is a bit more than a matter of degree!
God Loves Gays (and so should we)

Submitted Sep 29, 2011
By Kendra Perry

“As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned,’ said Jesus, ‘but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.’” ~John 9:1-3

Here’s a thought experiment for you: replace the word “blind” in this passage with the word “gay.” Or “bisexual.” Or “transgender.”

Yes, God’s ideal is that marriage should be sacred between one man and one woman (reference). God’s ideal is also that we should be born perfectly healthy and happy, and that we should live forever.

Jesus healed this man born blind, but there are still blind people in the world. When you see a blind person, do you tell him that he is an abomination of sin? That God hates him?

Is it possible to live a life that honors God AND be outside his original plan for marriage? Let’s ask Abraham, Jacob, or David. Ask your friend in church who had to get a divorce because her husband beat her. Or the friend whose wife left him for someone else. Ask how many respected leaders in your church have struggled with pornography. Or had premarital sex (talk about the Adventist sin that dare not speak its name!).

We all die.

Would you dare to say to the child born with a disability that he will burn in hell simply because of who he is?

Should my grandfather be disfellowshipped because he has a genetic neurological disorder that requires him to use a wheelchair everywhere he goes? Should he be required to choose between walking on his own, even though he physically cannot, or always lying in bed because using the wheelchair would stain the ideal of health that God established in Eden?

All of us, in some way, fall short of God’s original ideal. We all bear the marks of sin in our bodies, our minds, our hearts. I was born tongue-tied and had to have surgery to remove my frenulum (the small piece of skin below my tongue). I have a bad temper. I like to eat.

Think of the moment you face your besetting sin, maybe the secret one. The one that so easily ensnares you. Think of the moment BEFORE you act: the overwhelming craving to eat a whole box of Little Debbies. The wave of desire that sweeps over you when you see or think about that person. The hot anger rising in your throat when that stupid person says yet another stupid thing. The knowledge that you should, really should, put down the game controller because there are other things much more worth your time. The critical comment or piece of juicy gossip you find poised on the tip of your tongue even before you think about it.
Now, imagine that everyone and everything you know tells you that HAVING THAT IMPULSE (not even doing the act, just having the impulse) means that you will burn in hell. You are afraid to talk to anyone about it because acknowledging that you have that desire, that struggle, will condemn you. It will put you irrevocably outside your circle of family and friends and church and love.

From what I understand of my LGBT friends’ lives, they are not choosing to be the way they are to spite their families or church or God. In fact, most of them spend a lot of time trying NOT to be the way they are, often falling into deep depression before coming to the conclusion that they can either be honest about who they are or kill themselves. Too many choose the latter.

How can we condemn those who choose to be honest about who they are and the struggles they face? Our condemnation helps drive our brothers and sisters into the arms of the flamboyantly out, often promiscuous LGBT community, where they can find people who acknowledge and affirm their existence.

Their VERY EXISTENCE. While the church too often tries to tell them they do NOT EXIST. Or should not.

Too often, we conflate BEING lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender with outrageous promiscuity. But there are celibate gay people and promiscuous straight people. When a man says he finds women attractive, do we automatically assume that he lives like Hugh Hefner? He is not representative of every straight man any more than highly promiscuous gay men are representative of every gay man.

The attraction is not the sin. Not any more than the thought, “Chocolate is yummy” or that moment you stand before your besetting sin. Yes, leading a promiscuous lifestyle is clearly outside God’s will. But knowing who someone is attracted to tells us NOTHING about the decisions they will make about how to act on that attraction.

Some LGBT Christians (it IS possible to be both at once) believe that God is leading them to a life of celibacy. Should we not honor that heartwrenching decision? Some LGBT Christians believe that God is leading them to a life of committed monogamy with someone of the same sex. Did not Paul say in 1 Corinthians 7:9 that it was better to marry than to burn with desire?

I happen not to be attracted to the same sex, so I haven’t had to wrestle with my conscience before God about this particular issue. I have the privilege of knowing without question that it is POSSIBLE for me to have a romantic partnership according to his will. But I DO have those things in my life that I have to wrestle with him about. We all do.

Like Jacob (the polygamist), sometimes I must hold on for dear life and say, “I will not let go until you bless me!” And in those dark moments, often it is the fellowship, acceptance, and caring of other Christians that encourages me not to give up, to keep holding on, to believe that all have sinned and that the blood of Jesus covers all sins. Yes, even THAT one. Or THAT one.

Would it not be better to embrace our brothers and sisters with the arms of Christ and stand beside them as they wrestle to find a way to be themselves that honors God? How can we presume that our conscience, shaped by our own culture and natural inclinations, can speak for them?
At the very least, can we not compassionately acknowledge that in this world shaped by sin, we all find ourselves in less than ideal situations from time to time, and that it is sometimes difficult to discern God’s will in two less than ideal choices? We do our best to choose rightly, and sometimes we do. But sometimes we don’t. All of us.

But thank God, he still loves us. Still draws us to him. Still forgives and cherishes and leads us.

Someday (soon, I hope), it will get better once and for all when we meet that God face to face. In the meantime, compassionate acceptance and encouragement of our fellow LGBT pilgrims is one important way of letting his unconditional, transforming love shine in this broken world.

Rosalie Alderman

Thank you so much for this article. It is very well written & nice to see our church publicly comment about this issue. Thankfully for me this is not my "besetting sin", but my sister struggled with these feelings. It tore her apart for years. I was blessed to have been by her hospital bed as she lay dying of acute myeloid leukemia at the tender age of 26. She was in a coma and fighting hard just to breath. I leaned down and asked her if I could pray with and for her. She made gutteral noices that let me know she had heard me. I asked the Lord to draw close to her and forgive her sins. I then told her to please let go & the next face she would see would be Jesus on the resurrection morning. Within the hour her blood pressure fell and within five hours she was gone. She had only been diagnosed 4 months earlier. While this was extremely hard on my father & I since my mother had also died only 5 months before, we were both comforted in the knowledge that she is only sleeping, waiting for the Lords call on that wonderful day so soon to come. My father passed away just last year and I wait alone now to be reunited with my family. I can hardly wait to see them again! As I struggle with temptations and trials I take courage & hope in the knowledge that soon, if I am faithful, I will not only see my family again, but my Lord & Savior who willingly laid His life down for me. Oh how undeserving I am! I have many times cried out to Him that I would not let go until He forgave me. While I have let Him down over & over again, He has never & will never let me down, neither will He let any of us go without a fight!! I speak His name & ten thousand angels start singing and at His name every knee shall bow. His name is "Wonderful", "Counselor", "The Mighty God", "The Prince of Peace". At His presence the earth shakes, the sea parts open & yet all this wonderous power and majesty steps aside to honor the dignity of our individual choices. "Oh, how He Loves You and Me." But how do we approach such a magnificent Being? Shall we give Him our first born or "Ten thousand rivers of oil"? What does the Lord require of us but to do justly and to love mercy & to walk humbly with our God!!!" This is an excerpt of what my sweet Daddy wrote several years ago in the beginning pages of Steps to Christ. I am forever grateful to have been raised by such a Godly man who showed me Christs character in his daily life!! Rosalie Nicholas Alderman

pagophilus

I see the gay lobby is back! They don't stay quiet for very long. As soon as it's quiet on the Creation/Evolution front, they come back to fill in the void.

So tell me, why is it that gay people who try not to be gay get depressed, but promiscuous straight
people who try not to be promiscuous do not get depressed?

Or why should it be considered OK for someone to be homosexual and monogamous, but not to be heterosexual and promiscuous? Both are a mixture of a good trait with a bad one?

Better just to be obedient to God. To obey is better than sacrifice.

In 1 Peter 4:8 we read "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins", and in James 5:20 we read "remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins." Therefore we also see that if we truly love someone deeply we will help them turn from the error of their ways. This applies to both gays and straight people (promiscuous or otherwise.)

William Noel

Pagophilus,

There is far more to redemption and overcoming sin than merely choosing to obey. Only those who do not know the true natures of the sin that is in them or redemption are so quick to offer such a simple solution to sin.

There is far more to overcoming than choice alone. It begins with the power of God enabling us to see the nature of the sin that is in us and give us a desire to change. Then God gives us the power to choose to accept His power to overcome. Once in a while you hear of a person being delivered in dramatic fashion where they are no longer bound by a particular sin. Most of us have a long struggle where we learn day-by-day to trust God and depend on Him for power for that minute, hour or day. I take hope from the experience of Paul in 2 Corinthians 12 where he talks about the "thorn in my flesh" that God gave him to keep him from becoming proud. I praise God for the "thorn in my flesh" that God uses to remind me of my need for him each day and that my salvation is secure regardless of if I overcome that weakness prior to the Second Coming.

pagophilus

I accept what you're saying William. We cannot overcome by our own strength, only through the power of God. However the first step to overcoming is to admit we have a problem. And this is where the gay lobby falls apart because they don't believe they have a problem. They believe some people are born gay and are going to stay that way.

It is possible that people are born with a tendency to be attracted to the same sex, just as it is possible to be born with a tendency to steal or a tendency to be attracted to alcohol. That does not make it OK to continue to steal or drink alcohol, and likewise it does not make it OK to continue to practice homosexuality.

To struggle with sin is a good thing, because it means you acknowledge you have a problem. It's when you stop struggling that you are in serious danger.
Kendra Perry  
3 weeks ago

As a matter of fact, many straight people who are promiscuous and try not to be DO become depressed. Hence the existence of support groups such as Sexaholics Anonymous. The difference is that straight people in this situation are trying to stop a problem BEHAVIOR, not change the fundamental makeup of their being.

It is possible that God's will for his LGBT children is to live a life of celibacy (I do believe that the Bible leaves this somewhat open to question, but we will go with your assumption for now). If celibacy is the only option, shouldn't this make us shower MORE love and compassion on them? What a difficult cross to bear! God also said in Eden that it is not good for people to be alone, so our brothers and sisters who struggle with this need MORE support and encouragement from their church family, not less, if celibacy is the only road open to them.

Ella M.  
3 weeks ago

Kendra,
I agree with what you have said. There are many "straight" people who are single for one reason or another, and we expect them to be celibate. They may also face a life alone. It doesn't seem unreasonable to expect the same from the homosexual who strives to be a Christian. Happiness and success in life doesn't depend on someone else. However, I would not be against legal partnerships outside the religion, because our religion should not decide what others should do (as in banning same-sex marriages). I don't know--this is a tough issue for Christians.

Patti Grant  
3 weeks ago

Pagophilis: When did you choose to be straight? Your prejudice and judgmentalism is revealed in your use of the phrase "gay lobby." Oops!

Horace Butler  
4 weeks ago

This is the same drivel we hear from the mainstream supporters of this aberrant lifestyle. We're all born with a "disability." It's called a sinful nature. I've never heard anyone say that someone will go to hell for "having the impulse." But the impulse must be overcome. You can hardly put a disorder that confines someone to a wheelchair in the same category as homosexuality. There is no clear consensus on whether or not it is genetic. Some have hateful, violent impulses. Jesus called that murder. He would put homosexual impulses in the category of lust, which he called adultery.

The issue is not whether or not we love homosexuals. God loves everyone and so should we. But we do not affirm the lifestyle. The purpose of the church is to help lead sinners out of their sinful lifestyles, not aid and abet them like Kinship and some other "Christian" organizations are doing.
The argument that "they are born that way" is a very weak argument; one that comes from a defeatist mentality. We are all born with sinful natures. One could claim that they were born a kleptomaniac. So what? We've been promised power to overcome all inherited and cultivated sinful traits--that would include homosexuality, selfishness, pride, etc. So, whether or not that is "who they are," is irrelevant.

We each have our own areas of weakness. Some are attracted to one evil, some to another. But some are worse in the eyes of God than others. I have a hard time believing it is harder to overcome homosexual tendencies than it is to kick the alcohol or nicotine habit. We are not told to merely refrain from acting out our evil desires; we are told to overcome them.

While this evil should not be treated different than any other evil, at least in the sense that it must be overcome in the same way as any other evil, it does get treated differently in practice, because of its very nature. And we see in the Bible, God treated very differently, as well. To most people it is more repugnant than many other evils. The fact that it is not repugnant to some is an indicator of how low humanity have fallen.

Horace,

How badly you misunderstand and distort the natures of both sin and redemption! You raised the homosexual lifestyle as an issue making that sin repugnant. WRONG! That lifestyle is a product of the sin that is in a person, the identical sinful nature that is also in you from head to toe and fingertip to fingertip. I am thankful God doesn't get hung-up on our lifestyles and let that prevent Him from redeeming us. Only when you learn to look beyond the lifestyles and behaviors will begin to understand what it truly means to be a partner with God in His work of redeeming sinners, including both you and me.

That's the best you could do? Fixate on the last paragraph, ignoring the rest. I stated a commonly known fact: most people find that lifestyle repugnant. I didn't say that it prevents redemption. In that respect we are all in the same boat. The "white" lie will bar us from the kingdom just the same as being homosexual will (or being hateful, jealous, selfish, etc.). But God doesn't regard all sins as of equal magnitude, or He would not have destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. My objection is directed toward those who try to excuse it because "that's part of who they are." That doesn't cut it for any other sin, and it doesn't for homosexuality, either.

Horace,

You wrote "But God doesn't regard all sins as of equal magnitude, or He would not have destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah." On what scriptural basis do you make that claim? If one sin is of different magnitude than another, how do you know that Jesus' death at Calvary...
was sufficient to redeem you?

Horace Butler 3 weeks ago

"All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men . . . " Mark 3:29. That tells me that Jesus' death was sufficient to redeem anyone.

According to Paul, in his letter to the church in Ephesus, there are some sins that it is "a shame even to speak of . . . ." And yet there are sins that he speaks about a lot, and without shame. Clearly, then, some are much worse than others, and, apparently, will receive greater punishment in the judgment. Jesus said that there are degrees of guilt in his parable of the faithful and unfaithful servants. Luke 12:46-48.

William Noel 3 weeks ago

Horace,

The wages of sin is death. Period. Absolute. No exceptions. The difference you illustrate is merely that some sins bear greater shame, or are considered more "acceptable" by people. But they are equally repulsive to God and all bear the same penalty: Death.

If all sins can be forgiven, why are you having such a difficult time with redemption for someone whose particular sin is repulsive to you? How is their sin any less sinful or deadly than your pride or selfishness?

By the way, I learned the Gospel from a homosexual who knew the redeeming power of God and wouldn't let the opinions people had about him keep him away from God.

Trevor Hammond 3 weeks ago

Pastor Noel, It seems that it may not have been the FULL gospel you have learnt. Question is, do you believe that homosexual practices are acceptable biblical principles of righteousness and godliness? Or does such behaviour fall within the context of sin?

♥T

William Noel 3 weeks ago

Trevor,

First, I'm not a pastor. Just a redeemed sinner.

Second, what I learned was a major expansion of my prior, traditional SDA concept of the Gospel being powerful enough to redeem most while people with
some sins were questionable because their sin was more repugnant. I learned that all sin is equally repugnant to God and equally deadly to us, but the grace of God is able to look past the sin and touch the heart of the sinner who seeks redemption. My friend helped me learn to look past specific behaviors and love sinners the same way Jesus loves sinners.

In the time of Jesus lepers were the social outcasts with a stigma attached to them that is equivalent to how Christians view homosexuals today. Just touching a leper made a person unclean where they could not enter the temple. Still, Jesus was willing to look past that stigma and the threat of uncleanness to touch them. More than that, he healed them. Jesus offers to do the same for each of us today regardless of our besetting sin or the social stigma that may surround it.

Our biggest challenge as modern Christians is will illustrated in the book "Unchristian" where is it documented that the majority of Christians in America are viewed very negatively because we are perceived first as being anti-gay and anti-abortion. Our task is to understand redemption the same as Jesus so we can see sinners the same way He does. So I encourage you and others to look past the issue of homosexuality and learn God's power to redeem so that you can minister that redemption to sinners, whatever their besetting sin may be.

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**Trevor Hammond**

Brother Noel,

Sir, I have no grouse regarding you views above but just want say that God can use all sorts of people and avenues to speak to us (He even used a donkey once). I know of a dynamic preacher who told us that he learnt about Jesus love and the salvation freely offered to believers from the preacher's 'drunkard dad' (just as he told us). His drunken dad would call his family for worship and sing, preach and pray with them. The preacher became a believer as a direct result of this. (I can just picture all the 'christian' tipple revellers going yippee hallelujah!) ... but does this excuse the drunkenness? I respectfully say no to both drunkenness and homosexual behaviour no matter how virtuous they may be perceived.

♥T

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**William Noel**

Trevor,

As you reminded us, if God can use a donkey...

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**Horace Butler**

Have you read the rest of what I've said? I have no problem with redemption for those whose sins I find more repulsive than others. My beef is only with those who
would give them a pass because they were "born that way." Would we give the pedophile a pass because he was "born that way?" Right now the world embraces homosexuality and abhors pedophilia. Is one worse than the other? By your standards, apparently not. The term "scum of the earth" comes to mind when I think of pedophiles--but Jesus died for them, too. But they have to repent, as do all of us, including homosexuals (along with the proud, the selfish, the hateful, etc.)--whether they claim to have been born that way or not.

I'm still trying to figure out why those of us who refuse to affirm this lifestyle and find it repugnant are somehow Pharisees. I'm repulsed by the proud and arrogant, too, but no one calls me a Pharisee because of it.

Elaine Nelson
3 weeks ago

Perhaps scientific information can be furnished showing pedophiles are "born that way" or that "alcoholics are born that way" or even lovers of pornography were "born that way." Surely, with such a statement, it should be accompanied by indisputable scientific evidence. Otherwise it only reflects one's personal bias--no better than saying "sugar causes diabetes and Alzheimer's."

Kendra Perry
3 weeks ago

Point #1) You seem to regard the "gay lifestyle" as a monolithic entity. It is not. LGBT individuals and their lifestyles vary widely, as do heterosexuals. Some practice complete celibacy, some enter into committed relationships akin to marriage, and some are wantonly promiscuous. We certainly can find straight people who fall into all of these categories as well.

Point #2) Ezekiel 16:49 makes it clear that sexual perversion was not the only reason for Sodom's destruction: "Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy." I do not know one single solitary lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender person who has tried to beat down their neighbor's door in order to ravage hapless visitors as the Sodomites did to Lot's guests.

Can we not acknowledge a continuum of behavior for everyone -- gay, straight, and in between -- rather than posing the false dichotomy of GAY (EVIL) vs. STRAIGHT (PURE)?

Ella M.
3 weeks ago

Sodom can't be used as an example of homosexuality unless all the men in the town were homosexuals, and that would not be possible. They were no doubt family men who just wanted to let the visitors know they were unwelcome by humiliating them in the violent custom of the day. I believe this is what most theologians would say about this text. They were a wicked people.
William Noel 3 weeks ago

Horace,

I agree with you in rejecting the "god made me this way" claim. That claim blames God as the cause of sin instead of Satan while seeking to avoid personal responsibility for behavior.

DaveF 3 weeks ago

Thanks, Kendra, for your excellent article. Some seem to have missed the part about God's love being unconditional for all of us as sinners. I believe that is the center of the everlasting gospel that we are to share with the world. And, it is easy to grasp onto an "impluse" instead of realizing that sexual orientation is not a choice any more than being blue-eyed or left handed. But, since the Holy Spirit is the only one who can change a person's thinking on this, I don't expect to. I will just pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to work to lead us all to a deeper relationship with Jesus and His love.

William Noel 3 weeks ago

Kendra,

Thank you for such a thoughtful and realistic exploration of what it means to be less than perfect and still loved by God. I truly wish more people could understand that it isn't the particular sin we don't like in someone else that is the problem, but the sin that is in us making weak and imperfect and that no sin is worse than another because they are all sin and we all are in equal need of a savior, whatever our besetting sin may be.

Trevor Hammond 3 weeks ago

I agree: God loves SINNERS (and so should we)...

But for us to imply: God loves SIN (and so should we)... isn't what the Bible teaches no matter how politically, CULTurally and socially correct we want to portray ourselves to be. The bottom line? Condoning sin isn't the same as loving a sinner. To 'baptise' sin whether it is homosexual perversion or heterosexual perversion for that matter, as many cultural liberals (progressives) do, is an abomination to God and an open insult to the price that Jesus paid on the cross for our sin.

Ps 1:1  Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;

Having a goodwill gesture towards those who are disobedient to God may have it's place; but to stand in their way, preventing or obstructing them from coming to Christ for salvation tends to
display a kind of self righteous love which is offered without the cross. There is only one remedy for sin. Homosexuals can also come to the cross like everyone else and experience the joy of salvation. John 3:16 offers this to us and it comes as a result of God's love for the sinner.

Trevor Hammond wrote: The bottom line? Condoning sin isn't the same as loving a sinner".

This is exactly the point. And, as I posted in my comment above, the Bible states that by loving one another deeply we will cover a multitude of sins, and whoever turns a sinner from their evil ways will cover a multitude of sins, therefore loving one another is equivalent to turning a sinner from their evil ways, not supporting them in their sin.

You make the automatic assumption that a LGBT person is disobedient to God's will. In fact, the statement, "I am gay" makes a person neither more nor less a sinner than someone who says, "I am straight." It is the choices one makes about how to live out their attractions that determines obedience or disobedience. I trust that my LGBT brothers and sisters have spent time with God seeking his will for their lives and are doing their best to follow it, just as I am. I will continue to encourage them to do so, but the lifestyle they feel God is leading them to is between them and God, not me and them.

I have also observed that compassionate encouragement is often a more effective method of dissuading people from negative behaviors than self-righteous condemnation. See also John 8:1-11.

Maybe that assumption results from the way the subject is usually presented. Sympathy is expressed for people in these lifestyle, but little is said about helping them leave these lifestyles. These people need help, not affirmation. Much as I disagree with Focus on the Family on many issues, I do admire them for their work among homosexuals. Homosexuals who have been converted and left that lifestyle conduct a ministry to help rescue others from it. And it is not done in a spirit of condemnation. This put to shame Kinship, which claims to be a ministry to SDA homosexuals, but which, in reality, only affirms them in their lifestyles.

Does Mr. Butler have any problem with affirming the lifestyle of heterosexuals?
I find it telling that an increasing number of "ex-gay" ministries such as Exodus International and Evergreen International now warn those seeking change therapy that they cannot definitely eliminate all attractions to your same gender, nor can you definitely acquire heteroerotic attractions. Virtually all major mental health organizations have adopted policy statements cautioning the profession and the public against treatments that purport to change sexual orientation.

Those pieces of information in mind, I think it is all the more imperative that we show love to those in the GLTBQI community rather than concern ourselves with letting them know they need to turn from their sin as it is something most are likely to struggle with all their lives.

And while we're at it, the Bible demonstrates a pretty clear stance on divorce. If we spent even half the energy we spend condemning homosexuality helping married couples avoid divorce, or alcoholics recover, or workaholics find balance between work and family, I think society would be the better for it. Quite frankly, I've seen far more families severely impacted by divorce, alcohol, and workaholism than I have homosexual relationships. And the ones that have been affected by homosexual relationships have been married couples where one partner entered into a heterosexual marriage in an effort to "cure" themselves.

I also wish to thank Kendra for her excellent article. As we might have expected, Trevor and one or two others reacted in their usual I-know-whats-best-for-everyone and lets-call-sin-by-its-right-name manner. On one hand, it is so sad to realize that we have fellow church members with such views. On the other hand, I'm glad that Adventist Today has a free and open access policy for comments so we can all read in their own words how modern Pharisees express their opinions, e.g., "I thank God I am not as one of these . . . ."

Show me the quote where one of has said, "I thank God I am not as one of these . . . " I'm just as hard on the right wing wackos who march with signs that say "God hates fags," as I am on those who would try excuse the lifestyle on the basis that "that's who they are." Do we give that same pass to thieves, liars, or murderers?

Horace, 

Or, do we learn to love them as God does so we can look past their behaviors and attitudes and touch their hearts with His love?
Horace Butler 3 weeks ago

Love "rejoiceth not in iniquity . . . ." Love says, I don't condemn you, but, "go and sin no more." Loving someone is not the same as affirming them in their sinful lifestyle, whether be the current topic or some other destructive behaviour. And love cannot look beyond behaviour that is destructive to the individual. It seeks to rescue the person.

But those who appear to condone this lifestyle and behavior are quick to demonize those of us who wish to call it what it is. Funny that we are never demonized for speaking out against drug abuse, murder, adultery, or other destructive behaviours.

Kendra Perry 3 weeks ago

Let's look at the whole passage you're quoting:

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ... For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, 12.

One of the most important expressions of love (short of sacrificing one's life for another) is to see, listen to, acknowledge, and affirm a person's existence and experience. This can only be done on an individual basis. Any blanket statement that lumps an individual in with a group and makes a determination about their character is inherently unloving.

Just as we as Adventists wish to be known and understood for our individual (and widely varying) experiences and beliefs rather than lumped in with "those Adventists" or "those conservatives" or "those liberals," so LGBT individuals wish to be known and understood for their unique experiences, beliefs, and values.

Whether or not we agree with ANY person's beliefs, philosophy, or lifestyle choices, we can certainly be patient, kind, humble, and protective in our interactions with them. We can take the time and effort to see each person as a unique individual, loved by God, and treat them with the same respect we desire.

William Noel 3 weeks ago

Horace,

Ah, the inconsistency with which we view sins! That is how some sins have become more socially acceptable than others.

Let's not forget that God first forgives and accepts a person before empowering them to
follow Him and learn His ways. The first response I so often see to particular sins is to
condemn and demand complete obedience without first forgiving. Learning to forgive
first, to look past their sins and behaviors to touch their hearts has transformed my
ministry from theoretical to effective.

Trevor Hammond 3 weeks ago

The honourable Dr. Taylor informs us of the 'free and open access policy for comments'. I wish to
point out that it is not as free as he would like us to think. Take for example the deletion of some
of my comments and I think I did also notice the removal too of some others who come out in
support of traditional Adventist views. The Pharisees were more inclined to this type of
behaviour...

On the other hand, I would definitely give credit that such a position as pro gay support would
gain immense popularity within such a CULTure but will always only reflect a form of godliness
which denies the power thereof. The power of God unto salvation: that is.
♥

Kendra Perry 3 weeks ago

I believe this comment may be off topic.

Ervin Taylor 3 weeks ago

Mr. Hammond's comment is certainly off topic. But he probably can't distinguish what is on and
off topic very well because he usually has some cliche he wishes to share with us as is the example
above.

Trevor Hammond 3 weeks ago

Are we saying in all of this, that homosexual (GBLT) practice is an acceptable part of a Bible
based Christian Lifestyle and that cultural/political liberals, or humanists, within the church want
to force this position on the SDA church as a whole? Secular society is allowed to do as they
please even though they often encroach on the Church via the secularization within the church in
the form of liberals. Ok. Secular society remains separate from the church for various reasons so
now they have opted to legalize GBLT practice. I don't think that under these circumstances that
the church can do much except accept society's decision to do so - the church, with regret though,
will have to accept such trend but is not obligated to condone it. This however, shouldn't be
imposed on the church. Anyway, while the church and state may be separated from an earthly
perspective, one CANNOT separate God from all of this. He identifies what sin is and HIMSELF
makes adequate provision to remedy it - by (in Christ) dying on the cruel cross of Calvary in order
to reconcile us to Him. The death of Jesus also shows the wrath of God for what sin which is a
direct result of disobedience. Whilst love and mercy abounds in God, sin has to be dealt with by
Him and what a price Jesus paid for all of us: including those with a disposition towards
homosexuality. God’s call is for ALL sinners to repent: including GLBT.

Take for instance 'repentance' - which is an intricate component of Righteousness by Faith. We all go our own separate ways as sinners, in DIFFERENT directions, whatever; together with the many, many sinful habits and practices we are all susceptible to. When we repent (μετανοέω metanoeo) - it signifies a change in our thinking, habits and practices; but in the opposite direction, in obedience to God by Faith in Jesus Christ. Heterosexuality on God's terms is NOT sin: whilst homosexuality (GBLT) is - the Bible is clear regarding this and the church therefore CAN DO NO OTHER. As hard as this may be to accept and come to terms with there can be NO compromise with sin. The spiritual warfare we engage in is NOT against 'flesh and blood' and homosexuals but the powers of darkness and spiritual wickedness. Yeah, so the church will AWAYS advocate loving the SINNER but NEVER the SIN. There is no grounds to conflate the two...

♥Γ

Kuni Lutzle
3 weeks ago

Thanks, Kendra for modeling a compassionate approach to our LGBT brethren.

I grew-up in Lewiston ID and Clarkston WA. The one bridge crossing the Snake River bore both the cross-town traffic and US Hwy12. On the Lewiston side, for several years, there was a mentally ill man, who would say "repent" to every car as it came by. Fortunately he was usually quite intent on this task and while walking by you could hear a steady, though fairly quiet: repent --- repent --- repent ---repent... (engaging the man in any kind of conversation was risky and unpredictable)

I think general calls for repentance on an open blog like this are equally useful. Such deeply personal issues need to be addressed in a deeply personal way. The blanket condemnations issued in these blogs might convict someone of sin, but they don't really offer salvation. In the begining of the letter to the Romans Paul asserts that the "unnatural desires" he saw in Roman society were the result of people having abandoned God. If we want to change that we must help them rebuild a relation with God and assure them of His love for them even as homosexuals. Only that relation could ever change them and any effort bring about the change ourselves, however infinitesimal, simply undermines the work of God in their lives.

If you can't in good conscience condone homosexual relations, don't. But condemning them does no good, better to concentrate our efforts at revealing the love of God to those arround us and then let God do the condemning at the end of time.

Kuni (transgendered)

William Noel
3 weeks ago

Kuni,

Thanks for speaking up! We've got a lot to learn about loving instead of condemning. I pray...
that you are growing in God's love.

Timo Onjukka
3 weeks ago

Erv stole my line.
"Thank you God you did not make ME one of THOSE"
(insert favorite excuse to not love someone)

I'm also eternally thankful that the sin of pride and ego has been so thoroughly and perfectly removed
from all those who would so readily throw stones at any other behavior.
Isn't it nice we can all just will our prideful egoistic rebellious flesh into perfect submission?
Unlike THOSE people, who continue to CHOOSE to SIN?

Perhaps the prayer ought be thus:
"I thank you you God, that you did not make *M E* supercilious and epithetic"

Ervin Taylor
3 weeks ago

I wish I could write as well as Mr. Onjukka. So focused on the important point (which I assume that Mr. Hammond will never get).

Horace Butler
3 weeks ago

I'm puzzled by Timo's comments. I must have missed the posts that said anything about not loving sinners (homosexuals or otherwise). And I missed the part about anyone wanting to throw stones at them. There is no excuse for sin. What applies to one sin applies to them all: they must be overcome. What many of us object to is the attempt to aid and abet sinners by making excuses for them. And since it seems that more attempts are made to excuse homosexuals than with many other types of sin, that is the one we often focus on. If SDA's were trying to make excuses for bank robbers we'd be on that one, too.

Timo Onjukka
3 weeks ago

Perhaps the message, unless spelled out in specific letter of law, is lost on some. I'll not belabor you specific quotes.
Seems Jesus asked "have you the spirit, or the letter" of the law?
The letter of the law killed Him.
"Rather than quoting you a measured little bit of dill or cumin,
I'll serve heavens real treasure".
The spirit of the law saves. Sinners.
Even the (non-evolutionist, non-homosexual, non-alcoholic et al) "saints"
-but perhaps only when they seize no "letters"!
Elaine Nelson 3 weeks ago

Why must we look at people and merely identify them by their gender orientation? Do we look at someone and say "He, or she is gay?" That seems to be the one and only label yet we do not do that with heterosexuals. Is sex the most important part of all humans?

A gay or lesbian person may be a highly-skilled physician, teacher, engineer; in fact in all professions. Do we first admire their professional skills, or do we dismiss them as being a homosexual? There seems to be an inordinate puerlism about people that borders on one's own sexuality. To those who are so concerned about other's private lives, I say "Get a life of your own and stop worrying about other's." It is between them and their God and God has not given anyone the job of judging.

Horace Butler 3 weeks ago

Good points. But the problem is not that we are concerned with others private lives. If they would keep it private we wouldn't be so vocal about it. But too many of those in this lifestyle are trying to cram it down everyone else's throats. They don't want tolerance or even acceptance; they want affirmation, and if that isn't given, the label "homophobic" is attached to whoever disagrees with them. I don't want to know what they do in their private lives. When someone announces that they are homosexual they've told me more than I wanted or needed to know. I don't run around announcing that I'm heterosexual. It would sound stupid.

William Noel 3 weeks ago

Horace,

It is your choice whether or not to respond and speak about what you see, or to keep silent. I suggest holding your tongue and asking God to give you understanding of the person so you can know how to point them to Jesus for redemption.

Elaine Nelson 3 weeks ago

I know a number of homosexuals, and rather than "cramming it down one's throat" they try to remain very inconspicuous and have not ventured to announce to anyone their orientation. Have you found SDA attendees who are anxious to "cram it down your throat" or are you referring to the gay pride marchers? Surely, they should not be all placed in the same category.

Do engaged or married couples "cram it down one's throat" or is it merely acceptance of their situation? When couples, whether same or opposite sex walk into your church, how can you make an instant determination as to their sexual orientation? How many have come up to you and made an announcement of their sexual life? Why is it anyone's business how other people choose to
live? God will decide.

William Noel 3 weeks ago

Elaine,

Well said.

One big lesson I take away from my reading of Romans is that we are all equally guilty of sin in God's eyes and in equal need of redemption. There is no basis for me to condemn someone because they steal, are proud, lie, break the Sabbath or are homosexual. I can't say I'm always consistent about doing it, but God has taught me to look at others and not be offended by what they do. Instead, He has taught me to view them as human beings whom God loved enough to die for so they could be saved.

In contrast, condemnation, whether by highlighting a person's particular sin or painting them with a label making it sound like they are defending sin, drives people away from God. How I wish those who condemn could see their true nature and understand how much they are doing the work of Satan and how deluded they are when they claim to be doing God's work! The work of God is redemption that is as simple as 1-2-3: One, I forgive you for what you've done. Two, I offer you the power to depend on me for the strength to overcome. Three: Seek me each day for this power and let me teach you how to live in that empowerment moment-by-moment as you meet temptation.

Trevor Hammond 3 weeks ago

Ms Perry,  
Ma'am, are you saying then that a monogamous homosexual relationship is equivalent to a monogamous heterosexual relationship. Do you have Biblical support of such a doctrine? Loving someone of the same gender and the disposition of some who lean towards homosexual behaviour does not give one license for marriage. The secular state may allow this as marriage and err in so doing but nowhere in the Bible is such an abomination taught. The cultural/liberal faction within Adventism has erred in this regard. Wrapping sinful acts up in so-called 'love' is just a weak attempt to provide a man-made salvation by works doctrine. This is not the message of the Bible. Perhaps I will mention some verses should I post again. Traditional Adventism has bent over backwards to love sinners, including those from the homosexual community. Maybe just loving them isn't enough: they need the power of God unto salvation in order to become 'over-comers' just like we do to. Maybe we have dishing out too much of the cultural Adventism glasses which have been much tainted with worldly secular compromise which has even distorted how we view God's love too.

What I see here is a classic case to the challenge to love people and baptise the sin rather than the sinner. I think there in an infinite chasm between the two. May I say here too that no-one is advocating gay-bashing either...

♥T
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kendra Perry</th>
<th>3 weeks ago</th>
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<tr>
<td>I believe that gay marriage is clearly outside God's ORIGINAL Edenic plan. But it seems to me that the Bible allows room for God to lead and use people who are outside this original plan as so many of us are in this sinful world.</td>
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<td>God used Abraham, Jacob, David, and Solomon in powerful ways even though they married multiple women, remained polygamists throughout their lives, and even despite the chaos that their decision to practice polygamy brought to them, their families, and their country (in the case of David).</td>
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<td>Again, I see this issue on a continuum instead of as a dichotomy. If heterosexual marriage between two individuals is the ideal, a committed monogamous homosexual relationship is closer to that ideal than a promiscuous lifestyle of either orientation. It may even be closer to the ideal than heterosexual divorce and/or remarriage situations.</td>
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<tr>
<th>William Noel</th>
<th>3 weeks ago</th>
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<tr>
<td>Trevor,</td>
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<td>Some sinful behaviors are more obvious than others. However, making that observation does not authorize you to condemn it.</td>
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<td>What many Christians do not understand about the homosexual condition is just how conflicted it can be. They don't need condemnation. The need redemption. Unfortunately the predominant Christian view is that redemption begins with showing someone how sinful they are and to worsen the condemnation. That is not how Jesus treated sinners. Often the first thing He did was relieve people of their guilt so they could begin to see that redemption was more than desirable, that it was possible. Was the transformation immediately complete? No. It began immediately, but they had to learn day-by-day to live in God's love and to depend on Him for the power to overcome temptation.</td>
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<th>Deborah Swart</th>
<th>3 weeks ago</th>
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<td>Just a question; how did Messiah overcome His urge to engage in any form of sexual activity? This is my view on the life essentials=&gt; love, air, water and food; without it we will die. A lack of sexual activity is not life-threatening. Neither did Messiah die for a lack of sexual activity, nor did He lay down His life for the purpose of proving a point that without sex a person will surely die. In fact He mentioned that there are ppl who are eunuch by choice. Besides the ones who, for whatever physical reason have to refrain from sex. And there is no such thing as a &quot;homosexual&quot; gene. Sexual behaviour is an adopted behaviour, when one responds to certain feelings; which do not totally depend on hormonal secretion; a person is way more than the sum of his/her hormones. Shalom and God bless in Jesus' name</td>
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Kendra Perry

3 weeks ago

But surely we can agree that even if one is able to overcome sexual desire, the desire to be in an intimate emotional partnership is very powerful? Being single and alone is also not in God's original Edenic plan.

So, again, if celibacy is the only option available to LGBT individuals, it seems that the church should acknowledge the very painful losses that entails and provide EXTRA support and encouragement to people facing this difficult dilemma.

William Noel

3 weeks ago

Deborah,

Excellent question! The Bible does not give a specific answer that I can point to. Still, it says that He was "tempted in all points" like we are, yet without sin. Add that everything Jesus did was empowered by the same Holy Spirit who is offered to us today so that we can overcome temptation and become empowered to minister His love to others. So I think it is consistent to assume that the Holy Spirit empowered Jesus to be in such control that He could remain completely focused on the purpose for which He came.

Ervin Taylor

3 weeks ago

Any comment about Jesus' lack of sexual activity is probably off-limits because it would bring up such sensitive issues that any rational discourse would be impossible. However, if one believes that Jesus was 100% human (as all of the historic creeds of the church insist), let's not be so sure about something which was never addressed in any of the gospels probably for very good reasons.

Elaine Nelson

3 weeks ago

Is there a heterosexual gene? How can one be so certain that there is a gene for sexuality, as each individual has either xx, or xy, for females and males. This says nothing about the orientation. If someone says he has always been gay, who has the ? omniscence to question him? Who lives in his skin but that individual? Is it perfectly natural and O.K. to have heterosexual feelings but not homosexual? People will not die without sexual activity, but it enriches their entire life and longevity.

Who should be able to deny another person's most intimate choices?

There was no understanding in the time the Bible was written of sexual orientation. The texts spoke of "abominations" and that is seen in both hetero and homosexual promiscuity. Is there no difference between promiscuity and monogamy? Does the Bible ever address homosexual monogamy? If so, why did David love Jonathan "more than the love of women"? Did they have to engage in sexual intimacy or could they truly have experienced love? Or, is it appropriate to love someone of the same sex but only becomes sinful if physical intimacy is involved?
Kendra Perry 3 weeks ago

I agree that it is essential to listen to and respect the experiences of individuals. Every LGBT individual I have spoken to feels that they have been that way, if not from birth, at least from earliest conscious memory.

William Noel 3 weeks ago

Elaine,

The "homosexual gene" is something the gay community has long sought with little result. From ancient times we have inherited the concept of gender as strictly male-female with little or no variance. Still, increased understanding of genetics has shown us incredible variation in the human genome. Why is it that tall parents can have a dwarf child, or vice-versa? That a person with severe learning disabilities can have a child who is a genius? That certain diseases like breast cancer or physical "defects" are linked to genetic predispositions? While the rate of occurrence as a part of the total population is low, there is considerable variation in gender. Growing up the limit of gender variation I learned about in science class was limited to hermaphrodites, who were described as some varied combination of male and female. Over recent decades as I've sought to understand the gender community, I've learned since that medicine recognizes dozens of variations in the human genome that are evident in a range of gender-related behaviors and physiology.

The sum of this is that, to my knowledge, there is no identified "homosexual gene." Still, the frequency of genetic variation means that we are as likely to meet someone with a visible physical deformity as someone who has one of those genetic gender variations. So the sooner we get over being offended and condemning and get focused on redemption, the better we can do God's work of redemption.

Tom 3 weeks ago

I decided to see the latest on AT. My computer crashed a few months ago and I just got around to getting it rehabilitated so I have not commented on AT for a few months. I needed a breather anyway. Some subjects, especially this one, can get really heated up at times.

First I want to thank Kindra for the thoughtfulness she put into this blog. Myself, I have felt torn between two worlds all my life. My sexual orientation is definately gay, even though I forsook the lifestyle 30 plus years ago, married, fathered 3 children and have no plans to leave my wife of over 28 years.

Someone commented here that it would be easier to overcome homosexuality than alcoholism, smoking and the like. Believe me when I say that is NOT the case. When I came back to the church in 1980 I quit drinking. I was definately an alcoholic, in most part because I couldn't cope with the fact I definately had attractions to my own sex and acted on it for several years. Alcohol numbed the pain and guilt. Were it not for a compassionate pastor and this one family in the church who loved me back to God and didn't reject me because I was gay, I would have killed
myself. That was back in 70's when if you were found out to be gay, the rejection was overwhelming.

When I quit drinking, I struggled with a desire for a drink for a time, but my thirst for the booze completely vanished eventually. Alcohol prompts no response in me now, but only repulsion if I see or smell it. For years I thought that my attraction for my own sex would do the same. I even fell in love with a woman and for a time thought I was "cured". But after a time thoughts and desires came back to haunt me.

I have been faithful to my wife all these years, but let me tell you unless you have lived with this inside you you can't begin to understand the full dimensions of it all. I am one of the fortunate ones. The track record for mixed orientation marriages is not good, but in some cases like mine it can be done. I am not sorry for a moment that I married but I would not recommend that someone gay think they can change from gay to straight by getting married. It will give you no end of sexual frustration. It is sort of like trying to write with your left hand when you are right handed. You may be able to write something with some semblence of legability after trying hard enough, but it just doesn't come as natural as using your right hand.

I hope that all made sense. I'm convinced that you can change behavior but changing sexual orientation is quite another thing. Change therapy which claims to make one straight from being gay is a cruel hoax. I tried it twice, the last time just 3 years ago and I had a nervous breakdown over it all. The only ex-gay there can be is in lifestyle changes, but not sexual orientation.

Understanding this is vital to the church responding with compassion to people who struggle with homosexuality. Too often folks see the strident gay pride in-your-face gays and automatically think that represents the rest of us. It doesn't. Please understand why when some of you say that gays are looking for special treatment in the church and liken us to drunks, adulterers and the like it is really offensive.

Having traveled this road and struggled I can only tell you that love will win when censor and rejection will only contribute more conflict in the life of someone who is gay, and drive them away from God.

I don't have all the answers, but I know the One who does and I believe that only a full commitment to Him is the answer. I'll leave it up to Jesus to sort it all out and lead in each one's life, as he sees fit and in His time.

William Noel 3 weeks ago

Tom,

Thank you for being courageous and speaking out as you have! Your's is a voice of real experience amid the volume of the loudly and strongly opinionated.
Kendra Perry
3 weeks ago

Tom, thank you so much for your willingness to share your experience in a public and potentially hostile forum. I believe that hearing and trying to understand the experiences of individuals is the only way that those of us who don't face these issues can begin to grasp the struggle.

The commitment of people like you to Christ and the church in the face of prejudice, ignorance, and even outright hate truly amazes and humbles me.

Elaine Nelson
3 weeks ago

Tom, you speak for many silent gays who are fearful of speaking out. Your pain is palpable and those who so causally dismiss it are ignorant and know not whereof the speak. It's akin to a single person telling a parent who's lost a child "I know how you feel." No, you cannot know unless you've walked in their shoes. It's so easy to condemn OPS (other people's sins) than our own.

Trevor Hammond
3 weeks ago

Brother Noel,
Sir, I have no grouse regarding your views above but just want say that God can use all sorts of people and avenues to speak to us (He even used a donkey once). I know of a dynamic preacher who told us that he learnt about Jesus love and the salvation freely offered to believers from the preacher's 'drunkard dad' (just as he told us). His drunken dad would call his family for worship and sing, preach and pray with them. The preacher became a believer as a direct result of this. (I can just picture all the 'christian' tipple revellers going yippee hallelujah!) ... but does this excuse the drunkeness? I respectfully say no to both drunkeness and homosexual behaviour no matter how virtuous they may be perceived.
♥T

Elaine Nelson
3 weeks ago

Love and condone are NOT synonyms. Check your dictionary for the proper use of those words. To love does not mean to condone. You love your children, always (hopefully), but you may not always condone their behavior (that, too, would be unusual). Is it possible to believe that a prostitute could be in heaven (how about the woman taken in adultery?). God's love is so much greater that humans.

Maybe you know someone who is perfect and in no need of being forgiven. When will that time come? God overlooks our sins, not approves.
Thanks Elaine for the affirmation. I still want to meet you in person sometime and swap some good stories over a glass of lemonade, but I haven't been south of Sacramento all year. Trevor, I think I know what you are trying to say, but have you ever considered how it sounds on this end, the way you express it? You just don't get it, like a lot of others, and it is wishful thinking for me to even expect that of some people.

I don't believe that being gay is a choice, who would be dumb enough to want to be something that is the bane of so many fellow christians. Neither do I think it is some God given gift. How absurd to think that God deliberately made someone gay. At the very least it is an aberation of the natural order of God's created intent that should neither be celebrated nor shamed. It is just the way it is with some of us. It matters little to one like me why I am attracted to my own sex. All the studies, arguments, so-called scientific evidence on both sides of the great divide over this issue, only adds to the anxiety and doesn't change what I am, or make me feel more loved.

Those who ask questions like does God love pedophiles, terrorists, prostitution, etc. really don't care about ministering to gays or help lift their burden in a winsome way. I won't go so far as some do and say they hate us, but any lip service about loving every one is superficial at best. With a finger in the face the directive to GO AND SIN NO MORE is given with a trumpet blast, while "neither do I condemn thee" is either skipped over or begrudgingly whispered and unheard as an afterthought.

I believe that Jesus gave the more pronounced emphasis when he said "neither do I condemn thee" to Mary Magdelene. Obviously he didn't follow that with a "you can go back to work now..." His words, "now go and sin no more" was an invitation to a better life than that of a prostitute. He uplifted this used woman in a desperate moment of need and made her feel like something more than mere filth, and it won her heart to Him.

This brings me back to the questions as they were posed by Trevor. Hey pal, can you see what I am talking about now? Don't automatically assume the worst of a gay person and equate them with filth.

Thanks for the invitation, Tom. I do get to Sacramento a number of times a year as there are more family members there now than in Fresno and Sacramento is such a beautiful city and the northern foothills where some live that it's always a short and pleasant trip--seeing loved ones.

How can one claim to accept God's love but reject it for others? If their expression of God is true, why would anyone want to know Him? It gets more tiresome all the time to hear such expressions of gays, comparing them to pedophiles and prostitutes which exudes such a Pharisaical attitude that repels the average person. Such a representation of Christ is actually a repellant to all but the cultic personality.
"God loves everyone and so should we. But we do not affirm the lifestyle. The purpose of the church is to help lead sinners out of their sinful lifestyles, not aid and abet them like Kinship and some other "Christian" organizations are doing."

Right on good brother. Why do the practicing gays seem to be deserving of such excessive attention? It's likely the gay lobby which may have infiltrated this site, the Spectrum site as well the Episcopal church, the Armed Forces ad infinitum. Isn't it possible that much of the concern about AIDS has made many very concerned about the sexual practices of gays? Some sins have a much more deleterious effect on the human race than others.

This article does not specify practicing or non-practicing gays. Part of my point is that we need to stop assuming that someone who is gay is of necessity participating in sinful behaviors. They may in fact be celibate, or even monogamously married to someone of the opposite sex (as Tom very poignantly points out).

The bottom line is, whatever anyone's behaviors, they are PEOPLE just like you and me. They are in need of love, acceptance, and yes, a Savior. Approaching anyone in an attitude of love and humility is, in my opinion, more likely to help them meet that Savior than an attitude of condemnation and arrogance.

People behave in particular ways for identifiable reasons. The gay lobby is vocal in seeking recognition and legitimacy because they are not finding it and they are seeking to minimize or avoid the social and moral condemnation that accompanies their behavior.

The voice of Christianity has been loud on the topic and quick to condemn. Christians in North America are known for being anti-gay and anti-abortion. We are not know for being FOR anything. Our challenge is to stop condemning and learn redemption for ourselves so we can be seen as being FOR the power that can relieve their guilt and give them peace.

If God is for us, who can be against us? If we are FOR the redemption of sinners and have truly experienced that power in our own lives, how can we not be seen as FOR the fallen sinner and seeking their redemption?
differences; now it is simply applying equality to all the troops. Is there a problem with equality?

Was it churches who initiated AA? Or, did they turn their collective backs and proclaim them sinners? Ditto for divorces: ignore and maybe it will go away? Is there a more deleterious sin than domestic abuse? Something the church has long turned a blind eye and pretending that Christians could not be involved. Is there a church without sinners? Is there a hierarchical list of sins in order of worst to least offensive? Has gossip been dealt with—a pervasive condition in judgmental churches.

Tom
3 weeks ago

Hmm, I don't remember saying anything about affirming a "lifestyle" of anything but that of a christian. I have already said I am not in the league of the in-your-face gays. As for Truth Seekers claim of the excessive attention of gays, he's right, homophobes do give excessive attention, negatively that is. Some folks are clearly uncomfortable that we even exist. They would just as soon we stayed locked in a closet of fear, so they can pretend we don't exist in the church.

As for gays serving in the military, the late legendary conservative Senator Goldwater said, "you don't have to be straight to shoot straight," when the subject of gays serving in the military was debated shortly after Clinton was in the White House. You are right Elaine, AA was not started by a church.

Cherry Ashlock
3 weeks ago

I appreciate the article.

"Since we can not know what is driving a person from the inside, what the reasons are for his or her behavior, we aren't capable of judging fairly. When we criticize another person, we are only passing sentence on ourselves."

Just knowing 'truth' does not change a person's heart. History shows that those who claimed to know the most about God often were the cruelest and most evil. Saying you are a christian but not acting like Jesus gives God a bad name.

Matt Britten
3 weeks ago

What a curly ball: God loves gays and so should we. (I like it!)

As for me, I still believe in the healing ministry of Jesus. He came to restore the whole man: mind, body, soul and spirit. The only question I would ask is: Why don't we see healing ministries in the church? We have all sorts of interesting stuff on vegetarian cooking and natural health remedies etc etc...but where are the supernatural "gifts of healings" that Paul talks about (1 Cor 12:9)?

If restoration was Jesus' goal, I'd say we need to take another look at the ministry of Jesus, with all
of His grace, love, and power to heal the broken, the sick, and set the captives free!

William Noel 3 weeks ago

Matt,

Why don't we see healing ministries in the church? Simple: we're not seeking the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Everything Jesus did was empowered by the Holy Spirit. He told us to seek the Holy Spirit and that he would be present with us only through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the first revelation of God mentioned in scripture and the last. But we're largely ignoring Him. Why?

Kendra Perry 3 weeks ago

Does the fact that Jesus healed blind men mean that the church is failing if there are still blind people in the world? Jesus also healed many people with physical deformities. Should the church be healing all of these?

William Noel 3 weeks ago

Kendra,

The Bible promise is that believers would be empowered to do a number of supernatural things, including physical healing. So I believe the Biblical answer to your question is a definite "Yes!" Whether it is you doing the healing or me is not the issue so long as we are both ministering in the way God has giften and empowered us.

Elaine Nelson 3 weeks ago

Matt, such a suggestion has been tried before--check the success rates. "Change therapy" is, to be blunt, a colossal failure. Believing is like wishing--it won't make it so. Are all those who are born with anomalies of all sorts "cured"? Did God ever promise to heal all those who needed healing? "Supernatural gifts of healing" are just that--supernatural and rarely seen. Where are the examples of one who was born gay who became hereotsexual--not in behavior, but in complete gender orientation? To pray for a turn-around orientation is to tell God he made a mistake, isn't it?

Margaret Lynn 3 weeks ago

After reading through the article and thread, the main idea that I think Kendra and others were pointing out was that we should try and understand before judging...if we are to judge at all. (I think that would be a no.) It is not an easy answer. I do feel like living in a sinful world has caused many issues in genetic make-up, and also has impacted God's original plan for families and couples. I also think that the Bible is clear on what sin is...sexual immorality is rampant in our world in every possible way you could imagine. The
Devil has preverted it so much, far from God's original plan. We should all be praying for God to take sin out of our lives, and purify us for His purpose, and asking Him to use us to glorify His name and lift Him up.

God does want us to encourage each other and help each other if we are stumbling spiritually...but I also think that I'd be much more receptive to Sister Matilda knocking on my door to discuss an issue of concern in my spiritual life if she had first established a caring friendship with me. That being said, the issue of homosexuality is still difficult. I can say it is a wrong practice based on the Bible, along with fornication. As Kendra implied, I don't see too many people being pulled aside in the church and counseled on their sins of fornication. (I've always noticed the blatant difference in many people's strong feelings against homosexuality vs. fornication.) Think about it, sexuality is a very private issue, and who would really be comfortable discussing it with a random church member???. Maybe this is an issue that should be discussed and worked through with one's Heavenly Father, and a close circle of supportive, loving friends and family.

Why couldn't our church be that family? I've often noticed that when someone has a "bomb" to drop, the place they are most afraid to discuss their issue is in the church. The church could be that loving, supportive family, where people are not afraid to share their deepest fears and struggles. It starts with building that loving relationship, and then allowing God to use us in each other's lives according to His purpose. Isn't that what family is for? :)

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William Noel 3 weeks ago

Amen!

Kendra Perry 3 weeks ago

Margaret said:
"Maybe this is an issue that should be discussed and worked through with one's Heavenly Father, and a close circle of supportive, loving friends and family. Why couldn't our church be that family? I've often noticed that when someone has a "bomb" to drop, the place they are most afraid to discuss their issue is in the church. The church could be that loving, supportive family, where people are not afraid to share their deepest fears and struggles. It starts with building that loving relationship, and then allowing God to use us in each other's lives according to His purpose. Isn't that what family is for? :)

I love this. Yes, yes, and yes.

Matt Britten 3 weeks ago

Hi Kendra,

In my Bible it reads that "Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people" (Mt 4:23). A short list is then given: "... and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them" (Mt 4:24).
I find in Jesus ministry, he had power to heal bodily disorders, mental disorders, emotional disorders and spiritual disorders. Nothing was beyond the range of His grace and power.

Jesus gave the early church this very same "power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease" (Mt 10:1). I believe God wants the whole church to have the same power (Ac 1:8).

I grew up in the church and suffered from "closet" sins as I suspect most of the church does. (I say closet because of the shame and fear of condemnation if they were shared). However, after God got me and things turned around, I received a lot of personal healing. Some friends and self decided to pursue the ministry and lifestyle of Jesus (Jn 14:12). So, back in 1996 we organized time at the end of our home groups meetings to pray for people regardless of the need. I have to say the gospel of Christ still possesses the same power from when it was first preached. We have had blind eyes open, fused back disks healed, Rheumatoid arthritis healed, emotional and mental disorders healed (insomnia, depression etc) sexual disorders healed (homosexual orientation included). It is hard to describe the grace (where people felt comfortable sharing with a couple of folk) and the power that was released in our meetings. I guess you would have to see it to believe it!

Like I said, I still believe in the healing ministry of Jesus. By and large the church still believes in the third person of the God head, but rejects much of His power and presence by the unrenewed mind (Rom 12:2). Paul mentions that the carnal mind (unrenewed) is in fact at war with God (Rom 8:7). Now going back to Jesus' message: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel." (Mk 1:15).

That word repent actually means "change the way you think". We don't think "Kingdom". That would be a good place for the church to start!

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Elaine Nelson 3 weeks ago

One may be able to "change the way he thinks" but where did Jesus promise to heal or cure all our conditions? Can someone pray to be cured of heterosexuality (for some that might be a relief!)? Are only homosexuals to pray for "cures"? Should someone born with a physical anomaly from birth pray for cure? At what point should we accept that God created us and we are in his image? Are Down's syndrome folks in God's image? Why aren't homosexuals from birth not in his image?

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William Noel 3 weeks ago

Elaine,

Please consider Paul's "thorn in the flesh" in 2 Corinthians 12. He doesn't say what the problem is, but he thanked God for it because it kept him humble and aware of his need of salvation. I struggle with a particular weakness to sin that used to be the cause of great spiritual despair until I let God make it my "thorn in my flesh" and use it to keep be depending on Him. When I did, the despair left and was replaced by the confidence of salvation. Have I completely overcome or been healed? No. Still, looking back I can only believe I would have been ruined spiritually if
that problem had been removed. Instead God is using it for His glory and I have a gift-based ministry that is strengthened by knowing my weakness and need of God.

Matt Britten 3 weeks ago

Hi Elaine,

I don't recall saying that men and women aren't created in God's image. But I would say, that image is somewhat distorted (since the fall). My understanding is that the Gospel is all about restoration. Satan is the destroyer, God is the restorer. I used to think (like yourself) that people are born this way or that way etc. But since I embarked on this journey with the great Holy Ghost, I have now come to believe, that nothing is impossible for those that believe.

I don't know too much about Jesus promising to heal all our conditions but I have read that the believers "will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover" (Mk 16:18).

I have also read that it is "with his stripes we are healed." (Isa 53:5; 1 Pet 2:24). But then again, that is the Gospel.

Elaine Nelson 3 weeks ago

Yes, God has promised to restore us, but not necessarily in this life. Most will be fully restored in Heaven. Until that time, we should exercise humility and less judgment and accept people as God created them. Habits can be changed, who they "are" cannot.

To hold out "nothing is impossible for those who believe" often ends in a cruel hoax. Be very slow on such promises. Only God fulfills HIS promises, not man.

TnHoney 3 weeks ago

Kendra, I very much appreciate your column. Have you all already discussed the 7 or so verses that speak to the idea? What are the hebrew and greek translations of the few references concerning such?

Kendra Perry 3 weeks ago

We have not, and I am not an expert in the original languages. Can any language scholars help us out?

Kendra Perry 3 weeks ago

In effort to promote at least a few positive comments on this article, let me post a question for reflection. (This also helps satisfy my English teacher inclinations).
In what ways have YOU seen "the works of God" displayed in the lives of LGBT friends, family, or acquaintances?

As I said in my comment to Tom above, the commitment of my still-churched LGBT friends to Christ and the church in the face of prejudice, ignorance, and even outright hate truly amazes and humbles me. It challenges me to keep my focus on Christ rather than perceived slights I may receive from other church members.

Matt Britten
3 weeks ago


David reminds himself to not forget all God's benefits: "Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases" (Ps 103:2,3).

My point being: I believe churches are to be healing communities where the presence of God dwells bringing healing and restoration to all people regardless of their background and state of being.

There are some good ministries out there (outside of our denomination) that are bringing sexual wholeness to gays and lesbians. One in particular that I have visited personally (in 1999) was Desert Stream Ministries at the Anaheim Vineyard, California. I enjoyed hanging with these folk. This ministry was started by a former gay called Andrew Comiskey. He has written several books but the one I highly recommend and maybe the most popular is: Pursuing Sexual Wholeness.

It would be nice to see churches transformed and receiving everyone in their midst with no judgment, fear, shame or condemnation. It would also be nice to see healing ministries flourishing bringing restoration to the whole man.

Maybe Kendra Perry might like to investigate such ministries (I have listed but one) and spearhead something in our tribe...Just a thought.

William Noel
3 weeks ago

Matt,

It is refreshing to see your desire for more ministries in churches. While it is hopeful to see churches transformed by such ministries, I am not hopeful of seeing such a change happen. While there are a wide variety of situations in different congregations so there is potential, my observations have been of most Adventist churches I have visited being deep into the defense of particular doctrines and traditionalism instead of seeking the renewal of the Holy Spirit. Expecting a new ministry to take root and grow in such a situation is like expecting a tropical plant needing frequent watering to survive in the Sahara desert.
Fortunately I have the blessing of being part of a congregation (Grace Fellowship in Madison, AL) that was established with the objective of helping each member discover their giftedness and developing that giftedness into ministry. The results have been nothing short of amazing. Our formation was more of a church division than a church planting. We came out of a tradition-bound church where ministry innovations were short-lived and died miserable deaths. But there were enough of us living on the west side of the county who shared a desire for gift-based ministry and freedom from traditionalism that we formed a new congregation. What is most amazing to me is watching how the Holy Spirit grows new ministries and how those ministries contribute to the harmony and fellowship of the church. I am far closer to my fellow church members than I have been at any other church where I have been a member. We share bonds of love that I never knew were possible. We are one of the fastest growing congregations in the conference— all without holding traditional evangelistic crusades, passing-out literature, etc. It is all the result of the Holy Spirit.

So if someone wants to pursue the Holy Spirit and grow new ministries, but they are trapped by tradition, I suggest they start a new congregation.

Kendra Perry 3 weeks ago

Matt,

I don't dispute that God COULD change someone's sexual orientation and/or gender identity, but I also know that there are many good, devout Christians who suffer from seemingly inexplicable physical, mental, and emotional impairments throughout their lives despite prayer, laying on of hands, and the search for miraculous healing.

I don't feel called to start a ministry such as you suggest, but if you do, please go ahead. What I feel called to do is to make God's love visible to those around me. Some of those people happen to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, and these are my thoughts on how I personally, and other individuals in the church, could best make God's love visible to them.

Matt Britten 3 weeks ago

Hi Noel,

I agree whole heartedly. I have had my fair share of working within traditional church "frames". I did not touch on that in my former post as it might of been a bit overwhelming for some folk (I don't want apear critical). I'm glad you brought it up. I believe, new congreagations with fresh expressions of Holy Spirit creativity and power, with a Christ-centred Kingdom focus will release heaven on earth...and that is what I pray: On earth as it is in heaven!

Glad to hear what God is doing in your corner of the planet.

Blessings
I too believe in an all powerful and healing God. He used 3 specific people, a pastor, a husband and his wife in the church to minister and show me the love of God and convince that I wasn't just fuel for the fire of hell because I was gay. Yes he healed me from living in a self induced hell of hating myself and a destructive pattern of looking for love in all the wrong places. He rescued me from alcohol, the gay bars and bathhouses. He changed my life, He even brought the one and only woman in my life that I could have ever loved enough to marry.

But as one that has "been there, done that" I could never pray the gay away. Change? After 25 years of struggling and wishing I would just wake up straight some morning, it never happened.

For what ever reason changing sexual orientation is a myth propagated by folks who think if you just pray hard enough, or have hands laid on you, demons cast out, filled to overflowing with the Holy Spirit, and a host of other notions, that God will miraculously make you straight. Many of us have clung to some of this snake oil spirituality to our utter dispair and come up feeling more burdened than ever. I know, I have been there.

I am not trying to make excuses, just telling it like it is from my experience.

When I finally unshakled myself from this thinking, I came to see it more as a thorn in the flesh that God has chosen to leave, so that I will rely more on Him. My love and committment for Him has deepened since I have come to that kind of acceptance of myself. That doesn't give me license to leave my wife and go and do the things I haven't done in over 30 years now.

Not every gay persons experience is the same so I would never want to make my experience the template for every gay person. Neither do I want Andrew Cominsky (psuedonym), who claims to be so completely ex-gay that he has absolutely no same sex attraction anymore, the poster child for reparative therapist and many religionists claim that one can become totally straight, even in the realm of temptations. I met him at the conference on homosexuality at Andrews in 2009. After watching and listening to him, let's just say I wasn't convinced that he was straight, as in completely changed to heterosexuality.

As I see it, the burning question in most gay people's mind who are christians is, "will the church love me if they knew?" Let me tell you, the secular gay community is out there with a big welcome mat and plenty of affirmation, for those who feel rejected by the church. People naturally gravitate where they feel the most love and acceptance. I would rather the church be the safe haven where gays can be spiritually nurtured and feel that God loves them.

Absolutely. This is my key point, stated much more clearly than I was able to.
William Noel
2 weeks ago

Kendra,

That issue of where and how a person feels acceptance should be at the heart of everything we do in God's name. As is well illustrated in the book "Unchristian," modern christians are know first and foremost for being anti-gay and anti-abortion. I already instinctively understood that but reading it still was a startling confirmation. So I like to turn the issue around with some questions: "I see what you are against. Now, what about God and redemption are you FOR? Do people know you are for that? Or are you just assuming they know it?" It makes people think.

Ella M.
3 weeks ago

Thank you, Tom, for sharing with us your very real person experience. You have led your life in a most admirable way. If it gives even a little understanding to some, it will be well worth your effort. It is hard for me to understand the brashness of some on this subject.

I wonder if some of the change therapies have found success in those who are bi-sexual or have a lesser degree of desire. I once heard there are different levels of homosexuality and that even "straight" people could experience it to some degree. I haven't heard this recently, so maybe the idea has been disputed.

Thank you, Kendra, for presenting the issue in the way you have. Unfortunately this is not being done in church papers and the misunderstanding continues. What bothers me the most is that when people hear someone is homosexual, they jump to the conclusion that they practice it. If we were to do this with all single people, we would believe all of them as being sexually active.

Kendra Perry
3 weeks ago

Yes. The term "gay" or LGBT is absolutely loaded with assumptions, many of which I have found are completely false. I think people can only speak in broad, judgmental generalizations if they do not personally know someone who has this life experience.

Kevin Riley
3 weeks ago

A sociology course in gender, sex and sexuality would prove useful for many who want to join this debate. Much about homosexuality - including how many homosexuals there are - depends on how you define 'homosexuality'. Both sides tend to choose definitions and statistics that suit there agenda. It is rarely as simple as either side in the debate would like to believe - real life rarely is. Dividing those who are homosexual from those who are heterosexual may prove to be as simple as dividing those who are black from those who are white, and just as pointless.

Kendra Perry
3 weeks ago
This is also very true, Kevin. I have lumped LGBT together here as one general category for the sake of starting a very simplified conversation, but even the four separate categories lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender have widely varying life experiences, not even taking individual variation into account. This is indeed an extremely broad and complex topic, but often not presented that way.

And we have not even begun to pretend to try to address issues such as genderqueer or intersex. So, yes, lots more ground to cover.

Dividing homosexuals from heterosexuals is not as easy as dividing those who are black from those who are white. Where would one put President Obama, who is a combination of both.

The Kinsey scale of 0-6 with complete heterosexuality, with no sexual feelings toward the same sex at 0, and a 6 for those who are exclusively attracted to their same sex. There are a lot of people who fall somewhere in between those exclusives. They may never act on homosexual attractions, but it is there nonetheless to varying degrees. I believe that sometimes, boys who have been sexually molested, by an older male, at an early age, become confused and gravitate toward homosexuality even though that is not their dominant orientation. Andrew Cominsky says he lost his innocence at the hand of another man at age 11.

The ongoing sexual trauma fixated in his mind that he was gay and for a time as an adult he embraced the gay lifestyle. He claims to now be ex-gay totally. Many church members use his testimony and point the finger at other gays and say "see it can be done". The notion is hinted, if not downright stated, that gays don't want to change. In reality what it is considered change in sexual orientation, is really someone who wasn't gay in the first place, but more likely acted homosexually because of early molestation trauma.

Perhaps what I've ventured into here is not the purpose of this blog, but I am just trying to give some possible answers to questions Ella posed

Quite honestly many of these studies on both sides of the great divide over this issue, are a source of further anxiety at times. Remember we are people not laboratory rats in some big experiment.

Kevin Riley wrote: "A sociology course in gender, sex and sexuality would prove useful for many who want to join this debate. Much about homosexuality - including how many homosexuals there are - depends on how you define 'homosexuality'."

And this is the problem with sociologists and other researchers. They would like to define something to the n'th degree. And by the time they have examined the issue and categorised everything they have been corrupted by the behaviour they have been examining.

God, on the other hand, states things very simply: don't lie with a man like you would lie with a
woman, and don't exchange the natural use for the unnatural one. So, what God is saying is, don't do man-to-man (or woman-to-woman) what should only be done man-to-woman. There doesn't need to be any more detail than that. Otherwise we have to get into detailed definitions and semantics and might end up like Bill Clinton "I did not have sex with that woman", which he "technically" did not have according to some people's definition.

Elaine Nelson 2 weeks ago

So "don't do man-to-man" what should done "man-to-woman"? What a novel way of expressing a most intimate physical love expression! Are such moments simply what we "do" to someone?

Seen that way, all sex becomes what Augustine described:

"if it was good company and conversation that Adam needed, it would have been much better arranged to have two men together as friends, not a man and a woman. Whether it is in a wife or a mother, it is still Eve the temptress that we must beware of in a woman."

The letters of Jerome teem with loathing of the female and Tertullian wrote of women as evil temptresses, an eternal danger to mankind. Is it any wonder that all sex became an evil that only should be permitted for procreation? Or that this fear and hatred of women could lead to closer relationships between men? Can there be love between opposite or same sex without sex? Can two same-sex people live together without being suspect as to their sleeping arrangements? Whose business is it? When we can allow other to make their most intimate decisions and trust they have sufficient ability to do so without our aid, we will be less encumbered with judgmental duties which God has never given us and learn to accept and love people who may not be just like us.

BTW: "God says" is the usual biblical writer's ensuring that such admonitions will be obeyed. Did God actually say that or did man choose to do so? What part of the Bible did God write?

pagophilus 2 weeks ago

*What part of the Bible did God write?*

All of it, using human hands!

Elaine, what does early church fathers' loathing of women have to do with anything. Sometimes it seems like you ramble on just because you can.

Trevor Hammond 2 weeks ago

I think we need to be candid and admit that this ain't just about God (and us) loving 'gays'. The article also strongly alludes that homosexual behaviour should be accepted as 'normal' sexual behaviour even to the extent of accepting it as the closest thing to the Edenic ideal. In other words, is it better to be in a monogamous homosexual relationship than any other sexual immorality? Question is: "Did Jesus teach this? Does the Bible teach this?" Or is it just but the overwhelming
dictates of a liberal culture within a society that has lost its way? A society that cannot discern spiritually between truth and error; right and wrong; light and darkness; and which has its constricting tentacles right within the church just cannot be trusted - the word of God will have to suffice: always. Extrapolating sexual immorality to be the equivalent of what constitutes biblical holy matrimony is clearly a secular cultural (even socio-political of late) worldview rather than a biblical mandate (in my opinion of course). I admire the sincerity of Ms. Perry’s article and the charge to love others which I will wholeheartedly concur with; but to be asked the Church compromise biblical truth in its quest to love, just ain’t on...

♥T

Kendra Perry 2 weeks ago

I am not SAYING any of these things. I am asking questions. If some of those questions lead you to think that gay marriage might not be out of the realm of possibility for a Christian, well, there you go.

It is still entirely possible that celibacy is God's will for his LGBT children. Again, I DON'T KNOW because this is not an issue God and I have to work out together.

But if celibacy is the only road, all the more reason for love, compassion, and acceptance in the church.

Timo Onjukka 2 weeks ago

Jesus had lunch with Photina at the well of Sychar; she perhaps was looking for a 6th (and better) husband. He did not revile her behavior, and encouraged her to return to her husband. Jesus sat on the curb with Mary, and covered her with the dignity of his robes, rather than reviling her apparel and behavior, "caught in the very act". One wonders...if homosexuality (today, ostensibly due to a puritanical cultural aversion more than anything) is ascribed special condemnation within the broader corporate church, why was Jesus entirely mute on the subject? Does anyone believe homosexuality did not exist then? Or perhaps he was less concerned with the little specifics, and more with encompassing principle.

Seems that both of these women became phenoms, Photina as the first evangelist, who brought back all the men from her village to hear him speak, and Mary became the most celebrated, and devoted disciple, loyal into the Friday afternoon dark of death, and the Sunday morning tomb.

It is disheartening to see that many in our church today would preclude these offices (and even membership; certainly social inclusion) from such people, on basis of gender, and behavior.

Somewhere I've heard he came for the sinner. A prideful and perfect church of neo-conservative has no need...seems we've compromised on the spirit of the Royal command, in lieu of the (misconstrued) letter. Perhaps erring on the side of love is not erring at all.
William Noel 1 week ago

Timo,

Preach on! You are so right that Jesus came to save sinners, including you and me. I have been richly blessed by the fellowship of believers who are willing to be open about their weaknesses, pray with and encourage each other in times of temptation, and celebrate the victories God gives.

Somehow we've come to expect a greater degree of perfection in our leaders than is credible or possible. The sooner we recognize they are human and embrace that weakness in the fellowship of grace, the better we will all be for the experience.

Trevor Hammond 2 weeks ago

Another point to also consider in all of this is paraphilias. These may also be characterized by claimants who may say they were ‘born’ this way. Much of this sexual immorality and perversion is ironically accepted wholesale by modern society. Such immorality stands diametrically opposed to a biblical understanding of sexuality, sex and the sanctity of holy matrimony which clearly refers to a relationship between a man and woman. I found a list of paraphilias in a medical journal article on Psychiatric disorders found among some of the aged.

Mind you, much of these paraphilias are accepted as normal among many in western society. (Incidentally the disorders found among the aged were exhibitionism, fetishism, frotteurism, pedophilia, sexual masochism, sexual sadism, transvestic fetishism and voyeurism). My question is: "What if those who practice such claim they are ‘born this way’ too" - just like the gblt constituency does?

As an aside: “Homosexuality and Bisexuality were listed as paraphilias ("sexual deviations" in the original terminology) in early versions of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders and were removed from the third version.” [wikipedia]

♥T♥

William Noel 1 week ago

Trevor,

The claim "I was born this way" is most often used as a convenient excuse to shift blame onto God and divert attention from dealing with the root issue. As Christians we know the root cause of the problem is sin. The problem we as Christians have with the issue is that the defects sin has cause in us include genetic variations where there are real situations where a person can legitimately claim that they were born that way. These are no different than other genetic variations that we see as color blindness, baldness, physical deformities, etc.
Any discussion of "God made me this way" really is fruitless unless the person is willing to recognize both that they have a problem and allow God to transform them from within. This leaves us to deal with the problem of judgemental Christians who define redemption as another person being instantly victorious over whatever sin they are accused of having.

Rngrbird 2 weeks ago

Kendra,
Not sure I understand how your comments are the church's stance on the subject of gays, etc. Is your stance what our church stands on and it's belief? I must first tell you that I admire you for putting your name to such a controversial subject, I don't feel I have the knowledge to write such an article. I can only say from my perspective I cannot point an accusing finger at anyone - as I have so many faults of my own. My opinion is that people who are a part of what you called as a group: LGBT is solely a choice of those people as individuals. I, just like all people will solely have to answer to God. I must say it seems hard to believe that our SDA leadership would in words "condone" a lifestyle that is without question Not in harmony with my understanding of God. Jesus loves the sinner, and hates the sin is what I understand. It would appear that this subject, just like that of La Sierra having to defend the position of teaching creation in our college. Taking into account that I 'most definitely' do not have a place at all to judge others does not mean I cannot feel the human emotion of anger towards the pastor of the Fayetteville, NC church - Pastor Huskins as he swept the dirty little secret of my ex-wife's adultery under the rug, and subsequently divided the church. So you see, I have my own demons and faults to work on. I can only imagine that many would condemn me for my 18+ years of service to the U.S. Army in the Rangers and Special Forces. I'm so glad that God is in control, and I'll admit that I need his mercy and grace every day.
Robert T. Wooster, Sr.

Kendra Perry 2 weeks ago

This is NOT the church's official stance on homosexuality or same-sex marriage. These are my independent and individual thoughts.

Official statements voted by the church can be found here:
http://adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main-stat46.html (Homosexuality)
http://adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main-stat53.html (Same-sex marriage)

Tom 2 weeks ago

Rngrbird,
You show that you don't have any knowledge on this issue, as you stated, when you admit that your opinion is that being gay is "solely a choice of those people as individuals." You make it sound as if it was as easy as choosing whether to turn the hot or cold water faucet on. It isn't!!!! If it was I would have chosen years ago not to have been gay!!!! I would go even further than that. I would have just about paid any price to not be so. As it was I spent a considerable sum on change therapy, only to find it was a waste of money.
Why is it that some folks can't accept the fact that some people are born that way? When I finally accepted that as a possibility, if not in fact a probability, with myself, I was finally able to salvage at least a little self esteem and peace of mind. It didn't change my behavior, which I have already stated was continued fidelity to my wife of 28 years, in spite of the sexual frustrations I live with on a daily basis.

"As for love the sinner, but hate the sin," that is a tired worn cliche forced from the lips of someone who can't muster anything better to say because they are uneasy about this subject. It's what I call lip service love. To gays it's more like a guided missile closing in on a target, than a genuine gesture of love.

Elaine Nelson 2 weeks ago

My personal opinion, not subjected to professional study, is that all dark-skinned people have chosen to be that shade. If they were unhappy with that condition they should have undergone therapy to have a change of color.

My personal opinion is that people who have no understanding of what it's like to be other than themselves, show an ignorance of human beings that is extremely sad. I chose to be female and all those who are male simply chose their sex, also.

Tom 2 weeks ago

Can a leopard change its spots? I guess with enough bleech anything is possible. Look at Michael Jackson whose skin seemed to turn from black to white over the years. I get your point, Elaine, and I agree. However I have never seen a cat turn into a rat. But I have seen a few people turn into rats, figuratively speaking that is. I did have a cat once that liked cheese and a dog that drank milk. So I guess one can say that behaviors can be changed or modified, but the orientation remains the same. Marrying a woman did not make me straight anymore than standing in a garage made me a car.

Elaine Nelson 2 weeks ago

Tom, well said! Spoken from personal experience, which few can claim. Advice is often freely given from those who have no understanding of what they speak.

Steve Billiter 1 week ago

Why are you attempting to create undue, overly sympathetic feeling, as well as making excuses for homosexuals? Not once did I read a single line that says the homosexual sinner needs Jesus for deliverance from sin just like everyone else does. Why? Coddling any type of sin and those who
engage in these sins, may simply lead to the eternal death of the person(s).

Rev 3:19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.
Rev 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.
Rev 3:21 To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

The real message of love to the one who breaks the Ten Commandments is the one that leads to Jesus Christ—His forgiveness as He absolves the repenting sinner and encourages him/her to “go and sin no more” as the Holy Spirit provides power for obedience. Overcoming all sin through Jesus Christ leads to everlasting life in the soon coming kingdom of God! Making excuses for any sin is the message of hate—please brothers and sisters, let’s not give those for whom Christ died that message.
1Jn 5:12 He that has the Son has life; and he that has not the Son of God has not life.

**William Noel** 1 week ago

Steve,

I take hope in Paul's declaration that God is able to save "unto the uttermost ALL who come to him." How far is "the uttermost?" How inclusive (or exclusive) is "all?"

Are not homosexuals also sinners whom Jesus died to save? I think your concepts of salvation and God's power to redeem need some expansion.

**Elaine Nelson** 1 week ago

Perhaps someone can furnish the commandment condemning homosexual orientation. Is it a "sin" from birth? Jesus clearly stated that neither the cripple nor his parents sinned.

For anyone who is heterosexual to condemn a homosexual is denying that he or she needs to walk in another's moccasins first, before condemning. Jesus said he did not come into the world to condemn the world but to save the world. "Who is without sin cast the first stone." Does someone here claim to be sinless? Only he who is sinless should cast the first stone.

**Trevor Hammond** 1 week ago

This is something new: associating homosexual practice as a 'cripple condition' rather than what the Bible calls it ---> sin.

♥T

**Kendra Perry** 1 week ago
You are persistently conflating ORIENTATION with PRACTICE. Elaine clearly says ORIENTATION in her post, yet you respond to her talking about PRACTICE. They are NOT the same.

Elaine Nelson 1 week ago

No one is being asked to condone homosexuals, but there is a command to love one another and to be kind to others is God-given. How can one be insensitive to others without necessarily condoning? Must someone be questioned on his actions and beliefs before he is accepted as one of God's children? Who has been asked to judge others? God is the judge and man has not been given that task. Let God be God, in the end will not God do what is right?

Has a homosexual asked you to condone his actions or orientation? Have we not sufficient problems in our lives that we can begin worrying about others? Why the puerile interest in other's private lives?

pagophilus 1 week ago

Must an adulterer be questioned on his actions and beliefs before he is accepted as one of God's children? How about a murderer?

The word "Lord" implies a master-servant relationship. We are willing servants of Christ. How can we call him "Lord" if we refuse to obey Him? Try telling your army commander "yes, you are my commander but I'm refusing to obey you!"

Who has been asked to judge others? We have.

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

1 Corinthians 1:10

But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.

1 Corinthians 2:15

I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren?

1 Corinthians 6:5

Then you shall again discern Between the righteous and the wicked, Between one who serves God And one who does not serve Him.
Malachi 3:18

To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.

Isaiah 8:20

“I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars;

Revelation 2:2

Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”

John 7:24

Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?”

1 Kings 3:9

Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem;
See now and know;
And seek in her open places
If you can find a man,
If there is anyone who executes judgment,
Who seeks the truth,
And I will pardon her.

Jeremiah 5:1

Elaine asked the question about which commandment condemns someone for a homosexual ORIENTATION. Some of you folks commenting here are so uncomfortable with this subject, you can't see a gay person but for sexual acts. You are long on coming down on sin with a capital S, which yes God does. But first he loves the sinner beyond anything we can even imagine. The church has not done a very good job ministering to gays. It has only recently made some small steps to try and understand it all.

I put my pants on one leg at a time like any other man. If I am damned to hell just for having a homosexual orientation, then I might as well put in my order for ice water now. Me thinks folks in the amen corner of the church who cheer on with a "let those gays have it" with those few clobber texts, may want to put in their order too before it's all sold out. They are certain to get a
Ella M.  

Would any of the "straight" men on here understand this better if they put themselves in the place of a man without a wife in today's world and no chance of marriage? Would they have no desires? Would they be lonely? Would they long for human touch? How would their lives be changed? Would they be happy? Would they struggle with their desires? Hopefully they would be celibate--but would it be easy? I don't think so. And if you met a woman and fell in love, yet could not marry, how would you feel? Or if your wife were around but you could not touch her and it would be considered a great sin if you did and it would cause people to persecute and even hate you? Does this make some sense to you? If it does then I suppose you could relate to this condition of homosexuality. Until you can understand that you were born this way as a heterosexual, you cannot understand these others' trials and pain.

I am not a man but a happily married woman, yet hope to help the "judges" here to have some sensitivity. My plea is on the behalf of the few men I have known or heard from over the years who suffer the pain of this affliction they came into this world with. "Let him who has not sinned pick up the first stone."

Kendra Perry  

I think these are very powerful and apt analogies. Thank you for sharing them.

Ymous  

Thank you Kendra for dealing with a very sensitive area in your blog. Thank you Tom for sharing your experience. I appreciated reading all the responses.

It seems that some blog responders consistently accused Kendra (and anyone else who urged that love and compassion should be extended to those who are gay) of condoning sin. They seemed deaf and blind to the distinction that was repeatedly made between orientation and practice, and to have condemned both. After reading all the responses, I do not recall a single one that condoned the practice. Kendra and perhaps Elaine and others did point out that homosexuality is not the only sin, and is no worse than many other sins. But then so did Paul in the latter part of Rom 1, so they are in very good company. (According to EGW, if there is a priority list, pride is at the top).

Though I have had little contact with gays or lesbians, I believe from what Tom and others have said that while the gay lifestyle may be a choice, the orientation is not for many gays. Someone denied that there is a gene for being gay. But is not the tendency toward sin--sinful human nature--passed on through the genes? If not, where does it come from? Why cannot it include a tendency toward homosexuality in some people? Then too, what about the effects of possible unknown
pre-natal influences or sexual abuse in early years? I think there is great deal of evidence to support the idea that many are born with a constitution that predisposes them toward a homosexual orientation, or develop it very early in life.

Apparently God does heal some people from gay desires. But does He heal all? Will He heal everyone of every disease that comes along--including aging itself, which in a sense could be considered to be a kind of "disease?" Will God remove sinful human nature and all of its genetic consequences from all who truly believe in Christ before they die or before He comes? Or is it rather that He gives increasing power to overcome the effects of sinful nature, and that victory comes not through changed human nature but through a consistent, living, growing relationship with Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit? I would be particularly interested in seeing answers that the more critical blog responders would give to some of these questions.

Kendra Perry 1 week ago

I am so glad to see that someone is reading carefully!! I would also be interested in hearing the responses to those questions.

Ron Henderson 1 week ago

It really saddens me to see how some people pick apart clear statements of God against sin, and the sin of homosexuality. It also saddens me to see how some continually repeat trite, well worn, excuses to defend the indefensible; it also saddens me to see how some cannot see how many Adventists love all people, including gays; as if the majority of us hate gays!! If one does not warn gays of their sin (as we warn other non gays) who will do it? Kendra? Do we love the philanderers and hate gays? Of course not. We love them all, for such were some of us. However, we have the God given mission to kindly talk to gays (as we talk to others) about their lifestyle. If it is not done then their blood will be on our shoulders. Finally, just look at the gay agenda for our society and you should think twice and control your feelings! Never give the impression that to be gay is okay.
There is no gay gene! The Swedes tried to prove it unsuccessfully; one is not 'born' gay no more than one is born an adulterer. Every sin is wrong, and that includes homosexuality.

Kendra Perry 1 week ago

BEING gay does not make a person any more or less a sinner than BEING straight. Philanderers are those who have engaged in a behavior outside God's will. Knowing that someone is gay tells us nothing about their actions.

Ella M. 1 week ago

Ron,

Maybe you didn't mean it that way, but you are still not making a distinction between homosexuality as a condition and the practice of it. As stated here, you are judging people rather than the behavior. That is a big part of the problem in the church--people are being stereotyped by the way they were born rather than actions and lifestyle.

When you talk about the practice outside the church, however, you need to recognize that the marriage or partnership of one person to another borders on civil or even religious freedom. Like polygamy in some countries, a missionary does not come in and start condemning the practice, first they start with Christ and His love for us before getting into cultural practices. And I do not see that one of these sins is worse than the other. I think adultery is more pervasive and deadly to more people. It is usually when the polygamist decides to be a Christian that they need to make a decision about their lifestyle. The same goes for co-habitation.

William Noel 1 week ago

Ron,

Where in scripture do you find greater condemnation of homosexuality than other sins, or that one sin is more despicable to God than another? I find that God is against all sin, that we are sinners and that He offers His power to redeem us from whatever sin we battle.

Ron Henderson 1 week ago

In my ministry I have never hated gays; nor have the members of my churches. I hear that there are a lot of people who hate gays, yes, just as there are a lot of gays who hate non gays, do not kid yourselves about that. Why Kendra and others think we mainly hate gays is strange to me. Who does not know that God does not hate gays? God came to die for gays as well as fornicators. But both will perish if they continue in their sins after being warned. I fail to understand how a guy with a great desire for women is any different form a guy who has a great desire for men. In no way should they be positively reinforced in their sins. Just as the Christian who is struggling to keep his desire for women under control through God's power, so must the Christian who is gay in his thinking, control his abnormality as well through God's power. Whether it is the abnormal sin of homosexuality or the abnormal craving for women, it is still sin on both counts, and both need a Saviour, and indeed have one. Will they accept him? It is the place choice. And someone has to
introduce him to them. Again I say, you do not seem to know what the gay agenda is for our society; go to Europe, especially the UK, just look at the governments of Canada and other countries and you should tremble. As a minister I would be arrested in my home country, the UK, if I preached on homosexually from the Bible. I am allowed to preach about other forms of immorality but not homosexuality. They would like to make homosexuality as just, and good, and pleasurable for all to follow. Our children from kindergarden are indoctrinated in that. So when we talk out it is not hatred; people must be warned for their own good or they will be lost if they continue in any sin, including homosexuality! Someone must stand up for God and preach the clear Word, calling men from their sins, and yes, the sins of homosexuality, for heaven is for transformed homosexuals as well.

Kendra Perry 1 week ago
You assume that all gays are practicing. They are not.

Anonymous 1 week ago
Such a pity that there are still so many homophobic individuals still out there preaching hate. I would bet that none of you antigay folks have ever had a friend that was close enough to you to share their pain and struggles trying to fit into a straight world and very straight church. The lack of compassion is really hard to understand when all you have to do is look at the example Jesus set in his life where he accepted people of all stripes and focused on healing rather than condemning. How about letting God be the final judge and working on showing other's love instead of hate. Ever thought of that? How you can call yourself a christian while being so hate filled is unbelievable. No wonder the modern world has little use for today's "christians".

Tom 1 week ago
I don't think that anyone here is preaching hate, or at least as I define the term. But there is a great deal of insensitivity, misunderstanding, and downright ignorance displayed toward gays in general here. Walk in my shoes for awhile and you might see just a hint of what I am talking about.
For the record, I was never molested as a child, I was raised in a loving home by two parents, attended church weekly, went to church school, and was surrounded by straight people. I didn't even know anyone who I might have remotely thought was a homosexual, yet as far back as I can remember, I found myself oriented to my own sex. Imagine the frustration, fear and loneliness of a young boy who thought at the time he was the only one with feelings like this. Imagine the confusion swirling in my young mind trying to make sense of it all and wishing and praying it would go away. Why is there this insistance on the part of some that if they admit that some people are born this way, they are soft on sin and want to promote lifestyle choices that go contrary to biblical teachings.
For me it is a difficult enough burden to bare, without hearing constant reminders from folks who, figuratively speaking, look at a gay person through prejudicial eyes, point the finger and loudly proclaim "unclean".
Kendra Perry 1 week ago

I admire and respect your willingness to continue taking part in this conversation, and thank you so much. Those who are willing to listen to and actually try to understand your experience have the opportunity to learn a lot, and to demonstrate the love they continually claim to have for "non-practicing" gays.

Elaine Nelson 1 week ago

"sin of homosexuality."

So now it's come to homosexuality being a sin! Where in all of scripture is the condition of homosexuality ever called sin? Those who are so certain it is sinful have also admitted that they really don't personally know, or have talked with any, so they are now able to judge? Should homophobia now also be a sin? Why not?

Please spare me your self-righteous manner: "Thank God, I am not one of these." If that's Christianity, spare me, also.

Ervin Taylor 1 week ago

Like Elaine and several others, I have been waiting for many weeks for those who seem to be so sure that know what the Bible says on so many topics to quote a Biblical text that says that homosexual orientation is a sin. I know what Jesus is recorded as condemning – religious pride, religious hypocrisy, an outward show of how orthodox ("straight") one was, an attitude that “I’m glad I’m not like certain other people.”

Elaine Nelson 1 week ago

Adventism resurrected Pharisaism. Perhaps it never died.

Tom 1 week ago

Thank-you Erv and Elaine for acknowledging what so many people in the church just can't see or refuse to. They see a news story about a gay pride parade, complete with provocative photos, and they conclude the worst about all of us. Oh well, the Jews in Christ's day had no use for the Samaritans, which makes Jesus parable about the good Samaritan all the more compelling. Maybe it's time to update the characters a bit for contemporary times. Imagine telling an all white church in the south this story fifty years ago and the one who showed compassion was a black man, or today that he was gay. Better yet what would be the response of some religious folks if the one who had been robbed, beaten and left half dead had been a gay man? I suppose there is some degree of prejudice in everyone. Jesus was crucified because He dared confront hypocrisy and
prejudice. We all should take note, be aware and act accordingly, of what divides the sheep from the goats in the end.

Rngrbird
1 week ago

Kendra - Many thanks for the sites w/official statements. I respect the rights of others to exercise the freedom of speech that ( I, my oldest son, and many others) fought to protect!!

Tom - As a Veteran I will set you in your place: "At-Ease in the harness". I fought to protect your freedom of speech. Don't point the finger at others saying they don't have the knowledge! Be very careful as I'm not soft on sin, YET I will tell you straight up, I gave you your rights to express your opinion - Not to lash out at others. Again, since I paid the price for free expression - YES, it is a choice, and this "born this way" is B.S. Do I need to pat you on the head and tell you how nice you are to have had 'continued fidelity' to your wife for 28 years..... poor boy.

As I've already expressed, Yes I do believe that it is my duty - As someone who is trying to be a Christian = as a Christian is someone who is Christ-Like.... Sorry, didn't say I was, but rather trying to be. I do believe that we are admonished to love the sinner and hate the sin. Don't strike out saying that "that is a tired worn cliche"... By far, I'm not uneasy with the subject - IT'S WRONG - PERIOD. Well if you feel like it is a guided missile - then, buckle up.

Want to hear something that has hurt me to the core, and I don't even know if it was true to this day ????

My younger brother, Sidney was murdered in Bakersfield, CA in August of 1981 along with his boss Jack Blankenship on a dirt road, at about 21:30 hrs., and yes I've got the 8x10 color glossy's of the scene - and I can see the path where my brother crawled while the 4 bullets bleed his life out of him. Ok, the murderer, William Robert Tyack shot and killed Sid and his boss Jack - as they were going out to talk to a man about listing his property with the realestate firm. Mr. Tyack said: "I aimed to kill those 2 gay guys ----- How dare you tell me I don't know anything!!!!! Mr. Tyack spent a few days in a half-way house, So would you like a little of my rage directed at YOU ????

Like I said, At-Ease in the harness, you self-righteous, holier-than-thou "whatever you are"........ Nuff said.

David
1 week ago

I ask myself if the only sinner in this world was a homosexual, could have Jesus die only for him/her to saved. The answer is YES, YES, YES.

EE (Elaine and Erv) are waiting for and passage of the bible expressing that homosexuality is a sin.

“For the wages of sin is death”

The OT and NT is pretty clear: an abomination, result is death

“If a man also lie with mankind…both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.

“But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death”.

Looks that abomination (which includes homosexuality) is placed among other conditions, that
**will result in death.**

Christ died for homosexuals, liars, murderers, unbelievers, idolaters and as well hypocrites including SDA. But the power of GOD produces a change in a life; the liar becomes to be honest, an unbeliever in a believer, and a so on.

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**Ervin Taylor**

1 week ago

I know this is not going to help David. But he might want to look up what the Old Testament text he is quoting actually is addressing. Also, stringing texts together as he has, even if they are totally out of context, is a favorite strategy in this discussion. Let's all just leave each other to follow their own presuppositions. Kendra's original blog made an excellent point. It's too bad that David is not capable of understanding that.

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**Anonymous**

1 week ago

So David, assuming one agrees with you that same sex orientation is a "sin", and that is still a long stretch, does that mean that we must all enforce the notion that those with this particular "sin" must stop "sinning" to be accepted and welcomed into our church family? If so how does that compare with all of the other "sins" that all of us are guilty of in one form or another (pride, jealousy, impatience, belittling those we have power over (like our spouse), cheating others in business transactions, domestic violence, closet habits like porno and singlehanded sex, a glass of wine with dinner, and on and on the list goes? This seems to be such a hypocritical argument. Jesus came to save **all** of us and again, His ministry focused on redemption and forgiveness, not condemnation. Is it so hard to let God be the judge? Why not focus our efforts at making all of God's children feel welcomed to our church family instead of trying to be exclusive and judgemental because of our own natural bias and discomfort with same sex orientation? These people are in our midst, and they are not going away. What do you think Jesus would do?

---

**Elaine Nelson**

1 week ago

David committed adultery, many of the patriarchs said to have been the faithful have committed grievous sins, including murder. If they are entitled to heaven, which of all the sins will keep one out of heaven?

Adultery used to be considered on-going if a divorced person remarried, it was not a one-time sin but he or she was a sinner until death. How is that different from homosexuality? Please explain the rationale. Any sexual act outside of marriage was also the sin of fornication. Are homosexual acts more sinful than fornication? Both are common today, including Adventists. Are they kicked out of the church? Should they be? Or, is it a program to winnow down the some 13 million members down to the proper number 144,000 to ensure the Lord's coming?

There's going to be a pretty big bonfire.
David 1 week ago

Elaine you asked for a text biblical that homosexuality is a sin, the evidence has been shown. Mark the church I assist is full of sinners, I’m one of them, but I saw the changing power of GOD. Thieves becoming to be honest persons, adulterous becoming to be faithful husbands, liars becoming to be credible, yes even homosexuals changing their past habits. I believe that grace of GOD and his power is greater than any tendency or sin. As a hospital is for sick people the church is for sinners, but in both places we expect people to get better.

Elaine Nelson 1 week ago

If homosexuals can change their past habits, why isn't same-sex marriage allowed? This has been the best method for heterosexuals for most of the world's history: marriage prevents promiscuity (although, not always). If heterosexuals were never allowed to marry, does anyone believe they would always be celibate? Paul said it is better to marry than burn, and humans, regardless of sexual orientation, have God-given sexual desires. Monogamy should be permitted for all couples who desire to remain faithful to their spouse. Such a position never occurred in Christ's time as all sex outside of marriage was a "sin." Does anyone ask a heterosexual couple if they are being intimate? Why should homosexuals be asked such questions? Are they considered legitimate targets for questioning?

What if the church simply accepted everyone who wished to worship? For those who are second or third-generation SDAs, should these people, suspected of such behavior, be questioned and then disfellowshipped? Many SDA young people growing up only discovered their attraction to the same sex in the teens or later. Is someone prepped to carry out a questionnaire? How many church members do you know who have confided in you that they are homosexual? Are you required to then report to the church board? Why the prurient interest?

Tom 1 week ago

Say, BURR UNDER THE SADDLE, how does being a veteran give you the right to stand on a pedestal to set me straight? Cool your jets man!! As for your trying to be christian, you better stop trying so hard, 'cause it ain't working. If being a christian is being Christlike, your response to me was anything but that.
Oh well, I'm not going to let it ruin my day. Your post is ample evidence of some of what I have been trying to say here, about how some christians show little tolerance or compassion for someone who is gay.

Some church members already think they are bending over backwards for gays, when in fact the church has for the most part turned a cold shoulder to so many. Kendra has shown a charitable attitude. She has put out the welcome mat so to speak and opened this blog for discussion. I have tried to put a face on all this with my experience, but not hold myself up as the template for all gays. Perhaps I shouldn't use the term gay because it conjurs up so many negative feelings with some. Would same-sex-attracted sound better?
Either way people are going to think the way they want to, and look for texts that support their
feelings on the matter. I ask the question, am I an abomination for having the attraction to my own sex, even though I haven't engaged in sex with the same for 3 decades now?

Let me make it clear, I am not looking for sympathy, only understanding and a willingness to show some compassion. The only time I am a cry baby is when I sob over the stories of gay teens who have committed suicide rather than face a seemingly unending life of harassment and hate.

Elaine Nelson 1 week ago

The attitude expressed by some here is not far from being happy when another gay young person has committed suicide because of the sentiments written by some of those posted here. If this is not realistic, feel free to prove why it isn't.

To paraphrase H.L. Mencken: "There's a fear that someone, somewhere may be gay." Where should they go?

Trevor Hammond 1 week ago

Where are the Bible texts which advocate and condone homosexual relationships or the marriage of same sex persons? I suppose to cultural adventists the Bible isn't paramount in such a discussion. The 'out of context' defense of homosexual orientation and homosexual perversion/behaviour is a strawman in terms of the Bible's clear teaching against such abomination and shows how we as a society have lost our way in becoming a society devoid of a sense of shame.

Now let me get this 'straight' (pardon the pun). Dr. Taylor and Mrs. Nelson request Biblical text to substantiate the sin of unnatural sexual perversion (although they don’t present the same to justify such practice). Before I indulge them, I have got the unambiguous impression from other comments that they aren't Bible based believing Christians insofar as the inspiration of scriptures is concerned. They defend much of their arguments not on scripture but on cultural trends and non-faith belief systems. Not posting any bible verses was intentional on my part and maybe some others. There is a reason for this. The Bible as we all know unabashedly condemns sin in all its forms. That is a no brainer. Homosexual acts however are specifically mentioned, among others, as specific sins which anger our Righteous and Holy Creator who is Christ the Lord. By His word were ALL things created that are created.

The Bible condemns sexual perversion and it specifically emphasizes the sin of homosexual perversion which is clear and in no uncertain terms. To lie to the homosexual community that their ‘ways’ are ‘kosher’ and Bible based is a terribly misleading sin itself and a direct insult to God’s love as seen on the cross of Calvary. Yes Jesus died for the homosexual too. God would have even spared Sodom and Gomorrah had there been only a few who were faithful. God eventually destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire for their sinful unrepentant ways which includes sexual perversion. The Bible also warns of the consequences of this course of action; and very strongly at that, I might add.
The Greeks and the Romans with all their ‘enlightenment’ in the arts and culture as a so-called civilized society, were very much into such debauchery which was in many instances practiced legally and openly thereby exposing a society devoid of a sense of shame: just like today. Nothing much has changed in this regard except now there are factions even within the Christian community (of all people) who come out in defence of such sin against the Almighty Creator by openly abusing the love He has unconditionally bestowed upon us sinners on this planet.

Orientation, practice, whatever: God CAN provide VICTORY in and from ALL SIN through Jesus Christ. Hallelujah!

♥TMP

David 1 week ago

Erv at least be honest and curious, go and see what was the original word in the Hebrew bible: *shakab* שָׁכַב. The translation to lie (of sexual relations) b) (Niphal) to be lain with (sexually)

c. (Pual) to be lain with (sexually)

*Maybe this can help you*

David 1 week ago

Erv here is the text *leviticus 20:13"

13 “If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable (abomination). They are to be put to death.

You and Elaine were asking for a biblical text. Now that is has been produced don't play with words

I have friends and family a member that are gay I love them and pray for them I hope some day they will accept the grace and power of GOD.

If AT wanted to exclude me so be it. that will not change the realty

Trevor Hammond 1 week ago

Cultural Adventists/ex-Adventists are so predictable. Now some are trying to sensationalize this topic by alluding and accusing others of hatred and harshness towards homosexuals, and accusing them also of inciting suicide by their posts here. Come on grow up! Falsely accusing those who believe what the Bible teaches is bad enough; but even worse, is to assert and preach that the Bible actually condones and supports such perversion (as the Bible calls it) is really what is so sad.

A 15 year old teen sadly committed suicide Thursday past just after her dad scolded her for something which obviously didn't go down well with her. Does that mean that all parents are guilty of promoting suicide when they admonish their kids for something they do wrong. Come on! I thought that a rational discussion was on the table but obviously it seems not. No Christians I know get happy when ANY teen takes their own life for WHATEVER reason. To assume
otherwise is purely a malicious attempt to GET BACK in a below the belt attack at opposing views and is not reasonable.

♥T

Tom 1 week ago

"Orientation, practice, whatever: God can provide VICTORY from and in ALL SIN through Christ Jesus."

Trevor, I see you make no distinction between orientation and practice. After all I have said here, you still just don't get it, and probably never will. What you see as one and the same, and probably discard as hair-splitting, is quite different if you were in my shoes. Go back and reread some of my posts and you may see what I mean. It would redundant for me to repeat it all. Also, if I understand Elaine correctly, her comment about some folks rejoicing when a gay teen commits suicide, was probably one of her tongue in check remarks, and not serious. But I will let her speak for herself. I have observed at times she throws a little fat in the fire or water in the face to jar folks a bit into thinking outside their neat little box of pat answers.

Elaine Nelson 1 week ago

When one looks on another and declares it an abomination, how can it not be an accusation against the individual at whom it was directed?

"Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the dark, but anyone who loves his brother is living in the light...unlike the man who hates his brother and is in the darkness, not knowing where he is going, because it is too dark to see" (1John 2:9-11).

David, since you appear to be obsessed over homosexuality as abomination, I suggest you use a concordance and give us a list of everything in the Bible that is called an abomination; eg., touching a dead body is an abomination; even the proud of heart ("God, I thank thee I am not like them").

Is anyone innocent, given the many abominations that can be committed?

"To hate your brother is to be a murderer" (1 John 3:15).

David 1 week ago

Elaine my participation in this blog was limited to answer you challenge (to show if homosexuality is a sin in the Bible). It was presented few passages to show it. They are many other actions that are abomination too (see your concordance). I'll finish repeating that the grace and power of GOD is greater than any sin. If he was able to forgive me and change my life He could do for anybody. That is his amazing Grace.
Elaine Nelson  
1 week ago

"She was a model student and a star athlete – an honest young woman in her final year at a private Christian high school, The Master's School, in Connecticut. But when school administrators asked her about her sexual orientation, she answered courageously and honestly that she is a lesbian.

And then those same administrators told her to withdraw or she would be kicked out.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students across the country are back in school, many facing bullying from peers. The last thing these students need is a school administration that refuses to protect them from unfair treatment."

From today's Human Rights newsletter.

Is this the Christian's attitude?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brothersdown</th>
<th>1 week ago</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hello folks, i'm new here but old to the bible. Now let me see if i have this right, Kendra said lets pretend that Jesus used the word gay insted of blind. If the man was gay insted of blind i dont think he would have done anything, in Leviticus chapter 18 verse 22 it says tho shalt not lie with a mankind as with a womankind, it is an abomination, it later says that a man that lies with another man should be put to death. There is a lot of differance between being blind and being gay. BUT Jesus can heal anyone with this disease, man was not created gay, he has achoice about that like he does about everything else in life. I am not saying we should shun them but we should pray for someone in this condition, if they dont want to change then have nothing more to do with them. God created man perfect, satan has brought sin into the world and now this is one that people are trying to teach our children, some as young as 6 that it is alright to have feelings for someone of the same sex, this is a lie straight from satan, if you cant see it than you cannot expet to understand your bible. Dont say that this was in the old law of Moses, if it is an abomination with God punishable by death then it is still the same today, our Creator says, I am God, i change not, neither does his word. We need to put a stop to this awful sin and teach our children moral values of a christian home, but to many people are to busy to have anything to do with their children, no bible studies, no conversation, no time spent with them at all, they are all left up to fend for them selves and no one knows this better than the RCC. This is their doing and they are antichrist. DO NOT pity the gays and lesbins, all they want is to suedge your children...</td>
<td></td>
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Elaine Nelson  
1 week ago

Brothersdown:

May I assume that you are heterosexual? May I also assume that you chose to be heterosexual? If so, can you tell us when you made that decision and what led you to that choice? Is blindness a
choice? What is the meaning of the words of this song:

"I once was blind and now I see"? Is there a blindness of the heart? (Eph. 4:18)

Joe Erwin 1 week ago

Who knows what goes on behind the bedroom doors of other people? Why should any of us care at all, as long as what is occurring is consensual? And, what if what someone else does is not what you or I think of as appropriate? Basically, it is none of our business. If God does or doesn't approve, let whatever is going on be between God and the individual or individuals involved.

So, who among you is prepared to cast the first stone? I think I see several hands raised....

Can't you just accept God's love and grace and quit the quick & insensitive condemnation?

Elaine Nelson 1 week ago

Too many Adventists are Seven Day Voyeurists. Why, oh why, are you so curious about what goes in the privacy of people's homes? If you are straight, are you seeking congratulations? Is there some special honor for celibacy? In the Roman Catholic system there is, but does Adventism also have such requirements?

Trevor Hammond 1 week ago

If this was just a bedroom private topic then why was it brought up on a public platform? Nobody is throwing stones or been insensitive or condemning for that matter. Neither do we want to snoop into homosexual bedrooms. Some may have been caught up in the sensational exciting side of such activity and are intrigued so much by it that they support its practice in order to satisfy their curiosity by encouraging homosexuals. Perhaps there are many who get a kick out of talking and supporting sexual immorality and immoral living. The SDA church has a scriptural basis for our belief and it is clear that God does NOT approve of such behavior even if we may find some cultural socio-political basis for this practice. Warning sinners who are trapped in sinful living (including all types of sin) by showing them love and calling them to repentance in Christ Jesus is what the church does or at least should be doing apart from its many other objectives. Those who are standing in the path of sinners, please put your hands up! Wow! There are many...

It's a long shot but should we then just change the Bible like some churches have done so that sin can be accommodated and practiced? Well some are suggesting that here...but don't expect or try to force or manipulate the rest of us into such a voyage of destruction. We just can’t let sexual excitement rule over the standards set forth in scripture. Homosexuals have to come to terms with this just like I had to let the Lord deal with my addiction to dope and tobacco and alcohol and sinful living. The blood of Christ has power indeed for every single shortcoming and sin.
No one has even mentioned the high risk among the homosexual community of contracting HIV/AIDS and other STD's which they too are very susceptible to and about how many of us have seen the devastating effects on homes and family's as a result of loved ones who have died of AIDS's related illnesses and complications. What about loving the many orphans on our planet who have lost their parents to HIV-AIDS? We as a Church are loving these children too. So our love as Christians is broad based and not limited only to homosexuals. Shouldn't we love them enough to tell them enough, just like we as a church do for others who are trapped in an orientation towards sinful living or even those practicing sinful living. Isn't the love of Christ enough to for all of us? Apparently from some comments here there isn’t enough power in the previous Blood of Jesus Christ. Maybe we have it the wrong way ‘round: perhaps we should first surrender our lives completely to Him and allow Him to work repentance in us, the old school way – the way of the Cross.

The mistake we have made here is to assume that to love means to condone. This is a misrepresentation of God's love. We have to admit too that just like the governments of our world have through their systems of education forced non-empirical evolution theory on society, they are now forcing social disorder and cultural sex as a normal part of sexuality which is been taught in school and promoted in the media. This is what the Greeks and Romans did when they chose to embrace sexual immorality. Seems Rome still rules much of our world today and they seek to hand homosexuality on a platter even trying to force the practice on the church.

♥T

Elaine stated, “Too many Adventists are Seven Day Voyeurists”.
Could provide the source of that observation? Was ever conducted a survey to find out the “too many”? or is this just your unfounded impression? It good to remember the 9th commandment “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor(s)” The Adventists that I know are not interested in such sick perversions.

Elaine Nelson

There seems to be such an interest expressed by some posters here who are intent on diagnosing and prescribing expulsion for private behaviors. If this is not voyeurism, please give another definition than Merriam-Webster:

Voyeurism: A prying observer who is usually seeking the sordid or the scandalous.

Elaine here is some definitions of voyeurism . Also to use the words “too many” is inappropriate. It will be more honest to say “I exaggerated... my apologies” than defending the absurd.
“In clinical psychology, **voyeurism** is the sexual interest in or practice of spying on people engaged in intimate behaviors, such as undressing, sexual activity, or other activity usually considered to be of a private nature” (Hirschfeld, M. (1938). *Sexual anomalies and perversions: Physical and psychological development, diagnosis and treatment*)

“Voyeurism is a psychosexual disorder in which a person derives sexual pleasure and gratification from looking at the naked bodies and genital organs or observing the sexual acts of others. The voyeur is usually hidden from view of others. Voyeurism is a form of paraphilia”

“the practice of obtaining sexual gratification by looking at sexual objects or acts, especially secretly”

---

**Elaine Nelson** 1 week ago

One only needs to read the many comments here to see that there are some who have an inordinate interest in people's private lives; suspicion that they may be committing abomination. Question: have you observed such abominations with your own eyes? Either you have (which is certainly voyeurism) or there is a suspicion. We should always believe the best of others, especially when we have no absolute evidence, and then, why condemn them? Let God speak to them; we have not been asked to do that.

---

**David** 1 week ago

Elaine your phrase: “Too many Adventists are Seven Day Voyeurists”. Is unsustainable. No matter how much you wanted to avoid it. *Take your own medicine “We should always believe the best of others, especially when we have no absolute evidence”.*

---

**David** 1 week ago

Erv, I know what I think and I’ll post it any time *but first you answer to my questions that you never responded*. Well now you have again the opportunity to do so. The street goes both ways! You want me to refresh you the questions?

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**Trevor Hammond** 1 week ago

RE: abomination:

God said it... I believe it... and that settles it for me!

No need to 'see' sin to know sin. God's instruction on what constitutes sin will suffice any day as a credible source of instruction.
I haven't seen one post here on this blog where anyone has proposed the church sanction gay sex. But that seems to be the automatic response from some folks who seem to have their skin crawl whenever the subject of loving gays comes up. I won't even give the dignity of a response to the guy who said all we want to do is seduce children. Some people's minds are like concrete, thoroughly mixed up and permanently set. Trying to convince them otherwise is a waste of time and effort.

To try and elevate the discussion a bit and cool the hot pokers jabbing back and forth of late, I'd like to ask WWJD? There is no biblical account of Jesus ever talking directly about homosexuals, but there is one concerning a prostitute. Since some of you automatically put gays down there with the prostitutes, I'll use this for an example. The story is in John 8. A prostitute, caught in the very act, was brought before Jesus. Her accusers stated that the law of Moses said she should be stoned. So they asked Him what should be done to her. They were trying to trap Jesus. Only the Romans could invoke the death penalty since the Jews were under their rule. If He told them to stone her, they would rush to the Roman authorities and accuse Him of usurping their authority. If He refused to tell them to stone her, than her accusers would go tell the Jewish religious leaders that He was disregarding the law of Moses. The catch 22 insured consequences whichever way He answered.

Jesus foiled their plot by saying, "he who is without sin, let him cast the first stone." As they one by one left, after seeing Him write their sins in the sand, He then asked her where her accusers were. "They are gone," she answered.

He didn't issue some long winded lecture to the woman about her sordid lifestyle, quoting biblical passages declaring she really should be stoned. No, he simply said," neither do I condemn you". By those words He didn't let her off and tell her "you can go back to work now." He followed his non condemnation by saying, "now go and sin no more."

I believe that Jesus greatest emphasis, the thing that gave this woman hope and a feeling of being loved were those words, "neither do I condemn you." This woman probably was treated like dirt and was looking for love in all the wrong places as a result. His following that with "go and sin no more" was not a qualifier for the first, but a follow up invitation to a better life.

If only we could look at others and their actions (or what we may think they have done), and recognize that they had their own personal (usually quite private) reasons for feeling as they feel and doing as they do. We attribute this ability to God, so S/He would be able to understand and show compassion where it is warranted. It is quite clear that we have no such gift of looking into a person's private reasons for being who they are or doing as they do. Shouldn't we act accordingly?
Isn't this the basis of our charge to treat others as we would wish to be treated, and to judge not that we be not judged?

I think we can all agree that sexual identity, sexual orientation, and interpersonal relationships, are all very complicated and very private and personal, regardless of outward appearances. Every person is worthy of our respect and due consideration. Do I need to tell you this? Who am I that I should do so? Fortunately, Kendra has put it just right in the title of her essay.

Elaine Nelson
1 week ago

How will we relate to these people as our neighbors in heaven? Who are we to bar them?

JIMS Seven
3 days ago

Who is baring them from entering heaven? Some would very fast type the answer as SDAs.......but if we see Paul on Mars hill.....the lesson is clearly there that God has revealed his purpose through many ways and LGBT in their heart sure know what is to be done morally i guess.......but the problem is more with the so called LGBT advocates who think they are the voice of the minorities and the tradional Adventists are just someones who try to rip the LGBT of their human rights..........THERE ARE SO MANY INSTANCES in the SCRIPTURE implying God's desire that we abstain from immoral sexual practise. Some would pop out the issues and when the scriptural references are provided they would take the Word Advocates as inhuman etc but then 'WE ARE TO CALL SIN BY ITS RIGHT NAME.....does that mean we are trying to banish them or so and so.......well there was this sermon preached once in my local church where a new convert came to attend and while the pastor was sharing the message on sinful attitudes such as stealing, lying, cheating etc this man gets up and asks the people 'how come he knows so much about me'.......well the word of God speaks a volume..........by the way most of things are clear in this thread through the statement of someone on'Sexual perversion' and with the textx from the Bible to support what actually is sexual perversion..........but some would just not take it ,,,such is the diversity hahaha atleast in the AT land ....all for ......all for......well you all know may be.....

Kelvin
1 day ago

Thank You Kendra! Thank You Tom! We need to have a more heartfelt understanding of this issue. We musn't let anything distract us from the Gospel. Jesus was not afraid that sin would rub off on Him. He came and dwelt among us so that we might all be saved! Sin can and will be left behind, Jesus can and will help us all overcome anything it is His will for us to overcome. It is not my place to judge another's heart, only God can do that. I must look on each of my fellow human beings as potential members of God's kingdom and treat them ever and always as such. Let's lift each other up and encourage each one to choose life and follow what God leads them to do. He wants us all to be pure and holy and will give us the grace and power to be so if we will let Him. What exactly that means to each individual is not my place to say. We each have our own sins to struggle with, let's encourage each other in love. "..I may understand all the secret things of God and all knowledge and I may have faith so great that I can move mountains. But even with all
these things, if I do not have love, then I am nothing." 1 Cor. 13:2
It’s how all the good stories end and, at least in a general sense, it’s how the big story of our world ends. The good guys are victorious; the bad guys defeated; the wrongs are made right; the world is renewed and restored; “...and they all lived happily ever after.”

But the closing lines of *The Great Controversy* don’t use this classic formulation. Instead, it goes like this: “From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.”

There is obviously something bigger going on here than just the characters in the story having all their adventures completed, trials overcome and problems solved. We are reminded that the real Hero of the story is a God who loves.

And it also wakes echoes of where the story began. *The Great Controversy* is the fifth and last in the “Conflict of the Ages” series that began millennia and 3500 pages earlier with the opening lines of *Patriarchs and Prophets*: “‘God is love.’ His nature, His law, is love. It ever has been; it ever will be.”

The big story of the “Conflict of the Ages” and the great controversy is the love of God. Ellen White gave away the ending in the first page of the first book of the series. And the epic story in between — particularly focused on Jesus, the *Desire of Ages* — is the story of that love being worked out amid the history, tragedy and brokenness of our world.

We might be tempted to assume this is more a story of a higher plane and another place. The workings of God’s love and its final victory can sometimes feel like the business of a distant heaven that we might get to experience for ourselves at some time in the future, if we can sustain that much hope. But in Ellen White’s progressing understanding and urging, this love is as much about transforming the present as it is about final re-creation.

For a variety of reasons, I have been reading quite a lot of Ellen White’s writings this year and I have been struck repeatedly by the significance she recognised in life here and now. One of her major themes is this life matters. The choices, priorities, attitudes, actions and lifestyle we adopt make a difference for today and forever, for us and for others — and this emphasis continues to be seen particularly in the Adventist church’s expansive health, education and welfare work around the world.

A few years ago, I was fascinated to discover the record of Ellen White’s funeral held on Sabbath, July 24, 1915, at Battle Creek (*Life Sketches of Ellen G White*, pages 462–480), particularly the address by then-General Conference president A G Daniells. Daniells had worked with her for most of the last 25 years of her life, first in Australia in the 1890s and on their return to the United States at about the same time, with Daniells becoming General Conference president in 1901 and continuing in that role until after her death. He knew Ellen White well and offered an inspiring summary of her life’s work.
In his eulogy, Daniells recognised the God-given inspiration that sparked Ellen White’s ministry and emphasised her focus on the Bible and Christ as the central foundations of all that she did, spoke about and wrote. He recognised in White’s writings the role of the Holy Spirit “to make real in the heart and lives of men all that [Jesus] had made possible by His death on the cross” (page 472) and the role the church should also play.

Daniells also pointed to the broader focus of Ellen White’s ministry and writings — the implication of her understanding of the nature of God and His mission that life matters now in so many ways: “Through the light and counsel given her, Mrs White held and advocated broad, progressive views regarding vital questions that affect the betterment and uplift of the human family, from the moral, intellectual, physical and social standpoint as well as the spiritual” (page 473).

He used remarkably strong language to summarise her call for action in the world in response to the issues of her day: “Slavery, the caste system, unjust racial prejudices, the oppression of the poor, the neglect of the unfortunate,—these all are set forth as unchristian and a serious menace to the well-being of the human race, and as evils which the church of Christ is appointed by her Lord to overthrow” (page 473.)

When we re-discover the life and work of Ellen White, we find a strong belief in both the love of God and that our responses to that love matter. In the stories of her life, we also find a life that mattered, a remarkable pioneering woman who lived her life for the God whose love she came to understand more and more, and risked herself to contribute to the mission of the church and care for those in need. Trusting the final joyous ending, we are called and inspired to work toward it now in those same kinds of ways.

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**Preston Foster**  
3 weeks ago

Nathan,

Thanks for this article.

How things end (particularly books) gives us a sense of the author's purpose and priorities.

That thought occurred to me recently, when I noticed that the Bible ends this way:

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

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**William Noel**  
3 weeks ago

Nathan,

Why are so many in our church so fixated on looking back on the life and ministry of Ellen White instead of seeking the indwelling and empowerment of the Holy Spirit so that we can each have an
effective ministry today?

Elaine Nelson
3 weeks ago

Because you gotta worship something and she is the closest to the Blessed Mary that Adventism has.

William Noel
3 weeks ago

:-) !!!

Kevin Riley
3 weeks ago

Elaine,

For most SDAs Ellen White (or her writings) plays the same role as Tradition does in some other churches: she gives us concrete examples we can follow. I don't think that is a bad thing, as long as we remember that tradition gives us a great place to stand, but can also crush us should we end up under it. I don't believe most SDAs want or need a BVM to worship. What they want is guidance from a source they trust, one that feels familiar and predictable. Which is perhaps also the answer to William's question.

Preston Foster
3 weeks ago

Kevin,

It seems the Holy Spirit is yearning the we become familiar with Him. Though He is not predictable in terms of means, His willingness to engage and instruct is. Have we forfeited our intimacy with Him by an over-dependence on lesser lights?

Kevin Riley
3 weeks ago

Many people fear anything they can't control. The Holy Spirit may be the ultimate example of that. He moves to his own agenda, which we often don't know or share. Much easier to read a collection of books where we already know what they will say and what they will ask of us. I think many of us would like to be led by the Holy Spirit, but only on our terms and only if it is safe. Unfortunately, the Bible is full of stories where God is not predictable, or even safe.

William Noel
3 weeks ago

Kevin,
Meeting the Holy Spirit quickly overcame my fear. Since then He has led me to do a lot of things that I would not otherwise have imagined. Let's just say that it has been an addictive adventure where I far prefer being controlled by him than being without Him.

Jim Ayer

I was not born and raised as a Christian only becoming an Adventist as an adult. Early in my new experience, I realized that I had not been vexed in my childhood, as my church friends had been, by being beaten with the correction stick of Ellen White. While I found comfort, guidance, and God’s love in her words, some of my friends found it very difficult to accept anything she said because of the previous stripes of chastisement they had received at home. The Devil made certain that he fashioned a big enough stick so that their spiritual scares would be life-threatening.

It became evident to me, in my walk with God, that He has always used prophets to communicate with, and guide, His people. This, the Devil hates, but the prophet problem is not a new one—nor is the stick of the Devil used to detour all who would take the name of God upon their lips. The professed people of God—with few exceptions—have treated the prophets He uses to call us from danger to safety, with extreme prejudice: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to her; how often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you would not!” Matthew 23:37. Did you notice that the mechanism God uses for gathering His children under the protection of his mighty arms is the prophets?

Again we read in 2Chronicles 20:20; “Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.” It seems evident that in order to prosper, it is imperative that we believe His prophets.

Some may say that Ellen G. White is not a prophet and it's everyone’s free choice to make that decision. If she is not a prophet we must ask, who has God sent to guide His last day people? It makes little sense to believe that the final work appointed to humankind would end without direct guidance from the Lord. “Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.” Amos 3:7

“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” Hebrews 13:8. His greatest desire is to continue calling us from danger to safety through His prophets.

William Noel

Well said. Still, I ask: Why do we as a church treat the writings of Ellen White as if they were the last revelation that God would send to His church? If we are truly God's church, would it not be consistent for Him to keep sending prophets to guide us? So, while taking guidance from the counsels from the past, should we not also be looking for the new guidance He sends?
Kevin Riley

Logically and theologically we should be looking for a multitude of contemporary prophets, pragmatically we don't want that level of trouble. Prophets are always at their best when they are no longer with us.

Matt Britten

I am grateful for the commitment and calling on Ellen White's life. What a blessing that has been. At the same token, from my reading of the NT, certain texts have bothered me like: "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers" (Eph 4:11). They are all listed in the plural!

From my reading of Acts, I noticed that there were prophets in the church of Antioch (Ac 13:1) and prophets in Jerusalem (Ac 11:27), some that had trans-local ministry (Acts 15:20). There were prophets down in the Corinthian church (1 Cor 14:32) and over in Thessalonica (1 Thess 5:19,20). There were prophets all over the place!

I have come to the conclusion, they are handy folk to have around (not forgetting apostles, evangelists pastors and teachers), especially if the church is going to come to "the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:13).

I'd be interested if any of you have/know prophetic people in your midst?

Ella M.

Jim, you have written a mature and practical response to the naysayers. On a personal level the writings of our co-founder (now called) are beautiful and refer to the Bible throughout. In fact much of it is biblical quotes. It speaks with depth and feeling and to the heart of those willing to listen. It opens the way to spiritual living and experience and to knowing Christ as the focus of our lives. The best, of course, is in the books which often picked up the best inspiration writing of the time and added to it.

The problems are the way the material has been used: compilations taken out of context; comments originally focusing on certain situations but made to fit all by controlling parents, teachers, or others in authority positions; cultural comments now irrelevent. You cannot blame the writer--it is the people. Don't hate the messenger, but those who recycle it in their own image! I do not believe these writings should be quoted in pastoral sermons as they give the idea of some sort of guru and insider information as well as pastoral incompetence and lack of creativity. We can't change the past, but we can begin a new future of respect and a willingness to listen.

William Noel

Ella,
Ellen White actually gave very specific direction to pastors and editors that her writings were not to be quoted in a sermon or article. Nor were they to be the basis for any doctrine or teaching because we are to study scripture and base everything we teach and believe on the Bible alone.

Kendra Perry 3 weeks ago

Nathan, I don't know if I've commented before, but I love almost every single one of your columns. Thanks for writing.

Christian Rock 3 weeks ago

If folks could be entirely honest and reflective regarding what they have seen and experienced within Adventism, they would have to agree that it is possible to find Jesus Christ while reading Ellen White and it is also possible to lose sight of Jesus while reading Ellen White; thus is the paradox of Ellen White. In one quotation Ellen's words can be in lock step with the Pharisaical, self-righteous, self-works oriented tone of Christ's own contemporary church, and in another quotation she can completely disagree with the Pharisaical tone and import of one of her own, other published statements and can bless her reader with glimpses of Jesus.

Yes, Jesus is still the answer and the Holy Spirit, is today being poured out on the "five wise virgins", on those who are desperately hungry for more of Jesus; Ellen White or no Ellen White, SDA Church or no SDA Church.

If one believes that salvation is only achieved for Seventh-day Adventists through the mechanisms and machinations of the SDA Church; meaning total, blind devotion and loyalty to Ellen White no matter what she ever said or did, instead of relying upon one's relationship with Jesus alone, relying upon Jesus who gives us strength to stand for even the tiniest bits of truth, then some day, maybe too late and hopefully not, the majority of the body of Seventh-day Adventists could possibly discover that the enemy to their souls has come to reside within their gates, that "some day" when they recognize that religion alone does not save, that "some day" when they recognize that their precious Adventism has become in too many ways, no different than Roman Catholicism or Mormonism or any other "ism" religions, whereby the "church" effectually impresses upon the people that salvation comes through the mechanisms, machinations, and dependency upon the religious institution.

Ella M. 3 weeks ago

I agree with much of this, because so many seem to worship the church and are concerned about its identity, unity, etc. They find their identity in an organization rather than in Christ. People are baptized into a church rather than into Christ.

As for EGW different emphases at different times, we can also find that in the Bible. These are all lights that lead us to Christ and teach us to live the sanctified life. The Word, of course, is primary because it is the story of Christ.
Ella,

I think you touched on an important issue when you mentioned identity. A significant part of the Adventist church's identity is built on the proof texts about God communicating with His people through prophets. Thus the ministry of EGW is used as evidence to claim exclusive (or limited) right to claim the Adventist church is God's only true church in the last days. However, given the time that has passed since her ministry ended and the absence of another apparent prophet since then, it is becoming increasingly logical to question if the basis for the church's claim remains valid.

Ella M.

If there were another "prophet" to arise, he or she would not be accepted by the church, even if they would speak according to the Word.

Actually I am aware of individuals in various parts of the world who have made prophecies on a personal or local level within the church. If brought to the attention of leaders, they are consistently denied as authentic without listening to them. Granted some of these have turned out to be false with self-centered motives, but not all. It is sort of like UFOs--you can explain most of them, but there are the ones that can't be explained away.

The same goes with "new light." Have you ever heard of anyone being taken seriously who brings a fresh idea to BRI or other authority? We stopped progressing theologically a long time ago--probably after White died. She is probably the last church leader who was able to change her mind!

It is possible that some of this might be happening in the seminary, but it isn't well known or admitted.

Doctorf

Ella come on. Trying to decipher "truth" from the utterances of modern day prophets is justas difficult in trying to figure out who are the "true" psychics and who are the charlatans. If anSDA prophet arises today, indeed they would be ignored and if they pressed their point wouldmost likely be taken to the LLU Behavioral instututed and sedated.

William Noel

That may be one reason God apparently has not sent us another prophet. I remember thelament of Jesus as he looked over Jerusalem and wept because of the sins of God's people andhow they killed the prophets. Maybe we wouldn't kill them today, but ignoring them has thesame result of us not receiving intimate and timely messages from God.
Matt Britten 2 weeks ago

I am grateful for the commitment and calling on Ellen White's life. What a blessing that has been. At the same token, from my reading of the NT, certain texts have bothered me like:

"And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers" (Eph 4:11). They are all listed in the plural!

From my reading of Acts, I noticed that there were prophets in the church of Antioch (Ac 13:1) and prophets in Jerusalem (Ac 11:27), some that had trans-local ministry (Acts 15:20). There were prophets down in Corinth (1 Cor 14:32) and over in Thessalonica (1 Thess 5:19,20). There were prophets all over the place!

I have come to the conclusion, they are handy folk to have around (not forgetting apostles, evangelists pastors and teachers), especially if the church is going to come to "the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:13).

I'd say, prophets (as they are meant to function in a NT paradigm) were meant to be a normal part of the Christian church. I'd be interested to know if any of you have any prophetic people in your midst?

Ella M. 1 week ago

I know personally of one individual who may be a prophet, as his visions were rational and biblical. His pastor at the time accepted this, and he was an elder and SS teacher. However, the pastor after that did not, and made his church life miserable. (This last pastor BTW was trained through Amazing Facts.) He was ridiculed and his church offices taken away. Finally, after taking up for one of the members and being put down by the pastor, he began a home church. There are no other churches in this remote rural area close enough to attend on a regular basis. When asked he speaks at other churches.

His vision presented a Christ of great love that begged His people to come to Him, and that our country would be facing a crisis, and the second coming would be near. This was from April 1999 to April 2004 with a total of 35 visions. I know they lacked the rigidity of traditional Adventism. Dependence on Christ was the theme.

I think prophet does not always mean foretelling and visions, however. It can mean an inspired individual who loves and knows Christ, who can give that message and provide fresh direction and ideas. We often call this "a prophetic voice."
Some weeks back we began studying Acts 19 in our Newsletter. Paul has arrived in Ephesus and begins to speak to the Jews there concerning the promised Messiah. In doing this, he discovers some of the Jews are already believers, but they had never heard of, or received the Holy Spirit. Paul prays for them to receive the Holy Spirit and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. Evidently, this caused some contention among those listening to the gospel and some of the Jews caused so much trouble that Paul decided to move out of the Jewish synagogue and into the town lecture hall.

Ephesus was a city that was highly impressed by the super-natural. A large portion of the population was involved in magic. They either performed it or wanted to, and the city possessed a huge collection of books from the black arts. To root out this evil connection with Satan, God led Paul to work many miracles, and especially root out demon-possession. That was a very powerful twist to the magic Ephesians were working. Usually, in order to work magic, the demons controlled their followers, but here Paul controlled the demons – this was magic of a higher order, so some of the people (The Seven Sons of Sceva) went around trying to cast out demons by the name of Jesus like Paul did. The demons perhaps thought that this might discredit Paul at first but finally turned on these people saying, “Jesus I know and Paul I know, but who are you? Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all and gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.” – vv. 15-16.

The result of this incident caused people in Ephesus to hold Paul and the New Church in great reverence and awe. “Many came and openly confessed what they had done. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas (several million dollars). In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.” – vv. 18-19.

But it was “About that time that serious trouble developed in Ephesus concerning the Way.” – v. 23.

Before we discuss the actual trouble that took place, I wanted us to notice that the early church at this time referred to themselves as “The Way.” This actually wasn’t the first time. In Acts 9:2 Luke, the writer of Acts, says Saul – who later became Paul the great Apostle - requested letters from the High Priest giving him authority to arrest “followers of the Way” and bring them back to Jerusalem in chains. However, Paul at the end of his life is brought before the Governor, Felix and declares “I am a follower of the Way.” – Acts 24:14. While we are not told exactly why Paul refers to the early church as the Way, it certainly makes sense. Jesus told His disciples, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.” John 14:6. The Jewish religion, as corrupted by their leaders, declared that the “Way” to God and His approval required obedience to over 600 laws, attendance to 7 feasts, washings, cleansings, and a multitude of offerings and blood sacrifices. Jesus, in contrast, said, “No; come to me exactly as you are. I am the Way to God. Do you not know what truth is? - the truth about God or the truth about yourself? In this relationship with me – this Way that you live every day – you will learn the truth about God and His amazing unconditional love, and you will know that you are totally accepted exactly as you are, so there is
never any reason to hide anything about yourself – I know all about you already, yet I still love you with a love so strong and everlasting that nothing can separate us. It is this Way that gives you peace and therefore the LIFE you have always longed for. So I AM the LIFE – not just life eternal, but life right now – My life.”

The early Christian Church was not a religion. In fact, Jesus had actually come to do away with religion. Religion controls my access to God. Think about it. It tells me what I have to DO to be accepted by God – be baptized, repent, believe, take communion, burn candles, pay tithe, do penance, confess, embrace certain doctrines, belong to a particular church, etc. But Jesus – God Himself – came to let us know we can access the Father (In fact, the whole Divine Trinity) directly at any time. HE IS THE WAY.

Now, I don’t think Jesus was trying to tell us not to have churches, or certain unique beliefs about God. But now that Jesus has returned to heaven and His actual flesh and blood body is not with us, it is OUR job to let people know that they can have direct access to God Himself. It is OUR job to embrace everyone exactly as they are like Jesus did and invite them into intimate, nothing hidden, authentic relationship with us and Jesus.

Here is what I’m suggesting: That every church fully receive the Holy Spirit like the church at Ephesus, so that Jesus is truly inside us all and we become the WAY to the Father like Jesus was. We are now the WAY! I believe that if accept this marvelous concept it will mean some radical changes in us, God’s children, and the WAY we do church. Jesus declared that people will know we are His disciples by the way we love each other, not by the way we agree with each other. Unity is based on an unconditional love we have for each other regardless of our differences. In fact, instead of debating our differences, I believe God calls us to celebrate them by seeking to really know each other (Yada – the Hebrew word for "to know", as in marriage intimacy), and understand why certain unique beliefs are important to our brother or sister. Uniformity requires that all who fellowship, agree with one another – that we have a common creed. But if we are to be The Way, I believe Jesus alone must be our creed. We are bonded together by Jesus alone. A real, nothing-hidden relationship with Jesus is the WAY we all must daily walk. That relationship (abiding in the vine) will be our TRUTH and our LIFE, and it will be IN that relationship that Jesus will alter our direction, how we perceive truth, or how we do life. Our eventual goal, as churches, would be that there be no membership to be given or taken away – we are baptized into HIM. We as churches – the WAY – would embrace whoever God has accepted and sent our way and we would continue to embrace them forever. While they might disconnect with us, we would never disconnect with them. I believe it would mean that while we can be confident in what we believe about God, God calls us to accept anyone who wishes to be part of our Grace Family – regardless of how their beliefs or practices differ from ours.

I understand that this is a radical departure from the way most of us were raised or presently practice. But if we are to again become The Way, we need to sink our roots deeper into Christ and Christ alone. He wanted all of us, as God’s children and as His bride, to know that we have direct access with the Father. And anytime “The Church” of His day got in the way of that access, Jesus got very passionate. Remember the Temple scene? The leaders were deciding whose offering was acceptable and not, in fact, WHO was acceptable and not. If we are to be The Way, we must allow Jesus to cast such “money changers” out of His temple. We must be the advocate for sinners.

Which sinners are not allowed in your lives and churches? We are the Way for them; we must face
the truth about ourselves as sinners, and freely give everyone around us the life in Jesus.

William Noel

Don,

Wonderful! Amen!

My congregation (Grace Fellowship SDA Church in Madison, AL) was formed with the primary objective of helping each member discover their giftedness and empowerment from the Holy Spirit enabling them to become ministers in whatever way God wanted. It has been an amazing experience in watching God work and seeing Him work in my own life. The freedom to minister that the Holy Spirit has brought is incredible.

You also mentioned about unity in doctrine. That is a noble goal that is achieved only when our first and foremost priority is seeking the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He has promised to guide us into all truth, so if we seek Him first, we are seeking guidance from the ultimate source and teacher of truth. Where the Holy Spirit is in control, doctrines are no longer an issue. No, we have not abandoned any doctrine, just the extreme views that cause division. Harmony reigns in the love of a redeeming God who is very personal. We have a diversity of ministries that are building the fellowship of the church and creating benefits making the church attractive to others.

At other churches I've attended business meetings where relatively minor issues led to hours of argument and hard feelings that lasted for years. At Grace Fellowship we've decided major financial issues in as little as 15 minutes with ten of them being a devotional and prayer--and without argument or offense. More than just seeing each other on Sabbath, we're in-touch with each other through the week and often help each other in practical ways. For example, this past Sunday, I needed help with an auto repair. I'm not a mechanic. God reminded me to call a young man in our church who is an auto mechanic. He came to the house and needed only a few minutes to identify and fix the problem. I had planned on paying him for his services, but he declined saying it was his privilege to help another church memeber. That's the Holy Spirit at work.

Timo Onjukka

Don, you highlight a very valid (and sad, sobering) point. Indeed, what group(s) of people do I disenfranchise? Choose to "love a little less"? Or perhaps actually disinvite from my faith community?

If God uses the marriage metaphor as his first framework of (vertical and horizontal) relationship, and we are cautioned "let no man come between what God has brought together", what are we really guilty of when we are failing in all-inclusive love? What are we really doing when we close church doors on any other human being? And we claim it is in HIS name? Now thats a "high hand"

Adam did not lose a religion; he lost relationship......
Jesus did not bring a religion, he restablished relationship.
Question is, do you know who you are?
Orphan, or heir?
This determines everything-deeds and doctrines, here,
And eternal destiny, over there.

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<th>Ella M.</th>
<th>3 weeks ago</th>
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| This blog reminds me of the SS lesson today of the church at Antioch where relationships seemed to flourish and people came-- until some from Judea came with their "truth" that: the Gentiles needed to circumized to be saved. Fortunately the Jerusalem Council finally overode this false theology, but did present four items to avoid, and this is because they were associated with the surrounding pagan religions. This incident opened the way for Paul's letter to the Galatians that declared nothing could be added to the Gospel. The Gospel was Christ and Him crucified.

We are saved by nothing else but Christ alone. Churches tend to focus on trivia, customs, and self-seeking. They find their identity in their own names rather than in Christ's name. The utopian church described by Noel is ideal. We hope it will last, and can as long as their focus and prayer is Jesus.

I have long felt that we should not be baptized into a church but into Christ. It almost seems blasphemous to be baptized into a church. What do you think about that statement. Am I taking it too far?

Of course we need organization as well, but it turns on us if it goes beyond what is necessary. We do need a belief system that reflects Christ in practical matters--call it doctrine--but it is the frame around His picture; the common sense ideas that describe what God is like--He is love, and it is reflected in His Word sent to us through His inspired believers over the generations. |

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<th>Barry Wecker</th>
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<td>Well written! Thought provoking. Thanks.</td>
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Scientists and Theologians Have Similar Problems

Submitted Sep 28, 2011
By Herb Douglass

Both scientists and theologians often suffer from mental imprints that are caused by, 1) what they have been taught; 2) by their own presuppositions; or 3) by who pays them.

Each of these reasons is often hidden in the unconscious. If you don't believe me, just check it out and see how quickly they respond on any given issue. Many times it sounds like a tape recorder!

Some simple questions to ask theologians:

1. What is sin?
2. Is Ellen White merely a nineteenth-century 'prophet'?
3. What is meant by 'forensic justification'?
4. What is the difference between 'perfection' and 'overcoming'?
5. How sinless was Jesus when He was born?
6. Why did Jesus die?
7. Will those who have never heard of Jesus be saved?
8. In what way do we understand Martin Luther's 'saved by faith alone.'

Some simple questions to ask physical scientists:

1. Despite the extensive research undertaken by countless dedicated scientists, why can't we find a single transitional form in the fossil record?
2. Because for many the premise of evolution is the backbone of most biological courses, is it not true that such science is founded on an unproven theory — and thus the theory of evolution is exactly parallel to belief in special creation?
3. What do we do with the individual cell with its 239 proteins, each one necessary for the cell to exist, when we seek an answer to where it came from, knowing it would not be a living cell if the proteins grew within the cell, one by one?
4. Why do those working in classification and comparative anatomy have a tough time agreeing with each other — splitters and lumpers, etc.?
5. How do we account for the clear-cut gaps in various 'classifications' when we would expect 'continuous bleeding' from one kind to another?

Adventist Today editor, Dr. David Newman, observed recently that we all are burdened with our assumptions (presuppositions). This could not be said more simply or eloquently. It seems to me it is unfortunate that it takes more years than time spent in colleges and universities to grasp the secret of humility. And it takes some time thereafter to re-examine the assumptions we learned in school, thus learning the quiet joy of real learning.

There is nothing more debilitating than to suffer through many panel discussions wherein we all share our ignorance, even when what is shared is properly buttressed with footnotes to those we have trusted. I have been as guilty as everyone else.
Herb,

Interesting lineup. I usually read your input with profound disagreement, but this time I cannot agree more with your observation about assumptions and presuppositions.

Could I be permitted to make a couple of observations about it?

You note: "It seems to me it is unfortunate that it takes more years than time spent in colleges and universities to grasp the secret of humility. And it takes some time thereafter to re-examine the assumptions we learned in school,...".

Would it be likely that the positions or beliefs one reaches or affirms as a result of that "humility" and "re-examine"ing, are most likely to be more sound? This seems to be an implicit reality in what you are saying.

I, like many others, have walked that road. Piece by piece I have been humbled as I confronted my Adventist heritage, and been forced to discard large chunks of it, including a YEC/YLC position....

You also note: "There is nothing more debilitating than to suffer through many panel discussions wherein we all share our ignorance, even when what is shared is properly buttressed with footnotes to those we have trusted". Profoundly true. I confess, I see the SDA Lesson quarterly as an unsurpassed example of such. Similarly of course many SS classes.

Your opening points are a give away to a conservative SDA position, as the answers you seek are implicit in the lineup:)

You have identified the problem well.

What would you advise people to do to ensure they are truly evaluating their assumptions \textit{a posteriori}? Is this even possible if we hold to a fundamentalist view of the authority of Scripture, as such a view apparently must begin with an \textit{a priori} assumption?

---

Your second set of questions are profound, and they are never given satisfactory answers by evolutionists. If they are addressed at all, the "explanations" are preceded by words such as "possibly," "could have," "may have," etc.

It is true that we all arrive with our presuppositions. It is inevitable, since from the beginning we must be taught everything, and the very process of that teaching will create those presuppositions. But at some point, if we are honest with ourselves, we will examine the evidence and go where it leads. But, when all the dust settles, we take either the Bible, or Darwinism, on faith, not blind faith, but the "evidence of things not seen." Although I still haven't seen any \textit{real} evidence for evolution.
The process of honestly following the evidence could be facilitated somewhat by convincing parents of the inadvisability of teaching their kids to believe in Santa Claus, the tooth fairy, and other similar fairy tales. At a certain age, when they find that their parents have been lying to them (because it was so "cute"), they may very well reject what they perceive as "fairy tales" about Jesus. By the time they have reached the age where they can engage in some real critical thinking, they have often been so prejudiced against religion that it becomes difficult to change course, evidence or no evidence.

Ervin Taylor 4 weeks ago

Mr. Butler continues to insist that "I still haven't seen any real evidence for evolution." May I offer the suggestion that Mr. Butler can never and will never "see" any "real evidence for evolution" because he sees evolution as running directly counter to his theology. If he wishes to say that "my theology prevents me from seeing any real evidence for evolution", I, for one, would say that such a statement has the virtue of being intellectually honest. But when Mr. Butler and others suggests that evolution is not supported by weight of scientific evidence, then I think the best way to deal with that obviously misinformed statement is to ignore it and move on.

Ron Corson 4 weeks ago

I am not really sure what your point is here Herb, as I think if I asked theologians your questions I would get a wide range of answers, perhaps a less wide range in the Traditional Adventist group but probably some range even there.

As for you science questions well you would probably get more similar answers because the questions are probably more flawed. For instance

"Because for many the premise of evolution is the backbone of most biological courses, is it not true that such science is founded on an unproven theory — and thus the theory of evolution is exactly parallel to belief in special creation?"

The answer will be the theory of evolution is based upon natural selection and that is not a theory but a demonstratable fact. That is in fact what Darwinianism means contrary to how some Adventists think to use the term. The answer becomes more variable when the scientist explains evolution because intelligent design and theistic evolutionists will still see God in the process where as atheistic evolution won't.

Anonymous 4 weeks ago

Ron,

I think Herb has been a silent observer on other threads and this is his way of weighing in on the discussion with a bunch of broadsides. All questions which suggest an entrenched position built
on assumptions and presuppositions.

Herb, perhaps you could also give me an answer to the question I put to Horrace. No one seems to be able to respond to the actual question as yet.

Horace Butler 4 weeks ago

If evolution is based upon natural selection, then the theory is DOA because natural selection adds nothing; it only selects from what is already there. For evolution to work there must be a mechanism to add genetic material (DNA), and so far none has been found. Therefore it is correct to say that it is an unproven theory. Of course evolutionists will claim that it has been proven, but I'm still waiting to see this alleged proof.

Most damaging is the lack of transitional forms. If evolution has been occurring for millions of years most fossils should be transitional forms. Instead, all fossils are fully formed. There are no undisputed transitional forms. So they invented the idea of "punctuated equilibrium," which is nothing more than a face saving device designed to fool the average layman. It's like trying to prove Santa Claus by saying that the reason no one has seen him is because he's too fast to detect. Yeah, right.

Anonymous 4 weeks ago

Horace,

There are many "transitional" forms and components in whales. see link below.

Problem is if scientists find a transitional form, YEC's call it a new one and scientists are left with two gaps instead of one! Can't win.

I asked this question elsewhere:

What are human milk lines? If they are not vestigial, transitional, or "bleeding from one to another" what are they?

http://www.talkorigins.org/features/whales/

Horace Butler 4 weeks ago

There is no consensus on transitional forms. There is dispute among the experts as to whether these fossils are true transitionals or unique species. But my point still stands. Most fossils should be in a state of transition, since it would have taken a lot of changes go from primordial soup to primates. Instead, we have a few "possibles." A vivid imagination helps, as well.

The idea of vestigial organs is a cop out. Because there is no known function for a particular
organ, they get labelled as vestigial, which reflects the evolutionary biases of the scientists, rather than concrete evidence that they have no function. That list continues to shrink, as we discover that these organs have a purpose.

Anonymous 4 weeks ago

Horrace,

Are you suggesting that a "purpose" will ever be found for human milk lines!!?? Even worse, that such a purpose could explain the incredible similarity with other mammals, plus their existence in both genders?

Horace Butler 4 weeks ago

Why not?

Anonymous 4 weeks ago

Horrace,

I've put comment on the other thread where this is being discussed.

Cheers

Elaine Nelson 4 weeks ago

All the questions to theologians presuppose answers that all theologians will answer similarly. The problem: All SDA theologians who are on the payroll are usually very circumspect, if identified, of answering such questions that appear to doubt the official position.

For the scientists, the questions are worded showing preconceived bias: "is it not true that such science is founded on an unproven theory — and thus the theory of evolution is exactly parallel to belief in special creation?"

Why do those working in classification and comparative anatomy have a tough time agreeing with each other — splitters and lumpers, etc.?

This is similar to "when did you stop beating your wife" for ASSUMING the answer. It is not an open-ended question that could be honestly answered as it doesn't hide the answer expected.

This question asked of theologians might find there would also be a tough time agreeing with each other:

1. **What is the difference between ‘perfection’ and ‘overcoming’?**
2. How sinless was Jesus when He was born?
3. Why did Jesus die?

John Andrews
4 weeks ago

Herb Douglass is dead wrong on his defense of sinless perfectionism.

His dogged stance on this issue has caused many in the church to continue down a path towards loss of security of salvation, depression in Christian life and discouragement.

It's time we reject FULLY and UNEQUIVOCALLY this HERESY from our midst and accept the Gospel.

Paul has a great message for us in the book of GALATIANS, we should read it:

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." 2:20

But Douglass says "No", we have to reach perfection and give "ourselves" to God and see if he accepts it.

No wonder Adventist baby boomers who grew up with Douglass' articles in the Review and leaving the church.

Menachem
2 weeks ago

John Andrews... I looked over my bookshelf and cannot locate any HED production remotely suggesting "sinless perfectionism". Please define further or cite your reference. Many thanks!

Joe Erwin
3 weeks ago

It is true, I think, that whatever our current beliefs are, they influence our abilities to process information. We almost automatically accept information that agrees with our beliefs, and we almost immediately reject information that disagrees with our beliefs. Recognizing this, and slowing down the acceptance-rejection process a bit, could really help honest people with different views at least communicate with each other.

But what about people who were taught, and came to believe, positions they later rejected because those positions lacked merit and could not survive examination in the light of evidence? For me, someone who was raised as an adventist and attended SDA schools through a couple of years at PUC (where I was, for awhile, a theology major), I did not simply reject one set of beliefs and accept uncritically another set of dogma. I did not just change over night from being an adventist
Christian with a YEC/YLC perspective to recognition that compelling evidence indicates that the earth is much older than I had been taught. Across many years of entertaining opinions and examining evidence, including--by-the-way--abundant examples of transitional living and faunal forms, I came to appreciate the Wallace-Darwin principle of natural selection as a means of evolutionary change. I had learned about Mendelian inheritance and genetics in an SDA college. What I had not encountered there, was ANYTHING about "the modern synthesis" as proposed by Ronald Fisher in "The genetical theory of natural selection," which then was advanced by Mayr, Dobzhansky, and others, as modern population biology. I had learned very little at PUC about DNA and Watson & Crick's "Molecular Biology of the Gene." I struggled to understand how molecular biology and population biology fit together, recognizing that the potential existed for a new synthesis. But I never became, and still am not, a "Darwinist." Why? Because Darwin lived a long time ago and had very little knowledge or understanding of either population biology or molecular biology. And, because I was not about to be a "true believer" in anything. I had a nagging concern about where the genetic variability comes from that natural selection acts on. It was my impression 40 years ago that we did not know of enough mutagens to produce the amount of variability that had to have been present for evolution to progress as rapidly as the fossil record suggested. I became fascinated with "epigenetic" phenomena, even though many biologists of that time discounted their importance (and usually branded them as Lamarkian). I came to suspect that some portions of DNA were more vulnerable to replication errors than others. Then it became clear that some viruses cleaved DNA (retroviruses) and sometimes inserted sequences of their own DNA into the genome of the host. If this occurred in germ-cell lines, the consequences could be inherited, but even in non-germ cells, there could be functional consequences. By the 1980s, "mobile elements" were discovered that influenced gene expression and genetic variability. The explosion of research on lentiviruses (a kind of retrovirus) since the emergence of AIDS further advanced understanding of virus-host interaction at genomic and functional levels. With detailed studies of genomics, including not only the exonic, but also the intronic, regions of the genome, and by comparing across species (ranging from viruses to humans), it is now very clear that an exceptional amount of genetic variability exists, along with enormous opportunities for environmental influences on expression, function, and replication--and evolution. There is always much more to understand, and we all do well to deal with this complexity very humbly. It is truly awesome and wonderful. I do not mind if you see in all this The Hand of God. For all this to have been invented and set in motion on purpose, that designer would have to have been far beyond our understanding. I see all this as truly remarkable, amazing, etc. I do not happen to see in it the necessity of believing in a designer--but you may, and if that works for you, that is fine with me. Just don't retreat into ignorance and deny that the earth is old or that fossils are real or that evolutionary change occurs. Seek truth. Honestly. And, sure, be humble.

Darrel Lindensmith

Interesting Joe!

Speaking of 'population biology or molecular biology' and the whole 'out-dated'
"mutation/selection" love affair,
I have been deeply interested in the newer fields of epigenetics and genetic front-loading. As you say, 'It is truly awesome and wonderful.' Both of these fields speak to deep deep complexity built into the codes of life from the very very beginning. The deep codes (not mutations) being turned over time explain the radiation of life on the planet. The codes were placed there from the very
beginning, so what we see over time, is what many mistake for a 'natural' process of 'evolution,' but in fact is the "unfolding" of designs that the Creator embedded in the genomes from the very beginning. Here is part of a very interesting new finding, reported in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. "Genetic Data Overturns Theory of Evolutionary Limb Development"

Genetic Switch for Limbs and Digits Found in Primitive Fish"

Genetic instructions for developing limbs and digits were present in primitive fish millions of years before their descendants first crawled on to land, researchers have discovered. Genetic switches control the timing and location of gene activity. When a particular switch taken from fish DNA is placed into mouse embryos, the segment can activate genes in the developing limb region of embryos, University of Chicago researchers report in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

"The genetic switches that drive the expression of genes in the digits of mice are not only present in fish, but the fish sequence can actually activate the expression in mice," said Igor Schneider, PhD, postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Organismal Biology and Anatomy at the University of Chicago and lead author on the paper.

"There previously was the idea that these switches had to be generated from scratch de novo, but no, they already existed, they were already there," said Marcelo Nobrega, MD, PhD, assistant professor of human genetics at the University of Chicago Medical Center and another author of the study. "Maybe the key was expressing a gene earlier or later or in a specific territory, but it was just a modification of a program that was already encoded in the genomes of fish almost half a billion years ago and remains there to this day."

ScienceDaily (July 11, 2011)

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Joe Erwin

Thanks for the comment, Darrel. I think it is clear that the function(s) of many conserved sequences has changed across time. I expect there are many cases where changes in function of highly conserved sequences have been and will be found. There are, however, also many derived sequences in every organism and species. They get there in various ways. They include insertions, deletions, translocations, etc., many of which are based on exposure to retroviruses--which, themselves, undergo various sequence changes across time. Also, in humans and all other organisms, there are many, many genetic loci where single nucleotide polymorphisms exist. This means that some of those polymorphisms can have positive consequences for survival and reproduction, others may have negative or neutral consequences. And SNPs are not the only kinds of polymorphisms that exist. There are many, many variable elements in genomes, and they are changing across time. The actual genomic sequences and loci and the proteomic consequences and phenotypic correlates are the data--the evidence. What we think it means, is something else. Figuring out what genomic data mean is a dynamic and creative process. What I think it means need not be what you think it means. Likewise, reference to an authority, such as someone at University of Chicago who holds and MD and PhD, does not impress me much (as the popular song goes). Lots of degreed people do not necessarily understand what the data mean, and they cannot simply make up the answers any more (or less) than we can. One of the most difficult transitions from traditional SDA thinking, which is terrifically authoritarian, to scientific thinking,
is understanding what constitutes evidence and what is interpretation (and often, VERY speculative interpretation). The mass media typically latches onto the most sensational assertions and explanations of what the evidence might mean. Scientists often go along with that to the extent that it feeds their ego or generates attention that might get their work funded. So, feel free to think what you want to, but, please, hold the evidence gently, and be aware that the explanation that appeals to you most might not be the most valid meaning of the data. Live and be well. Keep on thinking. For yourself. Who knows where that may lead?

David

3 weeks ago

Epigenetics in humans:
Angelman syndrome
Prader-Willi syndrome
Beckwith–Wiedemann syndrome

Darrel Lindensmith

3 weeks ago

Well Joe, I believe the facts are moving in the direction as outlined in these new studies, but feel free to think what you want to, but, please, hold your evidence gently, and be aware that the explanation that appeals to you might not be the most valid meaning of the data. Live and be well. Keep on thinking. For yourself. Who knows where that may lead?

Joe Erwin

3 weeks ago

Hi Darrel, Is that an echo I hear? :) I encourage you to think as you do for as long as you can while continuing to examine the evidence. I wish you had been able to attend a symposium I recently organized, where the participants described current evidence regarding comparative primate and viral genomics and translational medicine. Among other things, one participant mentioned that it has now been found that about 10% of the human genome is made up of retroviral genome sequences. Have a look sometime at the rapidly increasing comparative genomic evidence--and look at work from the Batzer Lab at LSU on mobile elements and cladistic genomics. You can probably also find some recent publications by Sara Sawyer. Just read it to find out what they are saying. You need not believe it unless you just can't help it.

Thomas "Vastergotland"

3 weeks ago

Would the papers presented at that symposium be available for us to read?
Seminary Student 3 weeks ago

I will disagree with the opinion of John Andrews about Dr. Douglass. This man has been a blessing to the Adventist church. Ervin, I am surprised that you would think that "evolution is supported by a great weight of evidence". Where is the evidence? do you have any insights into that weight of evidence?

Vernon P. Wagner 3 weeks ago

I'm going to the Galapagos in December where I'll visit the Darwin Station. I expect to return more of a heretic than usual.

Joe Erwin 3 weeks ago

Vernon, that should be a very interesting trip. I have not done that yet. The Darwin finches is an interesting story, and I think there is some fairly recent and interesting genomics work done on them, following on the zebra finch genome work.

Seminary Student, Erv is correct that evolution is supported by a great weight of evidence. Where is the evidence? It is reported in the enormous scientific literature of the world, and the evidence accumulates more each day. Erv can point you to the literature, but no one can make you read or understand it if you are unwilling or uninterested in reading any of it. I can only urge you give yourself a chance to examine the evidence. It need not threaten your faith in God. If you examine the evidence, though, you are pretty likely to change the way you think about things. I'm not one to advise you regarding your faith (though I was an SDA theology major long ago), but the one piece of advice I would give is: "Don't put God in a box." Anyone capable of designing and setting in motion life in all its emergent complexity (not to mention the universe), does not need to conform with any human conception of Him/Her/It.

Horace Butler 3 weeks ago

One dirty little secret that is not openly discussed by evolutionists is the fact that the so-called "great weight of evidence," is nothing more than bilge and beanstalks, supported by the shifting sands of scientific opinion. The evidence is routinely manipulated to make it appear more in harmony with evolutionary theory. This is true, not only of how fossils (especially "hominids") are arranged, but in how their age is determined.

What this boils down to is that the average person will believe what they want to, regardless of the evidence. I happen to believe that the weight of evidence is overwhelmingly against evolution.

David 3 weeks ago

I been in the Galapagos two times and next year I’m organizing a medical conference there.
Take a few pictures of the giant turtle “lonely George” this is the last one of his kind, who knows after years of his death somebody could expostulate that this turtle was a “transitional” species that proves the evolution.

By the way have I’m have been working using genomics in the rat’s brain to see the toxicity of oxygen in the first moments of live.

David 3 weeks ago

Take a few pictures of the giant turtle “lonely George” this is the last one of his kind, who knows after years of his death somebody could speculate this turtle was a “transitional” species that proves the evolution.

Elaine Nelson 3 weeks ago

Seminary Student asked:

"I am surprised that you would think that "evolution is supported by a great weight of evidence". Where is the evidence? do you have any insights into that weight (sic) of evidence?"

Are you qualified to evaluate properly such evidence? You write "seminary student" which is not usually in the business of teaching the biological sciences. What are you qualifications in those disciplines? Do you accept the findings of anyone, especially someone who is far more qualified (in theology)? Why? How are you able to determine the efficacy of more than half the world's knowledge? Special insight? Or, could it be that you have an aversion to anything that smacks of science that is not found in the Bible, excepting of course, medical science.

J. David Newman 3 weeks ago

Interesting dicussion but hardly anyone is discussing the challenge that Dr. Douglas has issued. How do we arrive at the assumptions to decide which facts we will select for our point of view? I have been reading Michael Polanyi and finding it taking a long time to grasp all that he is saying. He is rather unique because he was an eminent scientist then became a philosopher. His main work is Personal Knowledge. Drusilla Scott has tried to explain his position on assumptions in her book Everyman Revived. Polanyi says that our assumptions rise out of our experience and from intuitively grasping certain things. He has coined the term "tacit knowledge."

"Everywhere, at all elemental levels, it is not the functions of the articulate logical operations but the tacit powers of the mind that are decisive"

"We know more than we can tell" is the phrase with which Polanyi sometimes introduced tacit knowledge. For instance, you know your child's face, you could recognize it among a thousand with instant certainty. Yet you cannot tell how you know it; you could not specify exactly its
shape, size, coloring, the measurement of the features. You do know these, for you rely on your knowledge of them in recognizing the face, but you can't tell them. You know them tacitly. What you have is the power to recognize a whole (the face) of which you can't specify the parts.

It takes faith (an intangible) to believe there is a God. For scientists it takes faith to believe that either the universe is eternal or that something came from nothing or that inorganic matter can create organic matter, that non life can produce life. The real question is how do we decide where we place our faith and how do we arrive at the assumptions that help us decide?

Elaine Nelson 3 weeks ago

David, we decide with different factors for the different choices we make. If our child is desperately ill we seek the best medical advice; if we seek scientific answers we seek the most qualified scientists in that field; if we seek explanation of Bible passages we seek someone qualified in the Bible languages to aid in our understanding. Good judgment helps us to know which of the many expert sources offer the best advice.

Religion is NOT a science, it is a philosophical view of life just as atheism or Buddhism or Daoism. If one is a Christian then he will form his opinions based on that particular philosophy. One must first make the effort to determine who is best qualified to answer the type of questions. One must have faith in his physician if he wishes to be healed, rather than the charlatan or neighbor down the street. People have faith in many religious leaders based on the charisma of that individual. Faith is a very loose and ill-defined term.

Trevor Hammond 3 weeks ago

Evolution is NOT a science...

Horace Butler 3 weeks ago

That cuts through all the gibberish. Evolution is a religion, just as much as Christianity is a religion. The main difference is that Christians have more "evidence of things not seen" on which to base their faith than evolutionists do. Someone has described evolution as a "fairy tale for grownups." It fits. I just hope many of them realize it before it's too late.

Roscoe Fogg 3 weeks ago

Then, Mr. Hammond, the title of this blog should have been

Nonscientists and Theologians have Similar Problems

Actually, that title has the ring of truth.
"Evolution is NOT science" is a phrase that begs a question:

Is a seven day creation of the entire Universe exactly 6,000 yrs ago, complete with a deadly tree and talking snake, SCIENCE? We even call the two views as: STORY of Creation, and the THEORY of Evolution. Can we now pass final judgment upon something that cannot be proven from either viewpoint?

Whatever happened to a Flat Earth with Four Corners located at the center of the Solar System? Oh yes, it's that pesky thing called 'science' in conflict with the Church again...TO THE RACK WITH HIM!

Hi Joe, I am glad someone has a sence of humor. I will look at those items. Thanks God bless

So here’s the deal: If there is not a Creator (Eternal Mind/Being) then we can not really account for the rationality of minds ( I am talking about ours). If there is not a Creator we have no reason to believe in rationality itself. If minds/rationality (logic and science) do exist, then the ground for their existence is a priori. This a transcendental argument. "It is the firm conviction of every epistemologically self-conscious Christian that no human being can utter a single syllable, whether in negation or affirmation, unless it were for God's existence. Thus the transcendental argument seeks to discover what sort of foundations the house of human knowledge must have, in order to be what it is." Van Til, A Survey of Christian Epistemology, 11.

If we were not designed by a thinker, how could we be truly thinking.--it might be our perception, (neurons are firing and we "are dancing to our DNA" but that's all.

Elaine, You are stating your assumptions not facts. How did you arrive at those assumptions? Let me quote from Drusilla Scotts book on Polanyi, It would make it easier if everyone would read this book but here we go, "To state as Polanyi does that one is committed and under obligation to search for the truth, is to state an ultimate belief which is not provable. Is it any different than from Popper's admission that science rests on "faith in quite hazy ideas"? Yes it is different because Popper then tries to construct science on rules as if it were not resting on this faith, while to Polanyi the faith, which is not just an intellectual acceptance but a risky commitment of the whole person, is an integral part of knowledge. This commitment is the link between the personal aspect of knowledge in which it is my knowledge, and the universal aspect in which it is knowledge of reality, valid for anyone. My commitment is from where I am, what I am, to a reality beyond myself. It is the difference between personal and subjectivity." p. 74. Polanyi explains that science is just as subjective as beauty and how we decide moral values. It all
involves how we understand objective knowledge and tacit knowledge. Both are knowledge, both are real, but one is found in rules and laws and the other is found in intuition as in the example Polanyi gave of recognizing the baby in a crowd of babies. When I have finished reading Polanyi and fully understanding everything he has to say I will write an article for AT summarizing his ideas and how science and religion are actually built on the same foundations. He refuses to place them in separate categories that are parallel but never really touching.

J. David Newman 3 weeks ago

Oh, and a further thought. There are thousands of ideas even facts about everything. We use our assumptions to decide which facts we will select to bolster our case and ignore those that do not. For example, one person uses the presupposition of uniformitarianism to show that our earth and the universe is millions and billions of years old. Another person will question that assumption and use the assumption that the introduction of sin altered some of the fundamental laws by which we function. Therefore we cannot fully know beyond a certain time. Until we can agree on which assumption we will use there is no point going any further in the discussion since it would be as unfulfilling as a College football team playing an NFL team without first agreeing on whose rules (assumptions) they will play by.

Anonymous 3 weeks ago

David,

Food for thought. I'm just wondering whether your first question and second point provide a clue.

Here's the points:

"How do we arrive at the assumptions to decide which facts we will select for our point of view?"

and your second point:

"We use our assumptions to decide which facts we will select to bolster our case and ignore those that do not."

You have (I think correctly) made the apriori assumption that there are "facts" we can examine. Perhaps our challenge is to turn your question around thus:

"How can I reduce my assumptions to the absolute minimum in order to be best observant of the most available facts?"

Would it not be correct that only when I sucessfully do this are my assumptions (beliefs) based on the weight of facts and more truly a posterioiri?
Of course, as you note, our ability to do this is going to be significantly impacted by our background, view of reality, and preconceived views etc.

I'm still waiting for Herb to answer my question along these lines:

"What would you advise people to do to ensure they are truly evaluating their assumptions \textit{a posteriori}? Is this even possible if we hold to a fundamentalist view of the authority of Scripture, as such a view apparently must begin with an \textit{a priori} assumption?"

**Anonymous**  
3 weeks ago

David Newman,

Can I pick up on another of your points:

"one person uses the presupposition of uniformitarianism to.... Another person ...use(s) the assumption that the introduction of sin altered some of the fundamental laws by which we function. Therefore we cannot fully know beyond a certain time."

Totally agree with this dynamic. And, yes until these are dealt with we will never agree. It highlights a key point:

The uniformitarian assumption is based on observable data, and therefore may equally be a considered a conclusion based on "facts", or considered as an assumption.

The assumption that sin altered things is in fact based on an \textit{a priori} assumption: That the Bible is correct and authoritative in this "fact".

To make this \textit{a priori} claim about the Bible should in fact be a step considerably "down the road" from analysis of other observable evidence first...

May I suggest the authority of the Bible is an \textit{a priori} assumption which must be held in limbo, just as uniformitarianism must be, to allow the best assessment of facts/data?

**Elaine Nelson**  
3 weeks ago

That leaves none of us out, does it?

**J. David Newman**  
3 weeks ago

Right. Trying to deal with assumptions is like trying to pick up oil. It just keeps slipping through your hands. That is why we work so hard to avoid dealing with the subject. Dr Douglas asked us to deal with how we arrive at our assumptions but most of the posts have avoided doing just that.
Anonymous 3 weeks ago

mmm..

Did I miss something? Where did Dr Douglas ask us to deal with how we arrive at our assumptions?

I actually thought he just made the point we are burdened by such, and asked a whole lot of questions which provided implicit pointers as to what his assumptions were?

Ron Corson 3 weeks ago

Seems to be the book Newman is using is incorrect. It says: ""We know more than we can tell" is the phrase with which Polanyi sometimes introduced tacit knowledge. For instance, you know your child's face, you could recognize it among a thousand with instant certainty. Yet you cannot tell how you know it; you could not specify exactly its shape, size, coloring, the measurement of the features. You do know these, for you rely on your knowledge of them in recognizing the face, but you can't tell them. You know them tacitly. What you have is the power to recognize a whole (the face) of which you can't specify the parts."

Just because you don't or could not specify the various facts you know about the face of someone does not mean that the facts are not there. It just means when you get up into the hundreds of facts or more we don't do well at listing them all. The tacit powers of the mind is that you don't have to or you cannot specifically list all of the multitudes of facts that bring you to a conclusion. This is not intuition it is experience, so conclusions arise out of experience and the less understood intuition perhaps but that would not be where assumptions come from. Assumptions are the presuppositions which often are not based upon facts...which is why assumptions are so problematic.

Elaine Nelson 3 weeks ago

I am reminded of the difficulty some physicians have in diagnosing a strange, new-to-them ailment. Even after all the required testing, there still is not an effective diagnosis. Then another physician arrives and check the tests and looks at the patient, asks a few questions, and comes up with the correct diagnosis. Who would ask all the reasons, as he may not be able to recite them. Experience is of ultimate importance, just in identifying your child's face as well as his likes and dislikes even beforehand, which Ron has written.

J. David Newman 3 weeks ago

cb25

You make some excellent points. Theologians divide our understanding of the world into special
revelation and general revelation. Special revelation is what is given directly by God whether through a dream, a vision, the Bible etc. (Of course this presupposes a God, but then the atheist has to presuppose there is no God). General Revelation is nature. We have the facts of nature and we have the facts of the Bible. The issue is how we interpret nature and how we interpret the Bible. I operate from the presupposition that the Bible is correct in describing a great controversy between God and Satan. Thus I operate from the assumption that Satan will do everything to discredit God and do everything to try and show that the Bible is not correct and he uses science to do this.

Let me quote Polanyi again, "The prevailing conception of science, based on the disjunction of subjectivity and objectivity, seeks -- and must seek at all costs -- to eliminate from science such passionate, personal, human appraisals . . . For modern man has set up as the ideal of knowledge the conception of natural science as a set of statements which is 'objective' in the sense that its substance is entirely determined by observation . . . This conception, stemming from a craving rooted in the very depth of our culture, would be shattered if the intuition of rationality in nature had to be acknowledged as a justifiable and indeed essential part of scientific theory.' So why should the strict keepers of the house of science let in this intuition of rationality, this unprobable faith?

"Basically because all is not so well as it looks in their well ordered house. Polanyi speaks of his persistence in 'rattling all the skeletons in the cupboard of the current scientific outlook.' Insist as they may on the rigid framework of testable evidence, philosophers admit it breaks down. They can keep their rigid rules only at the cost of losing contact with reality. . . . Even Russell (Bertrand) admitted that there was no solid basis for induction. Laws of nature cannot be proved by any such procedure, since however many times something happens you can never be sure it will always happen -- not with the faith, the intuition of rationality. So you can only live in your house of rules and pretend the faith is not there.

"'From a psychological point of view,' Popper wrote, 'I am inclined to think that scientific discovery is impossible without faith in ideas which are of a purely speculative kind and sometimes quite hazy; a faith which is quite unwarranted from the scientific point of view'" p. 41 (Everyman Revived, The Commonsense of Michael Polanyi)
presupposition that the Bible is correct in describing a great controversy between God and Satan. Thus I operate from the assumption that Satan will do everything to discredit God and do everything to try and show that the Bible is not correct and he uses science to do this."

Several points:

1. Special revelation through the Bible is actually the fourth a priori assumption in on the required steps to reach that point. *a priori one* - nature is. *a priori two* - there is a God. *a priori three* - H/he communicates by those methods. *a priori four* - the Bible is the authoritative source of that special revelation from God.

Is it not in fact at a priori one that theists and atheists should share common ground? Is it not from that point we should begin our dialog? You say "We have the facts of nature and we have the facts of the Bible." Surely to say the "facts" of the Bible is take an a priori starting point which puts dialog out the window?.

That puts you or anyone else who takes such a position three steps away from anywhere real dialogue can begin.

2. On the opposite side...nature is a given (a fact as noted earlier). Surely if I begin a priori with its reality and that reason exists it should form the basis for conclusions about reality after gathering of data. Nature, not a book (no matter how good I think it is). To assume authority from a 3rd step in puts us on equal footing with Muslims and Mormons who a priori claim the same for their books.?

3. You begin apriori with the Great Controversy, as do most others here. Again, with respect, this puts you 3, if not 4 steps in from where genuine dialog can begin.

4. It seems to me that Polanyi, Russel and Popper are highly at risk of having begun their work with a polemic rather than in an effort to address the type of question I put:

"**How** can I reduce my assumptions to the absolute minimum in order to be best observant of the **most** available facts? "

Rather than address this question or need they (at least in the quotes you gave) are perhaps seeking to undermine the reality and observableness of nature in order to bring it down to a level playing field with their a priori assumption as to some other authority...eg Bible. An authority which at least to me, is several assumptions in from a more sound starting point.

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**Anonymous**

3 weeks ago

Quick update on my observations about Polanyi etc.

Did some research into them and I was incorrect about their polemic. I actually don't think what they had/have to say was specifically relevant to this discussion, and therefore using them in this context suggests a polemic use of their words/work?
At initial observation it seems to me there are issues with the tacit knowledge drift, but that's a different theme for another time.

Elaine Nelson
3 weeks ago

"I operate from the presupposition that the Bible is correct in describing a great controversy between God and Satan."

It won't be found in most of the Bible until the Hebrews were influenced by the Persians during their Exile. Prior to that time, there was no Satan; God was in control of everything, both good and evil. A rather late comer in theodicy.

Presupposing a great controversy theme in the Bible is one assumption; there is also the assumption, or theme, that God is love—which is a continuing theme throughout the entire Bible, not just what was written much later. It is also a theme made unique by Adventism by adopting EGW as the establisher of doctrines; just as the Book of Mormon or the Pearl of Great Price is Mormonism's unique contribution. Being unique is not the best way to determine truth; only a religious doctrine for a specific denomination. What other Christian denomination has "found" this theme? In the overall scheme of salvation, how important a part does it play? Must one accept this theme for salvation? If so, how will it be of benefit?

David
3 weeks ago

Some of the participant stated, "Evolution is supported by a great weight of evidence". Really? What kind of evidence? A reproducible one? Not a all.

If evolution is so obvious like the law of gravity or the need of oxygen for us live, every honest person in this planet will accept it. But the reality is not that obvious. Some of us have legitimate objections.

To evolve from lower forms of life to more complex ones requires **mutations** (fundamental changes in the DNA that can be transmitted to the following generations). In simples words mutations will makes better. The overwhelming evidence tells us the contrary (mutation are deleterious and lethal, in other words mutations make us worse). Here are some examples Trisomy 21, 18, and 13. I could provide hundreds of others diseases.

So I can say the evolution until now evolution is not supported by **reproducible evidence**, actually is disproved by it. This kind of evidence is superior to any other kind.

Roscoe Fogg
3 weeks ago

Some Scientific Issues
Induction: In science, inductive reasoning can be used to help formulate a hypothesis.

Deductive logic: Once a hypothesis is stated, deductive logic can be used to predict the consequences of that hypothesis. Scientists have to be able to derive consequences from a hypothesis that can be tested by observation or experimentation.

Proof: Hypotheses and theories are always, to some degree, tentative. They are never proven as a mathematical theorem is proven. A scientist's confidence that a hypothesis is a good one depends on how rigorously it has been tested and on how closely its consequences agree with observations.

Faith: Scientists don't have faith in science in the sense of religious faith; scientists have confidence in science because of its record of epistemic success. It's confidence not religious faith.

Science is not a religion, it's a strategy for learning about the natural world and it's been very successful. I don't think scientists and theologians have much in common at all.

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David 3 weeks ago

The key element for a scientist to have confidence in an observation is because it has been tested with rigor and is reproducible. Although the mathematical certainty is never reach the probability to reproduce is high. We use the “p value” the smallest this number the highest is the probability. Now part of the evolution is reproducible and could be tested over and over? If we can not do that is just matter of opinion in other words faith.

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Elaine Nelson 3 weeks ago

As a non-scientist, is it not true that "science" is only a method for learning by repeated tests? Religion is a matter of faith and religious belief and scientific knowledge are poles apart because they involve entirely different methods of seeking "truth."

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Roscoe Fogg 3 weeks ago

Elaine, Science isn't "only" a method, it's a very powerful method and yes, repeated testing is part of a scientific strategy. Of course, it's sometimes very difficult, time consuming, and expensive to make the observations or conduct the experiments necessary to test a hypothesis.

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Joe Erwin 3 weeks ago

"Science" is many different things, but most of all it is a method of obtaining and evaluating evidence. It is a method of truth seeking. Science and its methods have been adapted and refined across the years. Science itself is always changing, as scientists seek even better and more reliable and predictive techniques. I hope I don't see many more assertions here that science and knowledge
are the devil's tools. That is just crazy talk.

Which brings up another point, relevant to the topic Dr. Douglass introduced here. Perhaps I should ask your forgiveness in advance for bringing this up, but I'll plunge forward. My field of training is biological psychology. My most recent full-time employment was as head of a department of neurobiology, behavior, and genetics for an NIH research contractor. So, much of my career has involved attention to mental health issues. And, yes, I am stating the obvious fact that some theologians and some scientists suffer from various kinds of mental illness, certainly, obsessive-compulsive disorders, depression, paranoid personalities, and even various kinds and severities of schizophrenia.

Some theologians are extremely dogmatic and inflexible, so are some scientists. Others are warm and flexible human beings who are pleasant to be with. Some of each are highly "authoritarian," in the sense of anchoring what they believe on what they consider authoritative sources. Some of each are always looking for new evidence and new meaning. Others? Not so much. I suspect that many people fill a need for understanding or certainty by turning to theologians or scientists as "authorities." I think some scientists and some theologians greatly embellish what they see as evidence and what they think the evidence means. And, in both cases, I think there is a ready audience of people who are anxious and ready to be misled with easy answers, impressive rhetoric, and distorted reasoning.

As I scientist I choose to hold what I think I know pretty tenuously, because I am confident that what I think I know now is very likely to be changed in the future. What is known changes across time. Many things change across time. How things change across time can be scientifically studied. How things change is not science, but how things change can be a subject of scientific study.

So, for those who are so inclined, how about refraining from the crazy assertions that science is of the devil? When you say things like that, it gives me the impression that you are either ignorant or nuts or both.

Roscoe Fogg 3 weeks ago

Thanks Mr. Erwin,

If you please, I would like to know your opinion on applying the methods of science to the study of the supernatural or the miraculous.

Darrel Lindensmith 3 weeks ago

I agree Joe; attacking the rational validity of the interprise of science is shooting ourselfe in the foot (actually, in the head.) I was looking for this statement from Darwin for my earlier post. I believe we can trust our rational minds and this belief presumposes we are created by God. If this is not so I would have my doubts like Darwin: "the horrid doubt always arises whether the
convictions of man's mind, which has been developed from the mind of the lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy. Would any one trust in the convictions of a monkey's mind, if there are any convictions in such a mind?" Darwin, letter to William Graham, Down, July 3rd 1881. In the Life and letter of Charles Darwin. Editor Francis Darwin, D Appleton and Co. 1887, vol 1 pag. 255

More recently the Harvard Atheist Richard Rorty inadvertintly invalidated his own worldview/religion as well as any other, as he echoed Darwin's doubts: "The idea that one species of organism is, unlike all the others, oriented not just toward its own prosperity but toward Truth, is as un-Darwinian as the idea that every human being has a built-in moral compass—a conscience that swings free of both social history and individual luck." "Untruth and Consequences," The New Republic, July 31, 1995, pp. 32-36.

Also as scientist I pretty much know the limitations of research. In medicine the great majority of publications does not hold the prove of time and reproducibility. Why? There are many reasons, here are some of them: wrong model, inadequate number, inappropriate statistical analysis, alteration of data, and other reasons. There is also dishonesty you better keep to your self your ideas other wise somebody could literally stilled. Under the pressure of "publish or perish" there is also plagiarism, falsification and manipulation. **That is why the only observations then will hold their validity are the ones that we can reproduce over and over.**

I also I'm the chief on the one of most prestigious intensive care unit of the country with world class reputation with several years of research, as principal and also as senior investigator with grants of the NIH, DOD, MOD, and others.

Please call me Joe. "Mr. Erwin" was my father. I am not very interested in using scientific method to study paranormal phenomena, but, of course, if there are people who claim to be prescient, or something, that can be tested--although claims are often made that paranormal phenomena happen only in the presence of those who "believe." There is a body of literature, of course, attempting to deal with this, in a field known as "parapsychology." Check, for example, Charles Tart. I once served as a TA for him. He was pretty strange.

One cannot and should not expect every published study to hold ultimate truth that is not subject to revision. There is such a thing as "sampling error" when inferring/generalizing from samples and case studies to populations, and lots of scientists do not have very strong training in either experimental design or statistics. There are a lot of exaggerated and many incorrect generalizations from epidemiological data too, not just experimental research. So, that is why we try to look at
many sources of information ("meta-analyses" involving review of many studies on the same topic). Research on few, if any, topics is ever complete.

We are mere humans. None of us is perfect. None of us does anything without sometimes erring. What we can do is try to do the best we can. Please don't quote the opinions of scientists, even those who have vast expertise on any topic as if his/her words were scripture or were intended to hold that level of authority. Besides, brilliant scientists often venture opinions on matters on which they have little or no direct information. Scientists are fallible humans. And I'm pretty sure Theologians are too.

Right, when evidence repeatedly turns out the same way, we have much greater confidence in those data. Even so, interpretations of reliable evidence are not necessarily as reliable as the data they are based on. Speculations about human thoughts and minds, along with those of monkeys, have little prospect of being anything more than wild guesses. They are just made up, and we should all know enough to take them as nothing more than idle chatter. We can, however, compare the brains of monkeys, apes, and humans in many ways that provide some reliable bases for discussion. Why we see the differences we see, and what the functional consequences are, are also interesting fuel for discussion and further study.

Whether such comparisons are of interest or have any value may well depend on one's perspective, but one's perspective should not influence the evidence. The objective evidence is whatever it is. What it means is quite another matter.

Joe Erwin

And, by-the-way, one of the reasons I am not a "Darwinist," is that I'm uncomfortable with the method of reaching a conclusion and then assembling all the evidence one can find that agrees with that conclusion and discarding whatever does not fit the conclusion. Darwin did that. Just as detectives and district attorneys do when building a case against someone. So, some people believe in gathering and evaluating evidence that way, and some scientists do that too. I prefer to try to evaluate things in terms of the strengths and weaknesses I can find. Too often, when I have been studying something, the results of my investigation--the actual objective data--turn out to be just opposite "what everyone knows." I do not claim, when that occurs, that everyone else has been stupid or that they falsified their data. I am usually able to find some reason why the results might differ because the methods or subjects differ. But, the end message is, that something that was thought to be generally true is not as generally true as was thought. Or, that the evidence from other studies which led to the general conclusion was not examined in the same way as I examined the evidence from my study. But agreeing, as I do, that scientists disagree with each other about what evidence means, and agreeing that the results and conclusions regarding them need to be regarded as tentative, does not mean that anyone has been able to falsify the proposition that plants and animals change over time, both ontogenetically and phylogenetically. Fossils are real. They need to be carefully studied and they require some kind of explanation (other than some bizarre notion that they were planted by the devil to test our faith--that is simply nuts). Even more compelling is the genomic record, which shows where changes occurred in various organisms and allows identification of conserved and derived genomic features. Also evident are the myriad of...
changes in genetic material, including lateral transmission of genetic changes (by the insertion of viral genomic sequences into genomes of host organisms). Clearly, natural selection requires genetic variation if it is to work. Now that it is clearly known that many mechanisms introduce genetic change, it is quite clear that there has been much more material upon which selection and adaptation can work. It is amazing that fallible humans have gotten to the state of knowledge that is now available. And, of course, none of us knows all the evidence. I'm fine with people challenging any or all of the evidence, as long as they are fair about what they do. But deciding in advance how things are, and then coming up with convoluted and irrational explanations and nitpicking around the edges—for prejudices that do not even have any sort of scriptural basis, is unnecessary and unconvincing to anyone unless they already agree with you.

BTW, David, I appreciate your mentioning your area of expertise, but I was not trying to claim greater authority than you have.

J. David Newman
3 weeks ago

cb25

sorry I have taken so long to reply. I was on a plane all day and my Ipad will not allow me to post so I have to pay in the business center of the hotel. Anyone else with that problem?

Regarding your four a priori assumptions. I would place nature and the Bible equal first. Why? When we lived in Scotland we helped a pregnant Indian woman from Uganda with the birth of her son and had her in our home for a while. He grew up to be a six foot dark Indian lad with a wonderful Scottish accent. If you heard him for the first time on the telephone you would assume that he was a typical white Scottish male. If you saw only a photo of him you would assume that he was a typical Indian with an Indian or English accent. In both cases your assumptions would be wrong. You needed extra data to make the correct assumptions.

In the book of Joshua we read the story of the Gibeonites who showed moldy bread, cracked sandals, and worn out clothes to show they had come a long distance. The Israelites accepted the evidence. After all they were old. the next day they discovered that these people lived over the next hill. There is a telling verse in Joshua which says "they did not inquire of the Lord."

If I look only at Nature I will be deceived. Nature tells me that evil is part of the creative process, that evil has always existed. I need the Bible to explain how evil came into existence and how nature has been corrupted by evil. There is a tension between nature and the bible, between general revelation and special revelation. Nature does not tell me that I need a Savior. Nature does not tell me that there is a heaven, a real place. I need the Bible. Without the bible I am going to misinterpret Nature.

Both nature and the Bible are facts. We have both before us. The challenge is how we interpret those facts and which one informs who. And it is true that we have misinterpreted the Bible to make nature say things it never said but the problem was not the bible but our hermeneutic. An example of tension is an airplane fighting gravity and velocity. Too much gravity and no progress. Too much velocity and it shoots into space. But keep the right tension between the two opposing
fores and progress is made. I believe that is how we should work with science and the bible. there will be tensions. We will never have all the answers. We need to keep working on how we keep the right balance, the right tension between them. We need much humility.

Anonymous 3 weeks ago

David Newman,

Appreciate your reply in difficult circumstances.

Your points have a nice ring to them, but I admit they make me quite uneasy.

A few points why.

The “Scottish” lad actually illustrates the process, importance and results of validating an assumption. You suggest two possible assumptions: 1 typical white Scottish male, and 2, typical Indian with accent etc.

We needed more data, but that data did not invalidate the a priori assumption – it clarified it. He was male; he was not white; he was in Scotland. He was also of Indian background. Though he was not typical, the core assumption remained.

This is a great example of an a priori assumption, which began with some data, but when tested a posteriori (gathering available data) is improved, clarified and largely validated.

Critical here is that if someone “inspired” told you he was white, and had an Australian accent...you would reject it because the observable evidence disagreed.

Two errors could occur:

* Failure to test it when there is obviously observable, gather-able evidence available.

* Relying solely on the “inspired” dictum he was white and Aussie, when the “other” data which was observable and gather-able said otherwise!

This illustrates the crucial role more data can play in reshaping initial assumptions, but I fail to see how it proves the other a priori assumption that the Bible is the source of the additional data we need.

Why would I make an “inspired” person, particularly if they countered the other data a greater authority than what I can see about this person? So too it would seem for the Bible. (Except of course if I have made another a priori assumption, and validated, that it has greater authority, but I will come to next comment..
Hi David,

Another point if I may. You say “If I use nature I will be deceived”. First, is that not a recognition that nature and the Bible present vastly different views?

You use the Gibeonites to highlight the connection between their deception and the “deception” of nature. Is there not a major difference here?

In the Gibeonite story, God is a third party, he is removed from the deception, but can provide information if asked.

In Bible vs nature, he is not a third party. He is presumed the source of both, and he has presumably provided information. **Why should one be so different that it can be considered a deception when compared with the other?**

Sure, we say it is the corruption of evil, but this solves nothing because its the same God telling the story, and he should get it right. As more and more data from nature conflict with the Bible account, are we not going to make God actually look like the Gibeonites? Saying one thing, but doing another? Yes, I've even heard people say he made the trees look old in the garden? Knocks the socks off old boots!

I will pick up on this more shortly...

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Ok... my last comment in response to your hard worked for response:)

The reason I have taken the liberty to respond at greater length is that I think you raised a vital issue: getting a common starting point. Perhaps doing so is more difficult that we imagine. As you say, oil through the fingers

It seems that one of the reasons you give for giving the Bible authority is that nature cannot tell you certian things. This may be acceptable, but if in fact nature *does not speak* of, or to, those things - how do you confirm the veracity of the Bible's statements? Even worse, how do you confirm the veracity of the Bible when nature contradicts it? As with the Scottish lad, does this not invalidate an a priori granting of authority to the Bible? We would not take any "inspired" view of *him* that contradicted obvious and common sense data.

I also have to admit the several points you make about what nature cannot do are not so clear to me:
“Nature does not tell me that I need a Savior.”

What about the many religious cultures which do not have the Bible, but do have a saviour or god who “rescues” or “intervenes”? 

“Nature does not tell me that there is a heaven, a real place” again, other religions are not devoid of this theme.

One of the (to me) most significant conundrums faced by atheism is the commonality of these type of themes throughout unrelated, unlinked people groups over vast periods of time. Humanity is part of nature and nature does speak about spiritual things. (but that's a theme for another blog from me).

Ok... enough on that... others may have better things to say!...

Herbert Douglass
3 weeks ago

I am so sorry for my tardiness. Since my last entry I have had to learn the mysteries of the Mac (previous WordPerfect system really crashed!). Believe me, there is a learning curve! I am so grateful for each of the comments, I feel much enriched. We don't have the space to respond to each one, except perhaps for the comments that show complete ignorance of the facts: that I advocate "sinless perfection." If anyone can find that I have written or said those words, please refresh me. I know when those charges were first made and then quoted endlessly--but they are used as a shibboleth for those who can not accept the NT emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit given to all who indeed want to overcome their moral weaknesses. We are meant to "grow up." Those troubled with "perfection" should recognize that only God enjoys "perfection" and such a goal will be the happy venture throughout eternity. Now if one is concerned about "moral" perfection, then we should let the Bible answer that question, IMO.

In relation to similarities in man/animal configuration, we can simply point to the continuing tension within Comparative Anatomy that specializes in form and structure. Those similarities (forearms have the same bones in all limbed vertebrates) are facts, but what do they mean? This is where speculation begins. The creationist believes that the Master Planner saw similar functions and used similar structures, merely modifying these structures to meet the individual requirements of each organism.

I was simply gratified beyond words when reading Joe Erwin's current walk. Honesty is still one of the tests of humility. I am still wondering in this blog trail of anyone suggesting that "scientists" are of the devil, etc. I guess for the same reasons that some think "theologians" are of the devil!!

In both worlds, I am always leery of "doublespeak" where words are used that, in fact, distort or deny the truth at issue. I think when "natural selection" is used, young people now assume that that is a more eloquent way to think of "evolution." Or, when we are told that"printing fiat money" is merely "quantitative easing." Huh! Or Jesus "paid" for my sins!" Really, to whom? In other words,
language must always have understandable referents. Only God can help us during a presidential campaign!

Cb25 really keeps our feet to the fire. At the moment, my only answer regarding assumptions and presuppositions is to watch what happened to the early disciples after the Resurrection. What a change of world views, assumptions and presuppositions! Or with Paul after the Damascus Road experience! Truth seems to find its way through the right response to experience that needs to be tested, over and over again. There may be better ways to say all this. Cheers, Herb

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**Editor** 3 weeks ago

cb25

You raise many great questions and I appreciate very much your approach. You do not indulge in ad hominimum arguments or use sarcasm.

There is so much to reply to. First, my illustration of the Scottish lad was not meant to walk on all fours. I was simply showing how easy we make assumptions and even science at its most basic levels is based on assumptions which is another word for faith. Just some examples:

The assumption that inorganic material can produce organic material. I am not aware of actual testable evidence for this.
The assumption that macro evolution is still taking place today. I am not aware of evidence for this today or a satisfactory answer if it is no longer taking place.
The assumption that after the big bang all the laws we have today just happened. How did chaos produce order.

You ask "Why should one be so different that it can be considered a deception when compared with the other?"

You say
"God is telling the story and he should get it right"

It seems that the basic issue is still the respective authority of nature and the bible. For you nature interprets the bible. For the bible interprets nature. Let's for a moment agree with your premise. To be consistent we will consider all miracles in the bible to be stories not fact. This means that the resurrection of Christ never happened. If someone says there are exceptions then how do we decide the exceptions? This is what will happen when we follow science to its logical conclusion.

If you do not factor in the problem of evil then you come to one set of conclusions. If you factor in evil then you will come to a different set of conclusions.

It seems to me that if we say that God created the universe through evolution then he stepped back and did nothing after that (because we are afraid of a God of the gaps). But then if we do not let the bible inform us of the issue of sin and evil then we will believe that evolution is the only way. If adam and eve are not historical figures, if they are not the first couple then when did sin come...
into this world and what is sin anyway?

Anonymous

David Newman,

Wow...Challenging questions:)
Re the Scottish Lad, yes, it is a danger trying to make an illustration walk on all fours. (sounds like Morris Vendon Exodus to Advent(??))

I think on the most basic level we can, as you say, substitute “assumption” for “faith”, though I suspect what is “basic” would need some unpacking.

The three example assumptions you gave could be useful to narrow our focus a little.

- Inorganic material producing organic
- Macro evolution taking place today
- Big bang chaos producing order

I suspect that only the middle one is directly relevant to our discussion of evolutionary processes vs Bible facts. It deals with questions of how change takes place within an already existing framework – nature.

The other two are more, (it seems to me) assumptions about how material (inorganic and then organic) came to be here in the first place. If this is correct, then these two “assumptions” belong in discussion between theism, atheism and questions about how it all began.

To me, it is at that point: before the observable world in which we live was, that we can interchange assumption and faith. The further we move from that point to our time, the greater the available evidence and the more testable become our assumptions. The more testable they are the less of their declaration lies in the realm of faith.

Is the corollary to this that the more testable evolutionary theory becomes, the further into the realm of faith is pushed the a priori granting of authority to the Bible?

You make very valid observations about what (may) happen if we follow science to its logical conclusion. I say may, you say will. It is for this reason I believe it is high time we Christians began working on a compelling apologetic, because if we don't you will be right. And I think it is a very real danger!

As for evolution being the only way, and Adam and Eve etc. Yes, all real challenges. This may appear off subject, but C.S Lewis has been my favorite author for years. It is only in recent times the power of his apologetic has dawned on me. In Surprised by Joy. P 88 he says this:

“If ever a myth had become a fact, had been incarnated, it would be just like this. And nothing
else in all literature was just like this. Myths were like it in one way. Histories were like it in another: But nothing was simply like it ... Here and here only in all time the myth must have become fact; the Word, flesh; God, man. This is not “a religion,” nor “a philosophy.” It is the summing up and actuality of them all."

For Lewis the myth was bigger, and older than Bible. It caught the universality of myth and the similarity between them that I referred to earlier. I also recall, but can't find where, he speaks of the first moment when man became a sentient being at some point in the distant past. Yes, an evolutionary step.

These things would take on a whole new meaning if we dared to open ourselves toward the need and process of developing an apologetic. Seems to me if Lewis, one of the most powerful Christian apologists of recent times, could balance evolutionary process with faith and a gospel, so can we.

Anyway, appreciate you comments and thought provoking questions... tried to keep this short....oh dear...

Anonymous 3 weeks ago

I found the Lewis quote I referred to above. It's in The Problem of Pain. p 61& 63

“For long centuries, God perfected the animal from which was to become the vehicle of humanity and the image of Himself. He gave it hands whose thumb could be applied to each of the fingers, and jaws and teeth and throat capable of articulation, and a brain sufficiently complex to execute all of the material motions whereby rational thought is incarnated [. . .] Then, in the fullness of time, God caused to descend upon this organism, both on its psychology and physiology, a new kind of consciousness which could say “I” and “me,” which could look upon itself as an object, which knew God, which could make judgments of truth, beauty and goodness, and which was so far above time that it could perceive time flowing past [. . .] We do not know how many of these creatures God made, nor how long they continued in the Paradisal state. But sooner or later they fell. Someone or something whispered that they could become as gods [. . . ] They wanted some corner in the universe of which they could say to God, “This is our business, not yours.” But there is no such corner. They wanted to be nouns, but they were, and eternally must be, mere adjectives. We have no idea in what particular act, or series of acts, the self-contradictory, impossible wish found expression. For all I can see, it might have concerned the literal eating of a fruit, but the question is of no consequence.”

In the Acworth Letters, he also had this to say:

"I can’t {Take an anti evolution position} have made my position clear. I am not either attacking or defending Evolution. I believe that Christianity can still be believed, even if Evolution is true. This is where you and I differ."
Some of the participants stated, “As more and more data from nature conflict with the Bible account” “Evolution is supported by a great weight of evidence”. Really? What kind of evidence? I challenged over and over in this as well in different bogs of AT to show that evidence, until now no body came to show a single **reproducible evidence of evolution**. There is allot of assumptions but they are only assumptions. Only one person that I can perceive with solid background in research was honest to recognize the serious limitations with retrospective data specially when is not reproducible.

Some of us, **trained with rigor to analyze sustainable data**, we are not ready to accept these assumptions. Confidence comes when experiments or observation are reproducible. Maybe some of you assumptions of concepts are enough, but for the ones who expended a great deal of our live in research the “proof of concept” is only admitted when experiments/observation are reproducible.

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Who is able to separate Bible stories or accounts as fact or fiction? Only the writers knew their intent, and as nearly all of the Bible was told orally before being written, how could it all be accurate?

Did the resurrection actually happen? Well, even according to the Bible no one saw it; they only saw a man, a figure near the tomb that was not recognized, and others only saw something that was able to walk through locked doors and suddenly appear from nowhere. If that sounds like a human, it is not the usual description. All that was written was ABOUT the resurrection which they BELIEVED, but there were no eyewitnesses, and his disciples who had been with him closely a year or more did not recognize him. Strange?

As for the virgin birth, that is one that must be believed by faith. However, it was not that unusual as there were other gods and goddesses that also were similarly conceived and also were resurrected. Could it be that the Gospel writers felt it necessary to give additional support for their story to equal that of the surrounding pagan cultures?

Why try to "prove" something that is all of faith? If it is necessary to give evidence that is irrefutable, there is no need for faith. It's a catch-22 situation and those who continue to try to furnish evidence for the non-repeatable stories of the Bible will always come short.

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This is the kind of thinking that causes people to lose their faith. There is always plenty of room for doubt, but there is also more than enough evidence for believing the Bible, just as it was written. An insane person might preach a resurrection that didn't happen, and might even die for it, but mass insanity? 11 people all going insane at the same time and preaching a resurrection, at the risk of their lives? Hardly. Or, they could have invented the story to keep the movement
going. But how many people would be willing to die for what they knew to be a lie? Radical Muslims blow themselves up, thinking they will go to heaven and be amongst virgins, but if they knew it was all a lie, it's unlikely that any of them would be willing to do it.

Faith is not the "proof" of things not seen, it is the "evidence of things not seen."

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**Anonymous**  
3 weeks ago

Horace, could I pop a question in on your point? Hope you don't mind Elaine?

We probably all agree with you that it is unlikely the Radical Muslim will blast off to a well feathered nest with a bunch of chicks (Blokes perspective). As you say "...all a lie".

Yet, I imagine he would confidently tell us *his* faith is the "evidence of things not seen".

What would you say to someone like that, if the opportunity arose, to try to change his understanding?

I don't want to trap you or be mean, but I do want to confront your thinking a little with the difficulties of the position you take in some of your comments:

I actually tend to agree with you about the veracity of Jesus's death and resurrection, but probably for different reasons than you give, though they may well be valid too.

Cheers

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**Horace Butler**  
3 weeks ago

What I would say to someone like that would depend on a variety of factors. Chances are I wouldn't get that opportunity because once they've become that radicalized they aren't likely to listen to anything an "infidel" says. If someone like that was really willing to examine the issues, then you'd have to start at square one. That would include discussing the points we have in common, and moving on from there. There is no one-size-fits-all way to approach it.

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**Herbert Douglass**  
3 weeks ago

Ah, Elaine, you are real good. You make your case well. You would make a good discussion leader in an upper division religion class--and then we would find who had been doing their homework! Faith is not a leap into the dark, or blind devotion. How in the world did Peter, Paul and others ever get the young Christian community out of the shadows if they only told them to believe something that they had no evidence for? Sometimes we have to role-play with reality, walk in their shoes until we see what they saw. IMO. Cheers, Herb
cb25

I appreciate your candor about some of the difficult questions I posed if we are to reconcile science and the Bible. You quote Lewis. He is also one of my favorite authors. However, his view is not supported by most if not all theistic evolutionists. Francis Collins on his website biologos.org does not support God intervening all during the evolutionary process as Lewis describes. Are you saying that God made things change and adapt outside of our perceived scientific laws?

Anonymous

David Newman,

No..I'm not saying Lewis is correct, (though he may be). My key point is that as a Christian he believed it possible to hold a "foot in both camps". You suggested earlier that if we follow science to its logical conclusion it "will" remove miracles, resurrection, Adam and Eve etc. Surely, if someone like Lewis can believe evolution did not destroy Christianity, it is pause for thought, and we should be perhaps less fearful of seeking answers?

re biologos, they have some good material.

Am I saying God made things change outside our perceived scientific laws? Maybe? Maybe not.

One problem is that if I say he did not intervene, do I then allow that at some point he did? I then face questions like, at what point did this take place and how and why? etc.

If I say yes he did intervene during the process, I then end up with similar problems demonstrating how and why.

Which position holds up best under a posteriori scrutiny? It is the kind of question that could well be discussed in a context like this.

Joe Erwin

It is nice to see you back, Herb. Thanks for the kind words.

David, we are faced with two opposing perspectives/opinions, and I hope my response does not seem flippant. I'm not sure how else to reply. I do not think providing "a shred" of evidence of evolution would present a fair or honest picture of the "overwhelming weight" of evidence that some others and I have indicated. I doubt that there is any substitute for examining for oneself some large chunks of reliable information contained in the enormous relevant scientific literature. What can I do to help? My posts on here are too long as it is, but I just can't use this space to post hundreds of thousands of references for you to look at. All I can suggest is that if you really care to read the relevant literature, just do it.
Maybe I can suggest some places to start. Have a look at the recent comparative primate genomics work, especially as connected with recent viral genomics research. This is a HUGE literature already, even if you only look at the last five or ten years. What we have evidence of in primate genomes is similarities across taxa and evidence of when populations became sufficiently genomically different from each other to be reproductively isolated. We also find abundant examples of primate populations that are morphologically distinct that have some zones of intergradation.

There is a popular piece that could serve as an introduction, though it could have been stronger in some ways, but you might find it interesting: Thomas Hayden's "What Darwin didn't know," *Smithsonian* February 2009.

Of course we cannot directly "observe" and replicate primate evolution, that occurred over about 65 million years. We can, however, examine the fossil evidence and evidence surrounding fossil finds. These physical artifacts can (and are) measured and examined repeatedly and the measurements made are consistent and reliable. That is the replicable part. Discussion and interpretation of what the fossil evidence means is an ongoing process, and understanding is subject to revision. There are plenty of hot debates going on all the time in the paleoanthropology research community.

Another aspect to have a look at variation and change in organisms with short generation times. There is enough time to repeatedly replicate that populations of viruses and bacteria can become reproductively isolated from one another.

I would be perfectly comfortable with anyone examining these lines of evidence, especially the literature of the past 20 or 30 years, objectively, without deciding in advance how things are and came to be. Be sure to examine the objective results first, and recognize that the interpretations and discussions are just that.

So, I think the burden of proof is on those who think there is no "shred" of evidence, to examine at least some of the enormous amount of evidence that exists. Of course, none of us has enough time in a lifetime to examine all the relevant scientific literature. An easy cop out would be to deny the validity of scientific method or claim that fossils are not real or that DNA sequencing is nonsense. Then we can just make up whatever answers suit us.

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Joe Erwin 3 weeks ago

On the other hand, who am I to give any of you advice? My comments seem rather pedantic, even to me. So, I will go right on, and offer more of the same.... If you seriously do not want to believe that evolution occurs and that genetic variability and natural selection occur, please avoid getting into the scientific literature on these topics. What you will find might cause you to question what you believe. If you are not interested in or open to that possibility, you probably should avoid looking at the evidence and what scientists think the evidence means. So, "whatever you do, Brer Fox, don't you go anywhere near that tar baby."

Then go read some of Francisco Ayala's writings about science and faith. I mean, whatever you do,
don't ever read anything written by Francisco Ayala....

**Roscoe Fogg** 3 weeks ago

Joe,

Thanks. I appreciate the substance and the tone of your post. I couldn't agree with you more.

**Editor** 3 weeks ago

Joe

I am not sure which David you are addressing. But let's assume I am the one you are talking to.

I appreciate your passion in talking about all the evidence for evolution. However, I was surprised that you did not participate in the discussion of the ground rules, the presuppositions with which we come to this subject. To use an illustration I gave earlier. You are playing by NFL rules while I am playing by College Football rules. We will never find a way to agree if we do not establish the basis for our discussion.

The other big challenge is we are trying to interpret past facts. How about talking about where macro evolution is taking place today. Cb25 acknowledged that was a challenge and he gave no answer.

But I do not want to get side tracked. For the real issue are our assumptions. That is where we must begin. What are your assumptions?

**Ervin Taylor** 3 weeks ago

I’ve been reading this thread with great interest. My AT colleague David Newman and I have been having an exchange on this topic for some time. We even had an exchange in the pages of Adventist Today about this. He keeps talking about assumptions and I sought to provide him with what I thought was a response from a scientific perspective, but he did not think I was responding to his questions. I’ve been thinking off and on over the last couple of months about why we are having a communication problem.

I think part of this is simply that he is a pastor, a sincere and dedicated “person of faith” and a theologian and I am none of those things. He has the faith gene and I do not.

Parenthetically, I have always wondered why certain kinds of theologians get very concerned about evolutionary biology. The obvious answer is that they think that the contemporary views in evolutionary biology directly contracts major theological tenets which must be held at all cost or they think that their whole theological system collapses. With some of them (I’m sure this is not true of my good friend David Newman but it might be of the other David), it might be a power thing. They realize that any “authority” they might represent or wish to exercise has been eclipsed
by the power of science. It seems that since they rarely have the educational background or expertise to address the scientific data, they turn to philosophy in their search for a means of countering what they view as the implications of biological evolutionary thought. But I digress.

I think that Joe Irwin is on the right track from a scientific perspective. The assumptions that David Newsman asks for are relatively simple ones from a scientific perspective, but David is smart enough to know that he can’t accept them. He says “you (scientists) are playing by NFL rules while I am playing by College Football rules. We will never find a way to agree …” Bingo! QED.

Elaine Nelson 3 weeks ago

Erv, your reply is very much to the point: both sides are talking past each other. It is somewhat disengenuous to hear a theologian discuss science as being knowledgeable and yet would dismiss a scientist who dared to discuss fine theological points (especially in the original languages) as out of his realm.

A pastor who has his whole lifetime engaged in ministering to others cannot grasp all the scientific information necessary to engage in such discussions; just as the scientist is not equipped by knowledge and training to engage in difficult theological questions. This has never stopped such conversations.

Because most of the little scientific knowledge that I have is in the medical arena, as one of the very important sciences, I would not dare confront an esteemed medical practitioner with my own ideas of diagnosis and treatment. "Fools rush in....."

Anonymous 3 weeks ago

David Newman,

I've just read with interest the comments above. I too think Joe is on the right track.

I have to admit, I find it a little frustrating when you bring this ground rule thing up. Can we get this clear: Herb did not set such a rule out. He only reminded us about the problem assumptions can pose.

If I read Joe right, he is not ignoring this problem. He is saying put assumptions and preconceptions aside for a while and look at the evidence.

Which leads me to my other frustration.

You note: "How about talking about where macro evolution is taking place today. Cb25 acknowledged that was a challenge and he gave no answer."
What I tried to do with that is put it into a framework of where it fitted in our assumptions. Of the three you gave it was the one that fitted into our overall topic here Evolutionary process.

True, I did not give an answer....like Joe and others, I believe the data out there is overwhelmingly confirming of an evolutionary process. Even to me there is not space here to even begin, and I'm not a scientist. As he says its a DIY:)

I have to admit, after all our discussion about starting points for assumptions and your view the Bible is an authoritative point to begin - apriori, I find such a position indefensible.

I asked Horace what he would say to a radical Muslim about the "lie" of his beliefs. My point was that both are taking an a priori position on a different book with exactly the same dogmatism. Both would be trying to outprove the other from the same presupposition.

Solution? Move back to a basic a priori assumption. There is one starting point that fits here: Nature. Forget the assumptions before that, and after that eg Bible in or out etc. Let's begin there on common ground (pardon pun).

What does the world I see, live in, study, and reason about say about how it and I got here?

Cheers.

David

May be after 20 to 25 years from now when I retired I will have the time to participate. Today I have I nice conversation with a friend (endocrinologist, atheist and evolutionist) some of you would love to be there.

My argument was simple, evolution believe that we evolve from lower from of life to higher ones because of mutations (new information in that is transmitted to new generations). You and I know that mutations are deleterious and lethal to us. This is replicable, and we can probe any day of the week, we don’t know a single mutation that makes better. He agreed. So I ask why I have to think that in the past mutations got us better when the present evidence show us just the opposite? He smiled he could not give a reasonable answer, then he said may be in the future we will be able to prove. I replied well then we have to wait until that day and please just walk to me office and show me that evidence.

David

The burden of proof in in the ones who believed that mutations makes better when the overwhelming evidence just show the contrary.
Evolutionist are trying that is why they expended millions of dollars and several years to show that macroevolution is a fact. The reality...after several decades of observation 50,000 generations of E. coli and millions of dollars E Coli still is E coli. “Actus ipsi locutus” facts speaks by themselves”
Ervin Taylor

David (not Newman) says that the "burden of proof" should be with those who believe that mutations "makes better" (I will not comment on the English grammar here). Let's for a moment say that mutations are not what drive evolution. (I know, I know, anyone knowing anything about the science behind evolutionary biology would say that's crazy, but let's go with this for a moment.)

Regretfully for David (not Newman), this would make very little difference for an understanding that biological evolution over billions of years has occurred on planet earth. From the paleontological/geological record, we know that organisms have changed over time (that's one of the definitions of biological evolution) and that the time frame of that process can be measured in hundreds of millions and billions of years.

If it turns out that mutation and natural selection are not the driving forces, then future scientific research will locate some other process and be able to demonstrate that this force is more important than mutation and natural selection.

I trust David (not Newman) gets the point of this. Evolution--change over time in biological organisms--is a demonstrated fact of the geological and paleontological record. How it occurred--whether by mutation and natural selection or some other physical mechanism--could be an on-going subject of scientific investigation. My understanding is that most biologist believed that the current evidence is that mutation and natural selection can explain the process quite well. But some bright graduate student or postdoc may just come upon another mechanism and become another Darwin.

David

Erv stated, "My understanding is that most biologist believed that the current evidence is that mutation and natural selection can explain the process quite well".

Really? could you provide the evidence that is reproducible?
I mean mutations that improve us. If is so evident could you provide the references? Please not educate suppositions.

If some day it is prove that "other mechanisms" and mutations improve us I will accept it. But until that day comes I prefer to believe in what is reproducible; mutations are deleterious and lethal, the reproducible evidence is overwhelming!
In regard to suppositions I just take like they are.
Reproducible observations are superior to any retrospective observation.

Erv I guess you understood it was a typo “makes us better” plus English in not my second language but my fourth one. Maybe in few years I will get better.
You write, "If I read Joe right, he is not ignoring this problem. He is saying put assumptions and preconceptions aside for a while and look at the evidence." It seems that I am a very poor communicator. I have said over and over again I have no problem with the evidence, facts. Yes, it is all there for us to see. The problem is how we interpret the evidence. It seems that you do not want to admit that any interpretation is necessary. If that is true then there is no point wasting more time in discussion. That is why I am saying so much about presuppositions which so many people are shying away from. You evidently don't believe my football analogy. When it comes to understanding the Bible there is a whole science of interpretation called hermeneutics. Nature is no different. It too has a hermeneutic which, it seems, you do not acknowledge. You have complained several times that Herb did not say we should be discussing presuppositions. I am not going to argue that point. Except to say, that unless we agree on the rules (which I keep saying) there is no game.

You also say, "Solution? Move back to a basic a priori assumption. There is one starting point that fits here: Nature. Forget the assumptions before that, and after that eg Bible in or out etc. Let's begin there on common ground (pardon pun)." Why are you so against trying to find a common ground for the rules to play the game? I have been giving my assumptions (which you do not like) but I am not clear on your assumptions. You do not state any in this statement.

As I read your comments and others who support you I wonder where God fits in, if he fits in at all. All you are saying the atheist would agree with. So where is God? In the quote from Lewis that you gave, God was very involved. Did He just start the thing going and then walk away with it? You don't want to bring the Bible into it? I suspect that is because you don't know how to deal with the miracles and virgin birth and resurrection of Jesus which science says cannot happen (as we currently use science). You give no explanation of death and evil in nature. If there is no God then we have to accept what we see. But if there is a God then how do we explain him using pain and destruction and death to create his universe? I thought that we were all Christians on this blog and want to find a way to factor God into the equation. If we leave Him out completely then what is the difference between what atheists believe in how the universe has evolved and the respondents on this blog? And what about the end of all things? Will there be death in the new earth just like we have now? If not, why not?, and then it would seem that God does do something different. If he can do it differently at the end of time why couldn't he at the beginning of time?

Yes, cb25 I am just as frustrated as you are. And since it is not my purpose to upset people by seeming to be intransigent I will not comment further unless I feel that we are making some kind of progress. In one of your responses you said that I had asked some very important and hard questions but now you don't want to deal with them. I don't want people angry or frustrated. My main job as a pastor is to help people find true joy and peace and fulfillment through a relationship with the God of the universe who came to us in bodily form in Jesus Christ to show us what he is really like. I want people to feel loved, valued, and accepted and if I am not accomplishing this on this blog then I am being counterproductive.
You write, “If I read Joe right, he is not ignoring this problem. He is saying put assumptions and 
preconceptions aside for a while and look at the evidence.” That is an incredible statement. I have 
stated over and over that I have no problem with the evidence, with the facts. There are fossils, 
therere layers of ice in Greenland, and so on. But there is NO such thing as evidence without 
interpretation. In a courtroom the prosecution presents evidence and the defense refutes it. How? 
By showing there can be more than one way of interpreting the evidence. So to say that we should 
put assumptions aside is a really remarkable statement. It means that we are finished with our 
discussion. You evidently don’t agree with my football analogy. Yet in one of your responses you 
said that I had posed some hard and important questions. Now you seem to be forgetting all that 
because this discussion of assumptions is causing distress because as Christians we are trying to 
find some way to reconcile nature and the Bible.

Yet practically all the discussion on the side of evolution could be made by an atheist. So where is 
God in the picture? Did he just start the whole process then walk away and leave it? It seems that 
one of the reasons to leave the Bible out of the picture is the difficulty of reconciling the miracles 
such as the axe head that floated, the virgin birth, the resurrection of Jesus and so on. If we use 
science there then they could not have happened. But if we agree they happened, and once we 
make exceptions, where do we stop? Paul said to the church in Corinth that if do not believe in 
the resurrection then we are of all people most miserable and there is no hope for any of us.

You quoted Lewis approvingly but he has God heavily invested in the process. But that does not 
seem to be your position.

Then near the end of your response you write, “Solution? Move back to a basic a priori 
assumption. There is one starting point that fits here: Nature. Forget the assumptions before that, 
and after that eg Bible in or out etc. Let's begin there on common ground (pardon pun).”

I fail to see any solution here. You do not tell me your assumptions on how you deal with nature. 
As I said earlier there is no such thing as facts without interpretation. If you do not agree then we 
have no basis for any further discussion. And I do not want to antagonize anyone by seeming to be 
intransigent. I am just as frustrated as you are. Why is it so difficult to discuss the basis for our 
discussion? When a person starts an English course the very first thing they learn are the 
principles of grammar. Why would it be any different here?

Further, if we leave the Bible out of the picture (which you would like) we have an enormous 
problem of death and evil. Did God use death and evil to create the universe? Where did evil 
come from, the pain, the distress, the torture, the calamities, that we see in nature? And if there 
will be no pain and death in the new earth then it seems obvious that God must change some 
fundamental laws to make that happen and if he does why could he not have done that in the 
beginning?

For the Christian we cannot leave the Bible out of the story. If we do then we are no different from 
the atheist who has no use for the Bible. I am a pastor and my ministry is to help people find joy,
peace, purpose, and meaning in life. I do this by showing them how God loves them, came to this world as a human to show that love, gave his life for them, and is coming back again for them. At the same time I have to deal with the issue of evil and where Satan fits into the picture. That is why I come with a different perspective. If you come solely from the perspective of science then of course you will arrive at very different conclusions.

Since I do not want to offend people I will stop being obstinate and not write anything further unless I feel that we are making some kind of progress in our understanding. God bless.

Anonymous
3 weeks ago

David Newman,

Back again...I'm mulling over your points, so don't leave just yet:) You did and have made some challenging points, though as you note, at the moment there are sticking points in getting a clear direction, and understanding. Others may have further comment, but I will get back to you more on your last posts...

Cheers

David
3 weeks ago

The reality of mutation in humans:
In the last 10 years is estimated than almost 2,000,000 babies were born with trisomy 21, none of this babies were superior or equal in health, intelligent, or length of life compare to normal babies. The ones who have to break the news to parents we know the limitations that these babies will have. I really wish some day I could say to a mother “your baby has this mutation be happy because he will be healthier, smarter or he will live longer”. We know hundreds of mutation that will affect millions of babies each year. So why I have to accept a theory that says that we evolved (because of mutation) from lower form of live to what we are now, when every mutation that we see in humans results in diseases or early deaths?

Anonymous
3 weeks ago

David Newman,

First, sorry you are feeling frustrated, perhaps more than I by the sound of it:(

Because of space I will try say what I do mean and you can fit that into the many questions you raise. I hope not to frustrate more:)

First, in the posts you raise a series of questions. If I had answers for all of them I would have an apologetic to present here. I have some, some clear, some tenuous, but to set them out is not simple, and who's to say I am right anyway?
I do place a lot of weight on Lewis's view, and he may well be right, but that is not a call I will make here at this point in time. Certainly, I fully agree with him on relegating Bible to a lesser authority than nature, as I believe he does.

I do not suggest we put aside all assumptions full stop, but that we begin with ONE:

Nature. What do I mean by that? At least two things:

1. I put aside, as best I can, conclusions I may already have about whether there is or is not a god/God, whether the Bible is or is not authoritative, whether there is or is not evil, or even what it is or is not.
2. I bring to bear on nature every question I can think of about how, when, where, what, why - what I can observe, understand and reason about in, on, and through nature, including human nature.

In that process I can ask questions that take my evaluation outside of nature: eg what does it say about whether there is or is not a God. What does it suggest about good/evil, beginnings etc. I can put some tentative assumptions to the test: eg does nature support the view that there is a God? What kind of god/God does it point to etc. These and more are good questions that one would hope can lead to an apologetic for Christian faith. But they are not the starting point imo.

You say: “So to say that we should put assumptions aside is a really remarkable statement.”

No, I say begin with one! That is remarkably hard to do. It confronts our fears, our identity, our sense of who we are, or think we are.

What of the Bible? example: I must evaluate it in light of all observable data. If what I see says this world is very old and shows unmistakable evidence of an evolutionary process...so be it. I will then do what I suspect Lewis did, and try to understand the Bible from that perspective.

More shortly.

Anonymous 3 weeks ago

David Newman,

Greetings again.

I should just note here: I do get that for you the Bible is a "non negotiable" component of evaluating this subject. I fully understand. As I noted in the thread under my blog I grew up SDA with all the certainty that entails. There were no shades of grey. God was, Truth was, we had it all.

For better or worse, I have a very enquiring and analytical mind. Over the years contrary data began to stack up...Walter Vieth CD's on creation pushed the final button. I had to face what for me was reality. This earth is incredibly old, as is life on it.
There is nothing more shocking than for an SDA with the "certainty" I grew up with, to look into the night sky and realize there could in fact be no God.

The tragedy of this is that our own emphasis on Truth sets us up for disaster: Everything is black and white, facts, facts and more facts. We have the answers and the information. If for more than a moment we admit other evidence we are undone. We cannot handle shades of gray. Joe's "tar baby" is spot on.

What is beyond that night sky experience? There is nothing more profound than, having done that, to realize that there can indeed be a God, and there can indeed by faith based on a quite different set of paradigms, without requiring every black and white detail.

I smile at the guys here who are hanging all on mutations. Mutations are a hard thing to demonstrate, but over rated on this thread as I see it. However, this difficulty makes perfect harbour. Never mind that so many things about evolution are beyond doubt, this one thing that may not be is a final refuge. What when it falls?

David, is it possible that for you insisting on the Bible as equal fact with nature is also a safe harbour? I don't mean that in mean way, but there can be incredible fear of letting go something that makes it impossible for the other party to gain even "level" ground, let alone an advantage.

I do hope you stay involved, as I'm sure benefit can be gained.

Cheers.

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Anonymous 3 weeks ago

oh no...that was not meant to be italicised ...sorry...

Horace Butler 3 weeks ago

Interesting that what put you over the edge (the Veith material) is one of many things which provided even stronger evidence for me of the reality that the earth and the life on it, is about 6000 years old. Curious.

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David 3 weeks ago

Cb 25 stated, “I smile at the guys here who are hanging all on mutations”. I image a similar smile that yesterday my good friend the “endocrinologist/evolutionist” game me because he knew he could not give a credible answer. The difference is that the endocrinologist has a solid knowledge in biology/medicine and he knows the seriousness of the argument.
“Mutations are a hard thing to demonstrate”.
Yes and no
They are not hard thing to demonstrated, I repeat they are not hard at all, and we use every single
day to explain that specific disease is caused a specific chromosomal abnormality This is beyond a
doubt and if we denied is just ignorance.
Yes is hard, really hard to demonstrated that mutations improves us or produce macroevolution. I
agree with that!

Already you avoided responding in your blog when I ask you for evidence.

“If you refuse to believe in evolutionary processes because you can't "see" a mutation, that is a
very fragile platform. Well show me a mutation that makes us better, I will show you thousand
that are deleterious and lethal, to start trisomy 21, 18, 13, etc etc.

Secondly, it ignores many things that others would say are mutations. Could you mention which
ones are those? And more import can be proved?

Third, it will eventually face the day when incontrovertable mutations are demonstrated even to the
doubters. When that day comes I have not problem to accepted, but until day is just a mirage
(maybe some day also the BIG FOOT will appear)

J. David Newman 3 weeks ago

cb25
I am breathing a little easier. Thank you for your kind post and your wanting me to still be
engaged. You are right the earth is very old and life has taken millions of years to evolve but that
is because of your assumption that the laws we have today have never changed, that it is possible
to use those laws to go back in time and know what happened and when in the past. How do you
prove that assumption? I am serious. I challenge that assumption. If that assumption is incorrect
then you cannot know for sure how old the earth is. So we are back to what I consider the nub of
the whole controversy. And let's admit for a moment to go only by the laws of nature and leave the
Bible out of the picture. Eventually we will have to get to the Bible. The Bible is to be understood
by the laws of nature. So to be consistent there were no actual ten plagues of Egypt, there was no
actual manna, the sandals of the Israelites could not last for 40 years without wearing out, iron axe
heads cannot float, water cannot turn into wine, virgin women do not give birth, Jesus could not
rise from the dead. These are just stories but have no basis in reality. This seems to be the
inescapable conclusion if we make science supreme.

For the atheist there is no conflict because he or she does not accept the Bible at all. But the
Christian does. So how do we balance the Biblical claims with the claims of nature? There is no
way for the Christian to discussion nature only without sometime coming back to the Bible. Am I
correct in my conclusions about what science says that miracles cannot happen?
Kevin Riley  

For me it is not even as simple as accepting the Bible. My experience tells me there is a God. So, for me, God is part of 'life in the real world'. Because I believe there is a God, I am willing to accept that the Bible is his message to us. What I am not willing to accept is a world with no God. So, whether or not we start with what is observable, I suspect that what is not directly observable - God - cannot be ignored. That, I believe, is what makes a dialogue with an atheist both interesting and frustrating.

Joe Erwin  

I'm not sure what is meant by my playing college ball with NFL rules, but maybe I should not have made sarcastic comments. I do not want to be unfair.

I think it is more difficult to understand why Down syndrome continues to occur, when one might hope it would be "selected out." But maybe the mechanism is such that the cause of trisomy is in the mother, rather than in the affected individual, and since the risk is increased with maternal age, how would that be eliminated if she has already had several non-trisomy children? But, we do know that there is terrific variation of severity in trisomy-21 sequelae, in the sense that the number of stigmata found in each individual varies from a few to 60 or more. Also, intelligence DOES vary, and some DS people have above average intelligence (and there have been DS people who have become physicians and attorneys).

Of course, DS is a chromosomal level defect. That means that it has a huge impact. Most huge errors are lethal, and probably nearly all the rest of the really big ones are profoundly negative. But most genetic replication errors are tiny, single nucleotide changes or short tandem repeats, that are not lethal, and can be neutral, or ranging in value from positive to negative--but may only have effects through interacting with other genes as promoters or blockers. It's complicated. But I think you must already know that.

I'm not quite sure what is meant by "current" evidence of macroevolution. Sumatran and Bornean orangutans are diagnostically distinct due to an easily detectable chromosomal rearangement. They are classified as distinct species. Likewise, common chimpanzees and pygmy chimpanzees (bonobos) are genetically distinguishable. Three or four (subspecific) populations of common chimps are genetically distinguishable from each other.

But we also have to recognize that the binomial nomenclature system we use is archaic and comes from a time when no one knew much of anything about molecular genetics or population biology or biogeography. A lot of this do not fit neatly into what have been traditionally regarded as "species." But that's another story for another day--as interesting as it is.

BTW, I do not know the "Veith material," so I was not pushed one way or the other by it.

Warm wishes to all.
J. David Newman

Joes, I believe that you are addressing me with the football analogy. It seems that you have not read all my responses because I said that college football and NFL football play by different rules and cannot have a game until they decide whole rules they will play under. This analogy I use for this discussion. You are playing by one set of rules and I am playing by another set of rules. Thus we will never have any agreement unless we can agree on the rules under which we are discussing. We are simply talking past each other. That is why I have spent so much time trying to flesh out the assumptions under which we operate.

And regarding species. The Sumatran and Bornean orangutans are still orangutans. I was not asking for evidence within family groups. I was asking for a clear example of one family group becoming a distinctly new family group. It seems that on the large scale evolution has stopped. I know it is said that it takes millions of years to evolve a whole new family group but there should be some evidence today. Why do we see it in the fossil record but not in the living record today?

David

Maternal age is only one factor associated with DS the older she gets the highest the risk. But even teenagers that have the risk 1/1500 (so some DS are independent from maternal age; mosaicism and translocation) we know many more diseases; for example more that 300 inborn error of metabolism were identified all of them have serious consequences. Yes we have constant alterations in the bases of the DNA; and most are been repaired by protective mechanism. For example the UV light in all of us produces nucleotides changes (pyrimidine dimers) in most people the nucleotide excision repair mechanism is efficient but if this is missing even partially the consequences are xeroderma pigmentosum and melanoma (skin cancer)

Could you provide evidence that even single nucleotide changes resulted in positive outcome in humans?

By the way the high achievers DS were mosaicism? what was the quality of live and life expectancy? if you have that information it will be greatly appreciated.

Darrel Lindensmith

Erv’s comment is a gem:

"I have always wondered why certain kinds of theologians get very concerned about evolutionary biology. The obvious answer is that they think that the contemporary views in evolutionary biology directly contracts major theological tenets [The existence of God?] which must be held at all cost or they think that their whole theological system collapses." I wonder why? Truly a mystery :-) Now to be fair Erv might be delimiting his evolutionary biology to the evidence of the sequence of fossil progression and homology which could challenge traditional theological views, if this is what he means, I will give him that. But these are not core to the definition. The core is the inorganic to organismic/mutational/selectional myth-- not the oily "change over time," unctuous definition that only seeks to deflect attention to safer ground.
Erv and Elaine remind me of James and Ellen White in the early years. They pull the "Authority" card whenever things are too scrutinized. "They realize that any "authority" they might represent or wish to exercise has been eclipsed by the power of science. It seems that since they rarely have the educational background or expertise to address the scientific data, they turn to philosophy ....." How smug; how gnostic and a tad cultic! "A pastor who has his whole lifetime engaged in ministering to others cannot grasp all the scientific information necessary to engage in such discussions....." Really, has this become a gnostic religion or a Orthodox priesthood were the truth can only be understood by the "chosen few" who are intellectually and culturally in a place to grasp the truth housed in the " vast body of literature" (un-comprehendable even to many qualified scientists) but the brights at the top, from "right estate" will graciously bequeath to us the correct meaning of it all. A little humility—Please!

"Erv and Elaine as James and Ellen White pulling the authority card whenever things are too scrutinized" And the part about "smug, gnostic, and a tad cultic" This is rich! First class! A completely backward suggestion but very, very creative.

There are clerics, the worst kind, that wish they had more in common with scientists. I think they're jealous of the prestige that science has earned. Freud might have called this syndrome Physics Envy.

I earlier missed the "Physics Envy" comment of Mr. Fogg. Well put. It would exist deep in the subconscious of some clerics and their fellow travelers and only come out in symbolic language.

Too many theologians want to be considered knowledgeable in many fields--even those for which they have no education or training. Few scientists wish to be considered as experts in theology, but the reverse is too often true. Thus, we see those like Cliff Goldstein writing entire columns on the fallacy of evolution, something for which he is eminently unqualified to discuss. But then his readers will probably validate it by showing and proving that this is what we should believe as good Adventists. There is no room for healthy discussion, just ping-pong with no winners. If it were only possible to recognize that Adventism is not one monolithic answer to everything in life, but that's another subject worthy of another article since there are some that prefer to live within the cocoon of Adventism from womb to tomb.
Anonymous

David Newman,

Early morning over here:)

Uniformity. As you say, a central issue. I see this as the ultimate "safe harbour" for our YEC/YLC positions.

It is (as we generally see it) ultimately unprovable from either side. That does not mean I don't see, from my study and observations, massive weight of evidence on one side.

You are no doubt familiar with my blog about the flood. As small as the point is, and as insignificant as the evidences are to the whole debate, the import of it to uniformity issues (imo) should not be missed:

If the salt domes, corals, etc are there and my understanding of the Biblical descriptions is correct the anti uniformity argument is conclusively destroyed.

That is how I prove that assumption. As I said, I think without that the weight of evidence favours uniformity, and that the debate only lingers because is is a safe harbour, but to me the salt, corals, and Bible story clinch the argument.

You ask about miracles and science. I think Kevin Riley hit the (or at least a) nail on the head when he said:

"I suspect that what is not directly observable - God - cannot be ignored."

I spoke last post about a new paradigm. I have said human nature is part of nature. The human experience provides a link to or pointer to the unobservable. (themes from a possible future blog from me) It and other things say God Is.

But: I can come to that position from one assumption: Nature IS. From there I go backward and forward and see what it says to me.

Do I come to the Bible? Yes, but not in the authoritatve SDA view.

Do miracles happen? Yes. But the God I find is sometimes extremely, and frustratingly, non interventionist. Yes, I read the comments on the thread under the flood blog. Beuatiful story. I read Irvin Taylors question, what when that does not happen? I've sat with people who have had the most tragic events happen...God appeared to do nothing.

Are some of the Bible events just stories? I suspect some are. Don't ask me to say which:).
Chris, thank you for believing that miracles take place. I do understand your frustration though about how God intervenes or does not. In Acts he lets James be beheaded but sends an angel to free Peter. Why? We are given no answer.

Another way to get at this situation is to look at it under a world view. "A world view consists of the set of basic assumptions a person holds, whether consciously or subconsciously, about the origin and nature of the world, humans, other living beings, morals, values, and where we are all going" James Sire in Naming the Elephant p. 19. Thus Everyone from Richard Dawkins to Chris Barrett to David Newman and Elaine Nelson have a world view. Thus a world view will by definition not allow certain things to be believed. For example someone like Dawkins has a naturalist world view. When it comes to evidence pointing toward a divine origin of the universe or the occurrence of a miracle such as the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead, Dawkins has determined in advance that this did not occur because, as a naturalist, he "knows" miracles do not happen. Nothing will budge him from his belief, and if the evidence seems to contradict it, it is the evidence that must be thrown out or reassessed, not the conclusion. The only possible way he could accept something that does not fit his world view is to change his world view and adopt a new one that does allow for the supernatural or miraculous. And of course, that option is also open to the religious person to consider the atheistic naturalist worldview.

A religious world view will exclude certain ideas from consideration. A Christian will find it difficult, if not impossible, to accept the notion that miracles are impossible or that there is no God, since such ideas are incompatible with the most basic assumptions of a Christian world view. Thus the Christiana will not accept the evidence of gratuitous violence and destruction as a reason not to believe in God.

And this is the essence of the debate among sincere Christians. There are different world views among us and anything that contradicts that world view is excluded. I do not have an easy answer as to how we change our world view.

Joe Erwin
3 weeks ago

David Newman, I'm still not quite sure what rules you are referring to, even after reading the extensive discussion between you and cb25. Do you propose that we agree on some assumptions, such as that both the Bible and Nature exist? I have no problem agreeing that both exist, but the existence of the Bible does not tell us what the meaning of the Bible is. I cannot accept that the Bible means whatever it says it means or whatever anyone asserts that it means. It exists, I have read it through and through many times, but I do not view it as an authoritative document upon which all other understanding must rest. The natural world exists. I do not see any magic in its revelation. It just is. It exists. We can study it using the most reliable methods at hand (and the Bible can be studied that way too). So, we can find out a lot about the natural world. It is abundantly clear that the evidence from nature falsifies the young earth hypotheses. Natural physical evidence does not and cannot falsify claims that there is a God or that there is a God who somehow created everything. Somehow. Nature and natural processes can be described. Supernatural processes cannot be described using the kinds of physical evidence that scientific methods require. I'm not at all sure how you and I can get on the same page to have a conversation.
So, you seem to admit variation and speciation (at the species level--two species of orangutans are recognized) but you don't agree that family level changes have occurred. I guess can't really expect you to look at Hominidae, Panidae, Pongidae, Hylobatidae, Cercopithecidae, etc., among the Primate Order (various authorities disagree on some of the nomenclature applied at the family level among primates). I'm just not quite sure what you are looking for.

David,

You are quite correct that even young women sometimes have DS babies. Some are familial, others are not, and there are a number of strange chromosomal aberrations. One source I looked at indicated that young women have about 1/5 the likelihood of having a DS baby as older women, and the rate in the oldest group of mothers was only about 2%. Because younger women have many more babies than the oldest class of mothers, about 80% of the infants born with DS are born to women younger than the median age. I'm not sure the causes of nondysjunction are known, but I'd be interested in knowing, if anyone knows.

So, I think you can easily find many publications reporting many nonlethal SNPs. Of course, most attention in humans is paid to pathology and attempts to find some genetic correlates of physical and behavioral abnormalities. The very existence of single nucleotide polymorphisms suggests a basis for some consequential functional differences, with some being more or less advantageous or deleterious. But copy number variation, viral insertions, etc., also introduce variability, and comparative primate genomics can show where chromosomal and genetic variation is associated with morphological change and speciation.

Herb, I should avoid being too personal, but, don't we know each other from academy reunions in central CA?

Anonymous 3 weeks ago

David Newman,

mmm. I guess you are welcome to switch from discussion presuppositions and assumptions to replacing that with "world view", though I think it may just add more to confuse with.

I'm happy you like the miracle concession:), but I'm also uneasy that the force of the other points were overshadowed by the appeal of that point.

I'm not particularly frustrated about the absence of God's intervention. That's how it is, but it should challenge our "just pray about it world view/assumption" held by so many.

You say: "I do not have an easy answer as to how we change our world view."

Can I suggest the same as we change our a priori assumptions?

With humility, honesty, and courage to face our fears of what the outcome might be.
After all the dialogue on these two threads, I am more convinced than ever that to the degree these are lacking will be the measure of our inability to see evidence that may get in the way. To pick up from Joe about being on the same page....maybe some of us are in a different book.

Seriously, world views will (imo) more often change by increments. When cognitive dissonance gets too great people are moved a little in another direction.

I suspect some writers here have a lot of dissonance being held back by the cost of admitting its existence!

Elaine Nelson
3 weeks ago

A personal perception:  It seems that there are some that accept that the Bible is the final authority on nearly all matters (they decide which ones).  Others accept that the Bible directs our faith toward God but was never written to be an authority on every possible subject, otherwise, why would we need the power of reason?

The Bible contains stories of supernatural events, believed by those who wrote them.  Because they believed them it is not necessary that we believe them anymore than much of their understanding was not prescient and they were not given the ability to see as people thousands of years later.  All such miraculous events were REPORTED; just as today there are reports of miraculous healings.  However, there have not been any stories of people brought back to life after more than three days.  If that was reported, would they be believed?  If so, then it is consistent with the belief in the miracles of the Bible.

If not, why would a REPORTED event of thousands of years ago be more readily believed than if were reported a week ago  How is such determinations made?

J. David Newman
3 weeks ago

My world view

cb25 and Joe.

Alright, I am going to spell our my presuppostions, my world view.  But before I do here is a little preamble.  I see death and evil in nature.  I see selfishness rampant in our world.  I see no purpose except to live as productive a life as possible and then comes the end.  But I seek an answer to the problem of evil.  I feel there is more to life than just to be born and then die.  So here goes.

1. There is a God (most people on this forum would agree with this first one).  I accept the bet in Pascals Wager that it makes more logical sense to believe there is a God than not to believe, although Richard Dawkins in the God Delusion does not like this illustration at all.
2. God created the universe (most, if not all, Christians would accept this).
3. God created the laws of the universe.
4. The Bible explains the purpose of life and how it became disrupted and the following assumptions follow from this one.
5. Lucifer rebelled against God and disunity came into the universe with the possibility of death and with the introduction of evil God changed some of the fundamental laws of the universe to account for this new state of affairs (there are consequences to not following God).

6. The bible tells us that when Jesus returns evil and death will be destroyed and we will live for ever on a new earth, therefore fundamental laws must change again to account for this new state. And if they can change at the end of time why could they not change at the beginning of time?

7. There was a literal first couple who infected the human race with sin alienating them from God.

8. Jesus came to restore us back into fellowship with God, died to take the penalty we deserve, and rose again. If there was no sin then what did Jesus save us from? And why do we need a savior?

9. We are not saved by knowledge but by a personal relationship with the God who created us. There will always be questions.

10. Thus we can disagree on many many points but as long as we can agree on the need for a personal relationship with God we will one day all find out which presuppostions were correct and which were wrong as God gently instructs us in the new world.

Now you can see how difficult it is for me to accept what many of you are saying just as Dawkins world view prevents him from considering the God option.

Now a brief plug for the Fall issue of AT just going to press. To let you know that I do think outside the box I wrote an editorial questioning the traditional Adventist teaching of a universal Sunday law. Read it for my reasons. We are also publishing an article on conditional prophecy in Ellen White and how it might affect our end time scenario. We have the editor of the South African edition of the Signs of the Times taking the GC President to task for some things he said in his ASI sermon this past August. A short piece on how to manage if the church splits by a former conference president and much more. Happy reading.

David 3 weeks ago

While some SNPs are neutral and others definitive are associated to diseases there is a serious lack of being positive for humans. I saw couple of papers, when I examined closely there was much speculation and little substance.

Joe Erwin 3 weeks ago

David N. and David,  
First of all, even though I think Dawkins overstates the case for atheism, I am not a "believer." Even so, I think there is room between your ten points, DN, none of which fits my "weltanschaung" (world view), and Dawkins positions. I do not think the existence of fossil and genomic records/evidence proves the non-existence of God. I think they do falsify many of the concepts I was taught as a child and young adult. So, I'm not sure we can ever be on the same page, but maybe once in a while we can examine objective evidence that does not require any of us to accept or reject the ten principles.

Genomic information exists in the present. While many genomic scientists are quite open and direct in their interpretations of genomic variation as part of evolutionary process, looking at the
information does not require one to blindly accept the explanations offered. One can be free to try to explain the data in accordance with any world view s/he has.

Discussion of single nucleotide polymorphisms (as well as double and triple and higher order polymorphisms), SINES, LINES, single and multiple tandem repeats, translocations, inversions, deletions, and other sources of variation, along with proteomics, gene regulation, exons (protein producing regions of the genome), and introns (non-coding for proteins regions, so-called "inactive" or "desert" portions of the genome that are increasingly found to have functional influences), does not require disbelief in God. One can look at all this evidence and still believe it was directly designed or initiated by God, and can base explanations of the very real objective information on that premise if they so choose.

That said, it is important to note that there are an estimated 1.42 million SNPs in the human genome, of which about 60,000 are in exonic regions--that is, they code for proteins. But single nucleotide changes tend to have relatively minor effects by comparison with multiple nucleotide polymorphisms. And, when they occur in intronic regions they are even less likely to have any immediate functional consequences. Such changes can build up across time (but that is another story). When complicated machinery is functioning well (as intended or designed to do) tiny changes in various parts may not make the machine stop running, but they are far more likely to make the machine perform less well rather than better. Larger changes may cause a total breakdown to the machine--they are not likely to make the machine run better. By analogy, mutations in humans or nonhuman animals are probably much more likely to have negative consequences for survival than positive consequences for survival, or no serious consequences at all, until they have accumulated to the point when there is some function (and even then, the direction of the consequence might be likely to be negative). BUT, remember that polymorphisms are alternative forms that produce or may influence production of proteins. The proteins produced may be flawed in ways that make them not work, not work very well, result in deficiencies that influence physiological function by inhibiting or failing to inhibit other functional processes. There may be 1 or 3 or 10 different alternatives at a specific locus. Of however many there are, if one is worse than the others, it tends to be selected out. The worse it is, the more likely it is to be eliminated. One can potentially rank all the alternative forms in terms of their consequences, from lethal to bad to not so bad to neutral to slightly positive to very positive. One need not reject God or science to consider such things....

Nathan Schilt

Joe, you say that fossil/genomic evidence "falsifies many of the concepts [you] were taught as a child and young adult." Obviously you recognize that fossil and genomic evidence have also falsified much of what scientists believed when you were a child. So presumably there is something other than a history of erroneous conclusions that impedes communications between you and your theocentric interlocutors. It is interesting to see how those with a materialistic world view often footnote arguments with theocentrist by pointing out how much of what they (materialists) learned as young people, from the perspective of those who had a theocentric worldview, is not true, seemingly indifferent to the reality that much of what was taught by those who had a materialistic worldview is also untrue. The converse of course holds for those with a theocentric worldview.
Of course it is in the nature of the differences between material reality, which is subject of scientific inquiry, and spiritual reality, which is the focus of theological inquiry, as well as their respective methodologies, that scientific theories will be falsified with far greater frequency than theological theories. Unfortunately, the true believer fundamentalists within each discipline gravitate towards the fallacy of thinking that, by falsifying the claims of conflicting theories, they can somehow validate their own claims. A unifying field theory, where the two epistemological pathways meet, has not yet emerged, though I believe that Jesus Christ - the Way, the Truth, and the Life - reveals much about the futility of thinking that the Kingdom can be discovered or claimed along theoretical pathways of truth. But is there not abundant information, to say nothing of the history of error and fraud within each discipline, to warrant great humility on both pathways?

J. David Newman 3 weeks ago

Thank you Joe for your kind response and saying there is room within my ten points for some agreement. I agree. No one can know the full mind of God. As Newton is reported to have said we are like a grain of sand on the seashore and before us stretches the whole ocean of truth. My main concern is to have some kind of answer as to why their is evil in the world. This is the biggest stumbling block for atheists. They see the cruelty in the OT some of it instigated by God, they see the cruelty in nature, and even among Christians. That is why at the heart of any response must be the cross of Jesus and what that tells me about God. Through the lens of the cross I can begin to have an answer for why evil exists. And my concern about evolution is how to explain evil in that process and how we came to the place of why we need a Savior and what He is saving us from. The is my dilemma. I am trying to see the whole picture not just a part of it and that is a big big challenge.

I am not competent to comment on your excellent presentation of scientific info on the genome except to say I desire a consistent portrayal of the love of God and His purpose for His creation.

Kevin Riley 3 weeks ago

I am still pondering whether sin in heaven may have a part to play in this. If Adam and Eve's one sin had such huge consequences, what effect did Lucifer and 1/3 of the angels rejecting God have? We see the effects of sin (chaos and destruction) everywhere we look in the universe. Surely we cannot claim that all of that is due to the sin of Adam and Eve? If the rest of the universe was adversely affected by sin before Adam and Eve were created, why not also on this planet? That death came to humans, or to the Garden of Eden, by one sin may make sense, but does it have to be applied further than that? I still don't know the answers to those questions. What I do know is that I am not willing to accept that there can be different answers from science and theology if we are talking about real events in this world.

Elaine Nelson 3 weeks ago

For the first person that can identify and explain evil, he will surely be given the Nobel Peace Price, and receive instant praise. Short of expecting there to be an answer, we often have the
human problem of labeling: "evil" is simply a part of life. Is death evil? Is rain evil? Are earthquakes evil? If thorns are a result of sin, can it be imagined that God wanted mankind to loll around all day eating fruit dropped from trees? Is not work a blessing? Is not a timely death also a blessing? To live forever would be a living Hell.

Then, there is the problem inherent in reading the Hebrew account which is far more sparse than later explanations.

Neither can we understand life as described in Eden, and life outside the garden except a few short verses. Given God's original and only command to the first couple to "be fruitful and multiply" had they obeyed that command and there was no death, this earth would have been over populated centuries ago--at least at the fecundity represented in Genesis.

There have hundreds of postulations about life in Eden and life afterward; most have been sheer speculations. The Bible writers only knew what their life was THEN. They heard stories about an Eden, but before these were written, at least 3,000 years elapsed, and the stories were related through several hundred generations.

But the most important is that there were no observers of Creation. When Adam and Eve were created, God had completed his work.

Joe “One can potentially rank all the alternative forms in terms of their consequences, from lethal to bad to not so bad to neutral to slightly positive to very positive”. Could you provide references to support reproducible evidence base of slightly positive to very positive.

David

Joe Erwin

David, yes, of course, there are hundreds of available references, probably thousands, easily available by searching the web, but let me first direct you, and anyone else who is interested, to the web site of the Human Genome Project (just google "Human Genome Project Information"). There is a lot of information available there, including basic "Genomics 101" for anyone who needs it (not for you, David, unless you want to brush up).


(or check Harpending lab at University of Utah--I haven't looked at it, but I expect there are some good newer references listed there)

Sachidanandam et al. NATURE 409:928-933, 2001 (1.42 million SNPs)

I think I might not have clearly indicated what I was talking about when I mentioned ranking SNPs in terms of their consequences. Imagine a locus that has 5 different forms, A, B, C, D, and E. Suppose allele A is found only in severely malformed fetuses that are spontaneously miscarried. And suppose B is found only in infants that are born and survive but have some developmental disabilities. And suppose that C is found in adolescents with some learning disabilities. And
suppose D is found in normal people who have no abnormal characteristics exceptional disease resistance. And suppose E is found in people who are exceptionally resistant to progression of HIV to AIDS. This is a made up example, but it indicates what I mean in terms of being able to rank relative fitness. Further, E would only have advantages for people who were exposed to HIV. In environments completely free of HIV, those with the E allele would enjoy no advantage at all over those with the D allele.

So, have a look at Hawks et al, but feel free to just google around, using whatever terms interest you, like "advantageous SNPs, lethal SNPs, selection among non-lethal SNPs, etc."--really, just look for whatever you like. You will find that many of the discussions of this evidence refer to evolution. Feel free to ignore that to the extent that you can, and just look at the evidence without the evolutionary explanation.

Joe Erwin

David Newman,

Thanks for your comments. I think evolutionists have always had much more difficulty explaining why people are nice to each other than why they are nasty to each other. Competition, "nature red in tooth and claw" is a common characterization of "survival of the fittest." Much effort has been made to try to explain "altruism," in the face of "selfishness." So, selfish competition seems to do pretty well in explaining why "evil" exists. That is, why do people behave badly? Because they are inconsiderate of others and are only seeking advantages for themselves. Why to people do good things? Well, if I am nice to you, maybe you will be nice to me (reciprocal altruism), and such as that.

I really do not see more bad stuff happening than I expect to see. If someone close to you is senselessly and cruelly murdered, I understand why one would have to wrestle for some kind of meaning in that.

But, actually, more people have been amazingly nice to me that I had any right to expect. I'm kind of amazed that you folks tolerate my presence here....

David

Joe thanks, I was familiar with Sachidanandam' paper. I glance the Hawks’ paper, as soon a have more time I will read carefully paying attention to the references. I did not in find in this work what I was expecting (example certain SNPs producing protection for specific diseases or improving survival) but yes allot of educated and sophisticated suppositions.

David

To be more specific, I was expecting the opposite of diseases and disorders than have been linked to the sort of genetic imprinting, ( Angelman syndrome, Prader-Willi syndrome, and Beckwith-
Anonymous 3 weeks ago

David Newman,

Just dropped in again...World views:) I don't think I could scratch up as many points as you have thought.

One thing about my journey that touches on world views. I have always appreciated animals. (love dogs etc), but since I came to accept the incredible relatedness of all life (as I see it), my appreciation of and love for creation, in particular other life forms, has increased immensely.

I don't know how it is for other YEC/YLC's who have "switched" views, but for me this has led to a whole new sense of connectedness with animals etc. We are family in a sense far greater than I could understand from a they were "spoken into existence" the day before I was "hand crafted" type of thinking.

Cheers.

Anonymous 3 weeks ago

Joe Erwin,

cb25,

I'm interested in your attitudes toward animals. I feel that literal connectedness with animals too. I had it before the "switch" too, but even moreso as I came to know more about relatedness.

Most of my career has ended up involving animals, especially nonhuman primates (as a zoo curator, journal editor, animal facility designer, as an animal welfare specialist working to improve the quality of life for laboratory and zoo animals, and doing conservation biology field work). And, of course, the companion animals (housecats and stockdogs--border collies & kelpies).

Do you live in NSW? I thought I had seen something to that effect in one of your posts.

Anyway, cheers to you all.

Anonymous 3 weeks ago

Joe Erwin,

Very interesting to see a similarity. I admit it was not something I would have expected or predicted so to speak.
I'm currently reading the "Great Australian Working Dog Stories" book. You mention altruism. Some stories in there (not to exclude other things in the animal world) leave one with the realization that humanity may not have sole claim to altruism.

I am in NSW. If you or Kevin, (or others) want to email me just put my nic above in front of @bigpond.com

Hope that's ok with the ED?

Cheers

---

David

3 weeks ago

Joe I look in Pub Med and for any “positive” studies (SNPs) in humans

1. Genome-wide association study (GWAS), I could not find yet any study, (The human genome consists of 3 billion nucleotides or “letters” of DNA)
2. Exome sequencing (1.5% of those letters are actually translated into proteins, the functional players in the body) all the studies reported are associated with diseases (as is expected)
3. RNA sequencing also all the reports were associated to diseases

We have to wait the future studies to show the positive effects in humans.

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Joe Erwin

3 weeks ago

David, I checked PubMed quickly searching for "favorable SNPs" and then "favorable SNPs human." The first search yielded over 600 fairly recent journal publications. The second one yielded 60 publications. You might want to start by reading the one from this year by Mu, XJ, et al. (2011) from Nucleic Acids Research.

I'm not kidding you when I say the evidence is abundant. And you don't even have to be very clever to find it. Since you are plenty smart and have enough background to read this literature, I'm sure you will find it interesting food for thought. I should mention that exomes are not all that is of interest. More and more intronic influences on exonic variationon and gene expression are being found.

You will note if you read the papers turned up in the search of Pub Med I mentioned above that many reports of SNPs are not associated with diseases or disorders, although very often at least one of the SNPs at a specific locus has some connection to some disorder (in part, because many studies are conducted to try to find some genetic variant associated with a specific disorder).

My point again, is that if there is variation at any genetic locus, the variants are potentially more or less advantageous relative to each other. If one is worst, others are better than that.

Maybe this discussion is getting boring to others. Anyone many feel free to email me at:
David

is this article? 
Genomics

Xinmeng Jasmine Mu, Zhi John Lu, Yong Kong, Hugo Y. K. Lam, and Mark B. Gerstein
Analysis of genomic variation in non-coding elements using population-scale sequencing data from the 1000 Genomes Project
doi:10.1093/nar/gkr342

J. David Newman

cb25

Your comment on having few points in your world view was intriguing. Would you mind sketching out your world view? This is actually a good exercise for everyone on this blog. Most of us have never actually thought through what their world view is. I would be especially interested in seeing Elaine's world view because it seems so different from most others here I sometimes wonder why she is even interested in commenting so much on this site. How about it Elaine?

Elaine Nelson

Some 25 years ago as a candidate for graduation from a Jesuit university, I completed the requirement of writing a spiritual autobiography (required of all graduates) in which the student must explain the journey which led to her present spiritual life. This could not be a doctrinal paper for any particular religion, and even atheists were required to give their reasons for choosing atheism.

How many SDA graduates of college or seminary must complete such a paper? The teacher said that the majority of students failed on their first try and had to re-write. Mine was selected as a model of what was required. In it, I began with my early parental assurance of love and believed that same attitude is shown in a loving God, the one most important and simple belief: God is love. Anything that reflected such love was of God; anything that deflected or did not demonstrate love did not emanate from God. The only "religion" that I have had for many years is stated in the Golden Rule; no finer motto has ever been given: simple, no interpretation needed, and if followed, we would enjoy a better world. Where it is demonstrated, there will be love and peace.
Ervin Taylor 2 weeks ago

Would Elaine consider sending that essay to Adventist Today so the editor could consider it for publication? You can use my email address to do that if you wish.

Menachem 2 weeks ago

I suspect Karen Armstrong would love to review and comment!

David 2 weeks ago

Joe you maybe right probably this is boring for the majority. Today I talk to the Chief of genetics and molecular lab in my institution. She (evolutionist) concur that all mutation that we now in humans are deleterious and lethal, when we talk about SNPs she also agree up to day we don't have the evidence of certain SNPs makes more intelligent, healthy or live longer. Maybe some of them are related to better response to medications, but the disease was present.

Elaine Nelson 2 weeks ago

Erv,

Thanks for the very nice compliment. Through the years I have been asked a few times for that paper and it seems to have been lost in the house's archives! I will do a better search but it is difficult to re-construct my thoughts as they were so long ago. Time has likely changed them, as one's perspective usually does.

A surprise! I did not expect to discover this paper so soon, but I have it in hand. Shall I send it to the AToday address? I will send in the original, but lengthy version and it will require editing for length and more. As editor, you know the limitations and can suggest eliminations. It is just as written 26 years ago, but nothing has changed in the original ideas presented.

Ervin Taylor 2 weeks ago

Elaine. Please email me at retaylor.ca@att.net your email address and I will give you the address to send it to. I'm glad you found it.

Anonymous 2 weeks ago

David Newman,

mmm re My world view. I considered doing so the other day, but thought better of it. I did not
because it would have been very brief, and also philosophically there are still assumptions and loose ends within it. Now it will also look like I have copied Elaine:)

Here's what I was going to put:

"God IS. Love God, Love your neighbor."

In light of my previous point or so, you will understand if I suggest our neighbor is not limited to the human form, but don't push that too far!

---

**Elaine Nelson** 2 weeks ago

cb25, Those are my exact sentiments: most simple, yet who can disagree? The more additions, restrictions, dogma that is added are all superfluous. Humans must have a constant desire to add to the perfect!

---

**J. David Newman** 2 weeks ago

cb25.

Thank you for your brief world view. It is excellent. It also means that you could very well agree with my views on science and evolution since there is nothing in your world view that would exclude my beliefs.

As I understand a world view it is designed to help me decide what I will accept and what I will reject. No one accepts everything in the world. So maybe your world view needs to be just a little tighter. But at the moment it well encompasses my philosophy. Thank you.

---

**David** 2 weeks ago

Sound like couple of song of the Beatles “All You Need Is Love” and “Imagine”

---

**David** 2 weeks ago

Or better “Imagine” “All You Need Is Love”

---

**Anonymous** 2 weeks ago

David Newman,

I appreciate the warm fuzzy, and don't want to put a prickly among it, but I think I need to just tweak the understanding that can come from my "world view" comment.
My world view is actually the \textit{result} of what I have accepted and rejected to this point as a result of this process, not other way around. You may recall the solution I suggested earlier:

"...a basic a priori assumption...: Nature. Forget the assumptions before that, and after that eg Bible in or out etc. Let's begin there on common ground (pardon pun).

\textit{What does the world I see, live in, study, and reason about say about how it and I got here?}"

Because I have started from this "end" I accept science as a very valid process to help understand what I see and experience. I am totally convinced that an evolutionary process is the prime reason and process life is as it is today. Because I have begun at that end, I find no validation that the Bible can be considered an authoritative source of information in the final shaping of my world view.

Yes, it contains much light, but to a perhaps lesser degree, so do other "sacred" writings.

I think your world view can include my philosophy, but I was not so sure about the other way around to be honest:)

I do agree with most here...there comes a point in my search that science cannot reach into the fringes of the reality we see, but imo there remain pointers to God nonetheless.

Please don't take this as a criticism, but I don't want to give the wrong impression about world views either..

Cheers.

\textbf{J. David Newman} \hspace{1cm} 2 weeks ago

cb25

May I respectfully suggest that your definition of a world view is very inadequate. Now you are adding other elements which are your a priori. Those are part of your world view.

You write, "My world view is actually the \textit{result} of what I have accepted and rejected to this point as a result of this process," A world view is the cause of what you accept not the other way around. It seems that we do not agree on our definition of a world view. So I will quote from World View on Wikipedia.

"The Christian thinker James W. Sire defines a worldview as "a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true, or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic construction of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being." He suggests that "we should all think in terms of worldviews, that is, with a consciousness not only of our own way of thought but also
that of other people, so that we can first understand and then genuinely communicate with others in our pluralistic society."[12]

The philosophical importance of worldviews became increasingly clear during the 20th Century for a number of reasons, such as increasing contact between cultures, and the failure of some aspects of the Enlightenment project, such as the rationalist project of attaining all truth by reason alone. Mathematical logic showed that fundamental choices of axioms were essential in deductive reasoning[13] and that, even having chosen axioms not everything that was true in a given logical system could be proven.[14] Some philosophers believe the problems extend to "the inconsistencies and failures which plagued the Enlightenment attempt to identify universal moral and rational principles";[15] although Enlightenment principles such as universal suffrage and the universal declaration of human rights are accepted, if not taken for granted, by many.[16]

A worldview can be considered as comprising a number of basic beliefs which are philosophically equivalent to the axioms of the worldview considered as a logical theory. These basic beliefs cannot, by definition, be proven (in the logical sense) within the worldview precisely because they are axioms, and are typically argued from rather than argued for.[17] However their coherence can be explored philosophically and logically, and if two different worldviews have sufficient common beliefs it may be possible to have a constructive dialogue between them.[18] On the other hand, if different worldviews are held to be basically incommensurate and irreconcilable, then the situation is one of cultural relativism and would therefore incur the standard criticisms from philosophical realists.[19][20][21] Additionally, religious believers might not wish to see their beliefs relativized into something that is only "true for them".[22][23] Subjective logic is a belief reasoning formalism where beliefs explicitly are subjectively held by individuals but where a consensus between different worldviews can be achieved.[24]

A true world view is much more sophisticated than what you stated. So maybe we need to start again.

---

**Anonymous**

2 weeks ago

David Newman,

:) Maybe I have inadvertently given you the answer to the problem or how we and others on this thread can dialogue better.

"a world view is the cause of what you accept, not the other way around."

So it may be, but philosophical definitions aside:

My world view today is the result of consciously and consistently testing my presuppositions from an a posteriori approach. (We can never be free of bias I know)

If we took the definitions you have listed, everyone's world view is locked in concrete. We know that is not the case, so as much as we like the definition, world views are rubbery.

I think you asked the question earlier about how people can change their world views? I (and no doubt many others) am your answer:
Recognize our world view, or presuppositions and assumptions require testing, and allow them to be open to a posteriori scrutiny.

The inability to do this, and yes, treating our world views as "fixed", and always arguing from them rather than to them highlights the problem.

Anonymous 2 weeks ago

David Newman,

Just reflecting you your point "maybe we should start again"

A few things are coming clear to me:

1. You are arguing from a world view
2. You seem sure a priori that your world view is correct.

   On that basis we will never get on the same page because we are in different books.

3. I argue that all assumptions, presuppositions, and world views be up for a posteriori validation
4. I have reached my world view through this process and therefore think it can be done and is fair

   On that basis we can hope to reach the same page. That page may look more like yours than mine,
   or more like mine than yours, at the end of the day. (or others who dialogue here for that matter)

But: Untill you put your world view in "limbo", as with and for me, there will be no genuine dialogue.

Are you up for it?

Anonymous 2 weeks ago

David Newman,

I'm not sure if the last post from you was in aswer to my question "r u up 4 it?" or not.

If it was here is my final comment on this thread:

1. We don't need to agree on a definition, but a starting point.
2. Evolution is not a "fixity".
3. I will consider the supernatural, but not as a beginning point.

(I once used to consider EVERYTHING through the supernatural, and the Bible and EGW as the authority in that.)

Why not now? Because everywhere I looked what I observed created cognitive dissonance with what I believed about a YEC/YLC view. It became a question of integrity and honesty.

**Now:** *Nature IS.* It is what I see, what I can observe, what I can study. I am, you are, we can reason.

Bible came much later. It provides no eyewitnesses of Creation, it is open to vastly different interpretations etc etc.

The onus (imho) is on you to demonstrate a posteriori why such a document should take any part in a *beginning assumption* of what is to begin our dialogue.

If we begin with Nature - and there is truly a Creation and God along the lines suggested by fundamentalists - Nature should confirm it. Both nature and the Bible are, in such a scenario, from the same author and should corroborate perfectly? mmm!

So...for me: Nature is the a priori beginning point.

To allow the Bible any equal footing begs the question why I have a priori allowed "that" book and not some *other* "book" eg koran etc. Choosing the Bible would clearly be the result of a Christian world view. Again, it may be where I come back to, but it must not be where I start.

Where from here? Herb highlighted the problem of assumptions and presuppositions. This thread demonstrates the problem exists!

Put up a blog demonstrating *a posteriori* why we should begin with the Bible, and not Nature, as the authoritative source in determining how life came to be. I'm sure such a blog would be a good place to continue this dialogue.

Cheers.

---

**Anonymous** 2 weeks ago

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Cheers.

---

Anonymous 2 weeks ago

Hi Ed, that last post I put was entered under David N's last post and also Elaine's, but somehow ended up double and above it....I used the comment box at the bottom too? Perhaps if you could be kind enough to send it down a few so it fits? tks
J. David Newman  

cb25
But your world view is not rubbery but set in concrete. This is how world views operate and why they are so difficult to change. How do I know that your world view is in concrete? Because you will not consider the supernatural. The fixity of evolution comes first and God has to fit into that somehow. Nature comes first as you said. That is your fundamental world view and it does not allow for the working of the supernatural within that world view. That is why you cannot accept the miraculous because nature does not allow for that to happen. I wish you could talk in person. It is so laborious to do this through writing. Words can be so slippery at times. However, it is 11:34 Friday night here and I do need to go to bed. It is good that I am not preaching tomorrow. Again, one last thought. If we cannot agree on a definition of a world view then further discussion will not be fruitful.

Elaine Nelson  

For those who believe in YEC, what part of science do you not accept? When it's to your advantage? When it appears contrary to your a priori beliefs? Does anything in science ever change your mind? What amount of information is necessary to change your idea of science?

Science is a very broad topic and has many facets. Most will accept SOME things proved by science, but other positions discovered through scientific methods are rejected? How are those decisions made? Must they all by judged by a Bible template individually prepared? Must any new discoveries pass that Bible test to be accepted?
Are medical discoveries that totally contradict both the Bible and EGW rejected? Or, are they accepted as God revealing to humans a better knowledge of humans? How are the many new discoveries evaluated? Has God given humans the curiosity to understand more about both the universe and the human body? Or, does he want us not to investigate and rely on the knowledge imparted through the Bible writers as being the best and last word on every possible subject?

J. David Newman  

Elaine, you ask "what part of science do you not accept?" I do not accept the faith statement of science. For example it is a faith statement that says the key to the past is the present, that the laws of nature have never changed. That cannot be proved. It is a faith statement that says that inorganic materials produced organic materials. It is a faith statement that says non-intelligence produces intelligence.

I prefer to believe that intelligence, God, was intimate involved in the creation and ongoing creating of this universe. Those who make nature supreme have no place for God in the scheme but that is by faith also. That is why we are at an impasse. We have two very different world views. Just as you do not have answers to the points I have made so I do not have all the answers to your questions about the Bible. That is why we both live by faith. In the end we have to decide which is the more reasonable way to believe. I believe it is in God leading the way rather than chance leading the way.
Excuse my lack of good grammar in the previous quote I hit the submit button rather than the edit button by mistake. One more point. Not to belabor the point. Our world view is made up of the presuppositions with which we come to view life as explained in the Wikipedia article I listed. Since your presuppositions are different than mine we are really two trains travelling together on parallel tracks, seeing each other but never communicating with each other in any meaningful way. And that is what frustrates us both.

Dear Friends,

The conversation about the relative rigidity of "world views" made a little uncomfortable. I feel that my personal process of moving from a very rigid "set-in-concrete" perspective on the world began from talking with people from different traditions and cultures. My current personal perspective is much more flexible and accommodates, even celebrates, the incorporation of perspectives from other traditions and languages, although I am not a particularly cunning linguist, and even information from nonhuman societies.

So, please, let's not throw away the potential for dialog on the basis of a rigid concept. "Weltanschauung" is a philosophical term that came from German philosophers, and is, of course, translated as "world view." We have some tendency to just apply that term to our "personal perspective on the world," but in some ways that misses the point. The term originated, I think, as a postulation that social mores, history, traditions, and especially, language creates a kind of lens through which the world tends to be seen by people with that cultural background. The originators of the concept were stressing how rigid the world view of various societies may be, and how pervasively they can influence cognition and discourse among members of those societies. So, maybe we are talking here about a traditional SDA weltanschauung and people whose personal perspectives on the world conform with it, versus the personal perspectives of people who have rejected some or all of that model.

It is worth noting that there are efforts to attempt to overcome the problems of differing rigid world views, and even differing world views that are more flexible, (along with personal perspectives) by fostering international and interdisciplinary integration and communication (e.g., the Center Leo Apostel for Interdisciplinary Studies in Belgium).

Sorry for the deleted words and misspellings above. Insert "me" between "made" and "a" in sentence one.

And, of course, I misspelled the central term, which is "weltanschauung."
As most of you know, this term is widely used in sociology, anthropology, linguistics, and cognitive sciences, and the suggestion is often made that concepts for which there is a word in one language do not translate perfectly into other languages. The problem goes further when the same word in the same language means something different to people from one subculture than to people from another subculture. I think we have some of that here.

"Mutation," for example, is now almost an archaic term, with all the baggage and misconceptions regarding it that have persisted from when it was kind of a theoretical construct, to the present, in which we know of so many kinds of replication errors, many of which do not conform with what we might have been taught about the old construct in terms of magnitude or consequence.

Elaine Nelson 2 weeks ago

Joe, we each have our own weltanschaung and it certainly aids in conversation to admit that we do rather than assuming that we all have similar world views. There is often the assumption that this is an Adventist blog so naturally, we all have "group think" and all have the same beliefs and views. And there is surprise to find that assumption was terribly wrong. How could it be otherwise? As past events demonstrate, one's family and ethnic roots often trump their allegiance to a particular religious view. I freely admit that those have been the most powerful in my life and family still trumps all else. As Steve Jobs has written: of all the innovative and creative events in my life, it all pales in comparison to my being a father.

One's world view must encompass much more than religion. There is national pride, family and friends, vocation, and there are times when one may take priority but if not kept in balance, life can become seriously distorted. I have no religious affiliation or need to have doctrine or dogma but a very simple belief that love is the only thing that matters. If anything in life inhibits that, such a world view is terribly out of kilter.

Joe Erwin 2 weeks ago

Elaine, I agree that we each have our own personal world view, that is based in our individual experience, as well as our culture. And, of course, this is formed by our participation in varied roles in many spheres of influence. There is no doubt that my personal perspective was influenced by my SDA background, but I was also sort of a rancher and frontiersman, as a child. I grew up working with and caring about animals. I was much less influenced, I think, by urban adventist culture, than by the values (and dogma) learned out on the remote homestead. My perspective was also influenced by growing up on the west coast, by living in Germany during my Army years, and by later social, cultural, and academic involvement. What seems to me to have changed most has been movement toward flexibility of perspective, always finding out about things I did not previously know. That continues and is thrilling. And I have been fortunate to have experienced far more love than hatefulfulness in my life. Warm wishes to all....
Elaine Nelson  
2 weeks ago

I believe in the essential goodness of all humans. The exceptions are those who have never experienced love and goodness.

J. David Newman  
2 weeks ago

I seldom comment on blogs. This is the first one that I have been involved in an extended discussion. Ultimately is there any value in these discussions? Has anyone changed their mind as a result of what they have read? If one does not learn anything helpful is this discussion really a waste of time?

My views are only accepted by those who already believe that way and those who believe the opposite are supported by those who already agree with them. So is there really any point? I would be interested in your views.

Anonymous  
2 weeks ago

Hi David Newman,

I've just checked back in...my personal view is that it has not been a waste of time, at least to this point.

Those comments above which are currently titled Anonymous are from me. (Asked Ed to check out what I did wrong hopefully)

I do think we are getting off the real point and becoming hung up on definitions etc, so if this continues to be the case I will prefer to bow out of the discussion.

I do seriously think someone needs to set out from an a posteriori approach a compelling reason why the Bible should be considered as equal authority the early parts in discussion of beginnings.

Hope you did get some sleep last night!

Cheers

Gailon Arthur Joy  
2 weeks ago

“Mr. Butler continues to insist that "I still haven't seen any real evidence for evolution." May I offer the suggestion that Mr. Butler can never and will never "see" any "real evidence for evolution" because he sees evolution as running directly counter to his theology. If he wishes to say that "my theology prevents me from seeing any real evidence for evolution", I, for one, would say that such a statement has the virtue of being intellectually honest. But when Mr. Butler and others suggests that evolution is not supported by weight of scientific evidence, then I think the
best way to deal with that obviously misinformed statement is to ignore it and move on.”

This comment cannot be ignored but rather requires a clear response that being “Blind in the Faith” of the biblical record with the hope of eternal life is a far better position than intellectually self reliant and “blindly evolutionary” with a hopeless adherence to apostacy.

Horace Butler 2 weeks ago

I see that we have reached a stalemate. You say that evolution is supported by the weight of scientific evidence; I say that the observable evidence does not support evolution. It is clear that we will never reach an agreement on this issue. Time will tell which of us is correct. I have to wonder, though, which of us has the more closed mind. Accusing me of intellectual dishonesty and ignoring my statements because they are "misinformed," goes beyond what you can know about me. I've been informing myself about this issue for many decades. I find it fascinating. But the distortion and manipulation of data to "prove" the theory will always cause me to be suspicious of the real motives of some of these "scientists." Scientists come to the table with preconceived ideas and opinions, just like any other person; and they are just as reluctant to abandon them when the evidence proves contrary to their cherished beliefs.

A friend of mine (yes, in spite of my "intellectual dishonesty" I still have a few) sent me a book that he hoped would convince me of the validity of the evolutionary theory. It was the same old drivel, full of suppositions, "may have's," and "could have's," sprinkled with a lot of imagination. The book was Science on Trial, by Douglas J. Futuyma. I did read it, cover to cover. He tries hard, but it falls flat, just like all other attempts to bolster the theory.

Trevor Hammond 2 weeks ago

RE: Mrs. Nelson's comment: "There is often the assumption that this is an Adventist blog so naturally, we all have "group think" and all have the same beliefs and views. And there is surprise to find that assumption was terribly wrong."

-----

It would be far more appropriate to make the assumption that most Tradventists would be appalled by a public forum posing to glorify Badventism than by asserting that they make the assumption that 'group thinking' should be the norm: even when such do not even remotely rightfully represent the core essentials of what constitutes Adventism. I would also point out that the 'valid' assumption that certain blogs may misrepresent Adventism can be avoided if a website, for example, would perhaps call itself - hmm...NON-adventists today. That would be more forthright in reflecting a cosmopolitan secular 'worldview' (in my humble opinion of course): but what say ye? So... would this comment of mine be regarded as group thinking? I do believe though, that one is entitled to their own opinion AND worldview, even if it may rub detractors up the wrong way. It would, however, be grossly inappropriate for a secular society's culturally biased worldview, to be imposed on Adventism, by partisan factions from within and without whose views may be respected, but not necessarily accepted.

♥T
Brother Trevor I also wonder the title of this web page. I never saw such a systematic repetitive attack to the SDA church or their representatives. Look like it is an agenda behind all of this. Is sadly but is it the reality. I guess the majority of frequent participants have plenty of free time, are they retired? But looks to me they are leftovers of the “DES MESS”

The comment "Des Mess" is another indication that David and Trevor had belonged to what was called the "CBs" in Australia? Or perhaps they were supporters of the CB agenda? (The agenda of the CBs and the ATS were and are very similar)

Took a little time to find out what is ATS.
The only ATS I knew was the American Thoracic Society, then I found out that also could be Association of Theological Schools, but I thought Erv must be referring something to Adventism so I found out *Adventist Theological Society.* I looked into their web I found out they have articles written by scholars, well thanks Erv, I will start reading “The End of Historicism? Reflections on the Adventist Approach to Biblical Apocalyptic--Part Two”, by Jon Paulien.

Ah, Dr David my brother, the legendary DESS MESS sums-it-up quite well. One can clearly see the ramifications and disastrous effects of what happens when one decides to be bigger than the church. Sadly though, this went on unchecked for decades right under our noses. I think Robert H. Pierson handled this matter par excellence followed on by others including Neal C Wilson and today we see our GC Pres Ted Wilson's effort to reclaim that which was lost. Unfortunately we can see here 'even today' the many casualties as a result of this mess. Yeah ATS does have some excellent scholarly articles. The Thoracic Society may not be my cup of tea though, at least for now ☺.

♥T

Comments posted above, now showing as 'Anonymous' are in reality postings by 'cb25.' Apologies for this operator error, which will be corrected as soon as possible. CH
You begin with nature, examine all the evidence, and see what might conflict with the Bible. So let's begin with nature.

1. We have nature before us.
2. There are laws that we can observe and define.
3. Nature has existed for a long time whether we count it in thousands or millions of years.
4. There is death, violence, destruction, growth in nature.
5. We see changes and adaptations in nature such as micro evolution.
6. Using current scientific understanding many have constructed a history of nature going back millions and billions of years.

I believe that you would agree on the six points that I have listed which I also agree with. Given that scenario there is no difference between what the Atheist or the Theist believes about how the universe developed. The one difference being the atheist takes by faith that something came out of nothing or that something has always existed where the theist believes that God was the first cause and accepts by faith that God has always existed. So both have to begin with faith. Are we still together?

Now as to what nature does not tell me.

1. It does not tell me there is a God. Some may see evidence for a God (see all the usual arguments such as the teleological one) but one cannot prove in a scientific way from nature that there is a God.
2. Since it does not tell me about God it does not tell me that there could be another life after death. And if there is another life it does not tell me how I might exist in that other life.
3. Nature portrays death, etc., as the normal process of life coming into being. Are we still together here?

Now we are introduced to the Bible. The Bibles makes some extraordinary claims such as being totally inspired by God and that there is only One God despite what others might think. How do we know whether the claims of the Bible are correct? During the time of the enlightenment the Bible came under great attack for its historical veracity. For example the Hittites feature fairly prominently in the Bible but there was no record of them outside of the Bible. Herodotus and other ancient historians never mentioned them. Then came the archaeological discoveries of the 19th and 29th centuries and libraries were found documenting that these were once a powerful people. More and more discoveries proved the accuracy of history in the Bible. Prophecies regarding the coming of the messiah have proved to be highly accurate. And I could go on but I have come to the conclusion that the Bible is different from any other ancient book especially when it comes to describing that there is another life after death and tells us how to be in that new life.

But perhaps the most important distinction between the Bible and every other ancient religious book is that the Bible tells us that we can never be good enough for heaven. That good works do not merit the next life. That we enter into that life because of what someone else has done for us.
"For it is by grace you are saved through faith and not of works" (Eph 2:8). No other religion teaches that. So at its core Christianity is unique. Since we are not to make our entries too long I will move to my next point.

The Bible now explains that death is an enemy, that death will not exist in the next life, that there was a time when sin did not exist in this world, that we are all under sin, that we need someone to save us from that sin. None of which I can learn from nature.

Now comes my challenge. How do I explain what the Bible says about the origin of death, the introduction of evil through the rebellion of Lucifer, and the future cleansing of the universe from all trace of sin and evil?

Who interprets who? If Nature is the final interpreter then all that the Bible says in this area is untrue because it touches on a lot of what science tells us about existence. If the Bible is the final interpreter then I must find ways to explain why some of our interpretations of nature are incorrect.

I hope you can understand my dilemma just a little. I am not wanting to be rigid. But our world view does determine what we accept and what we screen out. How do you understand what the Bible says in the areas I have expressed given some of these challenges? Why should I believe anything that is in the Bible?

J. David Newman
2 weeks ago

Even though I preview I somehow missed that we are in the 21st century not the 29th. We are really trying to decide what is the ultimate authority when it comes to matters of faith and science. Some would like to see the ultimate authority in science be nature and others the ultimate authority for purpose of life the Bible. So two separate authorities. The problem is when the Bible touches on matters that affect science as well such as death and sin. Then which one becomes the authority?

Elaine Nelson
2 weeks ago

"Prophecies regarding the coming of the messiah have proved to be highly accurate."

Only with very free re-interpretation of older prophecies which were not directed to Jesus. It is easy to take an old prophetic utterance and change a few important points and voila! it has become fulfilled prophecy today!

That Herodotus never mentioned the Hittites proves what? Has anyone proved by archaeological or other evidence outside the Bible that there were millions of former slaves living in the desolate Sinai for 40 years without leaving a single shard or bones or evidence that such a large group ever camped there? Nor is there any evidence of their having crossed the Red sea. "The saga of Israel's Exodus from Egypt is neither historical truth nor literary fiction. It is a powerful expression of memory and hope born in a world in the midst of change" (Finklestein *The Bible Unearthed*).
All cultures have myths that evoke national pride. Homer's were written for that purpose and the only way in which all of those stories were captured was the custom of the story tellers singing the poems, a unique device used to enhance memory to retell these stories for days.

J. David Newman  
2 weeks ago

Elaine: In your opinion is the Bible just the same as any other so called holy book such as the Koran? Is the Bible just a collection of stories from long ago? Does the Bible have any real purpose for us today? It cannot be just for encouragement because there is much to discourage in the Bible. So, do we study it just like any other historical document and evaluate it through the methods of historians? If we do then we rule out any information on the supernatural. It seems from reading your writings on the web that you give little if any authority to the Bible. If I am understanding you correctly there is nothing that I can show from the Bible that will be of any help to you. I know there is a tension between what can be proved and what has to be taken by faith but it seems that you want 99% to be proved and 1% to be by faith. Am I reading you correctly?

David  
2 weeks ago

Have you ever-wonder maybe they were looking in the wrong place? To start the “Mont Sinai” in the Sinai Peninsula, does not match with the few descriptions of the month Sinai or month “Horeb” describe in the Bible.

1. The month Horeb was in Midian  
   Exodus 3:1 (Midian is in Arabia)

2. Close to the month was a rock (Rock of Horeb) that split by Moses. Water came for the Israelites.

3. Also is described a cave where the prophet Elijah hided.

4. Paul went to Arabia and he mention Sinai in Arabia.

Kevin Riley  
2 weeks ago

This is one among a growing number of reasons that I am not prepared to equate our understanding of the Bible with God inspired words. In between is our process of interpretation, and whether or not the Scriptures are infallible, our understanding thereof is not.
I also once thought it was wonderful that the Bible had been vindicated by the discovery of the Hittites. Until I noticed that the Bible defines them as the children of Heth, who was a descendant of Canaan. Rather than being a mighty Indo-European empire, the Biblical Hittites are simply one of the multitude of Canaanite people, most of whom have left no trace beyond their names. Or, more correctly, we cannot distinguish between what traces there are of them and of their neighbours.

Joe Erwin  
2 weeks ago

Greg, old friend, thanks for your note. I'm glad we can be in touch. For those who do not know, Greg is a military and VA chaplain. He was my room mate at PUC and my academy classmate. He was the first student who spoke kindly to me when I entered academy as a stranger. Keeping in touch with former classmates is a wonderful thing that one may miss out on if one severs all ties with the church and its sub-culture. I'm so happy to be in touch with many of my old friends.

David N., I mostly agree with your six plus three statements. With a few quibbles, of course. Under four, I don't see quite so much bad stuff (there is beauty as well as ugliness, and I think a lot more of it; there is peace as well as violence, and hopefully, more of it; etc.). Under number two, I think we sometimes overstate the use of "laws" in nature (occasional exceptions occur to most general principles--because the principles are authored by falible humans, and may not accurately represent ultimate truth, which is pretty hard to come by). We see evidence of change and adaptation. Period. We do not need to break that down into "micro" or "macro" evolution.

So, I agree that nature does not tell you that there is a God, OR that there is not. Nature does not indicate that there is life after death (except that we and other animals have offspring, and our essence/genetic legacy persists through our children). Nature does not tell us that we are lost and require salvation.

So, where do we get that stuff, and why is it so important to us? I'm fine with not believing that I am going to live again after I die. I'm glad to have lived, but dying is no problem for me. I don't see a need to make it into a problem. Why do we need to be lost or saved? Fine and dandy to be appropriately humble, but I do not see why we need to agonize over what everything means in terms of an ultimate purpose. There does not need to be a purpose beyond our lives for our lives to be worth living.

Why is there such a need for some authority as an anchor? Can't we just accept that the world is complicated and to some extent is beyond our understanding? That need not keep us from learning about the world, to the extent that we can and for the benefit of ourselves and others. But to spend so much time and effort agonizing over intangible, unknowable, imaginary, unreliable, magical, superstitious issues just seems like a terrible waste of time and talent.

Joe Erwin  
2 weeks ago

Sorry about the typo. "salavation" should be "salvation." Of course, "salivation" is also a good thing....
Hi David Newman,

Lots of ? In there:) Just because I respond should not be taken to mean others better qualified should not!
Pretty much same page, but I will take liberty to add a few points and change the sequence (point 3): (added points in bold)

1. We have nature before us.
2. There are laws that we can observe and define
3. There is death, violence, destruction, growth in nature
4. We see changes and adaptations in nature such as micro and macro evolution. As Joe says Change.
5b. Using observable geological data we can construct a history going back extreme lengths of time
3. Nature has existed for a long time whether we count it in thousands or millions of years
6. Using current scientific understanding many have constructed a history of nature going back millions and billions of years.

Atheism and Theism. Yes – ultimately both statements of faith – thus both are conclusions NOT starting points. In other words either person has, for any of a vast range of possible reasons, come to the faith statement that there is or is not a God.
As I see it: This means that in a true a posteriori analysis of data, theism should be a conclusion, not a starting point, for us too.
SO...is the Bible a valid source of authoritative data? Am I going to use it to confirm, correct, or even deny what I see in nature as I try to reach my faith position?
As you say the Bible tells a different story:
In particular it points to a young life, possibly a young planet, and to some even a young universe. (depending on interpretations) It also outlines a global flood etc.

The key question which you and I (and others) are hung up on is this:
Should the Bible be allowed as an a priori authoritative document in the data about our 7 points above?
If I read right, you are using three things to prove the Bible is right, (and therefore should be used to confirm, correct or deny – interpretations aside?) :

1. Historical accuracy. What does this prove? It is a document written within a historical context. There will be historical correlations. How does this prove authority in for example Creation? No one was there, so we move from history to a subjective trust in another's “inspiration”. A big, a priori jump in logic. Nature in fact came first and the Bible is a humanly written commentary of much later input. (We could enter debate about inspiration, but suffice to say valid inspiration should not contradict observable data should it? I'm not talking about miracles).
2. Prophetic accuracy. Elaine has covered this with cogent points. The vast array of interpretations, applications, and arguments over what most prophecies did or did not, or do or do not, mean makes this a tenuous argument does it not?
3. Uniqueness. Appealing, but how does that prove it is correct or incorrect? To say so is a judgment call? It is similar to the next point about good works.

You note the important (to you) distinction of “good works”: I suspect even the author of the blog above would argue with you over the fine points of that one. Seriously, does this distinction actually demonstrate either way? This is perhaps a great example of a worldview getting in the way: You accept this as true, you believe it is good, you believe the Bible says it, so the Bible is true? Fact is you probably believe it is true because that’s an interpretation of the Bible you have come to believe. Circular reasoning?

**How have these three points demonstrated valid reason to take the Bible as an authority to confirm, correct or deny interpretations of nature?**

Finally: You are correct:

“If Nature is the final interpreter then all that the Bible says in this area is untrue because it touches on a lot of what science {Nature, geology etc too} tells us about existence. ..

If the Bible is the final interpreter then I must find ways to explain why some {I would say for YEC etc “most” not “some” } of our interpretations of nature are incorrect.” May I suggest that cannot be done without denial of data, dishonesty, or failure to think?

I have just read what Joe Erwin wrote as I was putting this together...valid points...

Cheers

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**Elaine Nelson**

2 weeks ago

Not giving "authority" to a book does not imply that it is essentially of no value. It is a wonderful view of the world of ancient peoples. Their worldview helps us to understand why they wrote what they did, and will always have a special place in the world's great literature, but to put implicit faith in its every word was never intended. It was simply their history--and only their history; and as such, it does not convey anything about the history of surrounding cultures other than how the Israelites viewed them: idolaters (yet the Israelites worshiped those same gods!). No book is worthy of such unadulterated praise.

There are many encouraging words found in the Bible; but there are also many accounts of horrible acts, said to have originated by God. This, again, reflects the writers' understanding just as their contemporaries: their god is in charge of everything that occurs, and they are merely pawns of his.

That a God one is expected to love was also the same god who killed millions of innocent people in a world-wide flood originated in Sumeria some 1,000 years before the Hebrews recorded it; the story of baby Moses is almost identical to a much earlier infant king Sargon. There are so many duplicates of earlier stories, plus contradictions and errors, that it can only be read for historical interest and not as the absolute Word of God, which it is not. It is a product of humans just as Homer's Epics; the Babylonian Genesis (which has many similar features to the Bible story of Creation--also told much later).
A book only has what a community endows it with; nothing more, nothing less. The Muslims hold their Koran at even a more revered position: their book can only be read in the original language: to translate is to make it no longer sacred.

Christians should revere God, but there is no book, no special insight that begins to reveal God as He is. Otherwise, why do Christians today almost totally reject the God of the OT, all the while claiming that God's son is an entirely different individual--never destructive, always loving?

J. David Newman

2 weeks ago

cb25

One assumption you have not discussed: the assumption of no change in the laws that govern our universe. Is there anyway to prove that the laws have never changed? If there is not then you are making a faith statement. Then it is possible that the Bible is right because if laws have changed then that brings a whole new picture into view. You do not give the Bible authority because it cannot correlate with what we see in nature. But that is because of how you interpret nature through the lens of present law being the key to the past.

J. David Newman

2 weeks ago

Elaine, I appreciate your answer. It seems then that we have no common ground to discuss God since the only book that tries to explain him has no authority for us. God is then whatever we want to make him out to be. Thank you for the clarification.

cb25

2 weeks ago

David Newman,

It is perhaps at this point in a discussion, having noted your point to Elaine as well, that we could remind ourselves of something:

Christains are desperately in need of a compelling apologetic which can account for and encourage faith outside of a "The Bible says it" mentality.

Such an apologetic will present plausible reasons why there can be a God, it will pull together vastly more than the narrow pespective some interpret from Bible. It will take account of and fit into the "fact" this world and life on it are incredibly old...

It will draw on what is in and about nature and human nature and provide reason for faith....

We would do better from this point forward to combine efforts to this end than debating over things which to many are long since proven. eg old earth, Bible not authoritative in such debates etc.
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We would do better from this point forward to combine efforts to this end than debating over things which to many are long since proven. eg old earth, Bible not authoritative in such debates etc.

cb25

David Newman,

mmm lots in those posts:) I'll attempt to pick up your points.

1. I do believe in God.

2. My view that natural laws are uniform, is not the same as "immutability" of the law. It IS, ultitmely a faith statement, but one backed up best by observation.

3. If I read right, the evidence you say you have is from the Bible. Is that not circular reasoning. We are trying to find evidence why we should take the bible as authoritative to confirm, correct or deny what nature "says".

4. Nature "red in tooth and claw" and a God of love. Well, first, I would not want to go to OT to demonstrate a God of love...I would not find one. Secondly, I tend to agree with Joe, and I think Elaine, we are too quick to judge much of nature and these kind of things as "Evil", much of it just IS. Why did God use this process if he did? (if he did not why make things so they look like he did?) That is part of the apologetic we need, though I have ideas I will blog about one day. Suffice to say, we should not make inability to answer that question "proof" that an alternative view is correct. Particularly when the alternative YEC/YLC, is even more
5. You say "if we cannot rely on the Bible then we are no different than the atheist who tries to be consistent without any reference to God."

I fear that is "baby and bathwater" thinking.

Across thousands of generations, across diverse cultures and among different people groups there has been belief in "being consistent", "worship" "hope", "desire for betterment" etc. True, some contain barely recognizable "light", but, the point is most did not have the Bible, and yet were not devoid of God/god. So how can you say if we can't rely on Bible we are no better than atheists?

Just a little footnote about creation being "very good" when completed. There is a whole area of inconsistency between that "perfect/good" world and what we live in. If nature was NOT red in tooth and claw in Eden: When did it become so? The curse? If so, there were no winters/summers? No migration patterns in animals? No deciduous trees? No perenials? No biennials? No lions? No food chain? No hunting instincts? and on and on. When did these things come to be?.

To say the curse was a "recreation" begs the question how a God of love could impose upon and entire creation 6000 years of "suffering" and red tooth and claw just because Adam didn't have the internal fortitude to say no to his wife!

Nor does any of this address the reality we see evidence for an incredibly old world and life. Did God make it looking old? and on we could go...I think that makes the point.

I'm not attempting to be blunt, but there are massive issues tied up with YEC/YLC, and a literal creation full stop.

To limit one's knowledge of God to one book only, and that being the absolute authority and nowhere else is to have a god that is much too small and is a god of only Jews and Christians, IMHO.

David Newman,

Ok...Lets take the question of whether the laws of nature (universe if you want) have changed or not. Let's test it a posteriori.
1. Let us assume they have not. Now look at the world: For recorded history sunrise and sunset, summer and winter, night and day have not changed. Objects fall, gasses float, wind blows, rain falls. Rivers run, soil erodes etc. You can go on and on looking at our world, from a most basic observation to the most intense scientific analysis. Does any of this very observable data suggest the laws or rules have changed?

Thus: IF I come with no pre judgement: What do I see in nature to suggest they have changed? Nothing.

2. Let us assume the laws of nature have changed. Evidence please? oops....

Which assumption is more demonstrably compelling?

Can I prove it? No. But I can accept that my first assumption was in fact more correct and produces far less cognitive dissonance. It also requires very minimal "explanation" of contrary evidence compared to the second possible assumption.

J. David Newman
2 weeks ago

cb25

Of course your are right if we leave out the issue of why God would use evil in creating the world. I understand that you do believe in God. So since you try very hard to discount what I say about how to explain evil would you be willing to explain how you see the connection between nature with its survival of the fittest, tooth and claw, and a God of love? Or maybe he is not really a God of love and when the Bible says in Genesis that when He created it was good it really wasn't good. Why did God decide to create this way?

And your answer regarding the immutability of natural law is still a faith statement.

Elaine Nelson
2 weeks ago

Those who claim that "things are not always as they appear" have the burden of proof to demonstrate that theory. Unless that is given, it is simple avoidance of the facts and contrary to all available evidence: a desperate appeal only to the gullible.

J. David Newman
2 weeks ago

cb25

Oh, one other thing regarding you feeling that I have no evidence for laws changing. If you believe in God you would believe in sin. Of course we have to go to the Bible to try and understand this (which Elaine feels has no authority) but hopefully you see the Bible just a little...
more positively. According to the Bible there was a time when there was no sin. Then Lucifer sinned and things changed. That is the evidence for laws changing. Now this is a faith statement too but I have a little more evidence than you have supplied.

If sin and evil and not real and have not always existed why should we believe there is a God? Maybe the Bible is just as mistaken about God as it is about sin and evil and origins. If we cannot rely on the Bible then we are no different than the atheist who tries to be consistent without any reference to God.

I guess in all this discussion you view God to be very distant and not involved in his creation. So I wonder how God fits into your view. Sorry I have taken so long to say what I am saying but I still feel we are on parallel tracks close enough to wave to each other but not able to hear each other.

cb25  2 weeks ago

I have made a comment to this, but it entered up further...hoping this one does not, as I used the "reply" button this time instead of the box at the end.

cb25  2 weeks ago

Herb,

You began this blogg...you admit similar problems either side, how do you defend the theologians side of the equation? Where would your starting point be and why? This type of discussion is a long way from some of the fine points of theology you may be used to, but time to get of the benches imho... Unless you are still fighting that Mac? If so, I understand. You are on a good cause,...best computers I've ever had!

Cheers

J. David Newman  2 weeks ago

It seems we are almost at the end of this particular blog and are ready for another. I want to thank everyone for the great discussion. I have learned much here that will inform how I answer these issues in the future.

I now realize that it all begins with one's world view whether conscious or subconscious (we all have a world view otherwise we could never make a decision). I will work on sharpening my world view and learning better how to address this issue. A world view is just like a pair of glasses. If I put on blue shades I see the world differently than if I have brown shades on. The world has not changed. What has changed is how I see the world. That is our challenge. How do we get to see through the same lens.

Thanks again for helping me with my thinking and beliefs
Elaine Nelson 2 weeks ago

Herb asked:

"How in the world did Peter, Paul and others ever get the young Christian community out of the shadows if they only told them to believe something that they had no evidence for?"

Neither Peter, Paul, nor any of the disciples actually knew of the virgin birth until at least a generation later. Neither they nor any disciples actually SAW the resurrection. They believed what they HEARD, not what they had seen with their own eyes. Is there a difference? Jesus was not recognized and had unusual abilities after his reported resurrection. The courts certainly don't accept hearsay, but in those times, hearsay was readily accepted. Should we be so trusting today we would not be here, as we would fall for anyone who makes claims. Is skepticism never to be used? With the many charlatans who have operated in the guise of religion since its beginning, it would pay to do so. Anytime someone makes supernatural claims, as was recently reported at the Annual Council, should we be ready to believe it? What about the man who was reported as dead and prayed for six hours and was miraculously brought back to life?

Horace Butler 2 weeks ago

If we used your philosophy to determine the veracity of the gospel story, the New Testament would have never been written and Christianity would not exist. Have you read The Case for Christ, or The Case for Faith, by Lee Strobel? As an investigative reporter, and an agnostic (or maybe an atheist) he submitted the claims of the Bible to the standards of any other investigation that he would make. These books are the result, and he became a Christian because of his investigations.

Your really think the disciples were all duped and the whole thing is a sham? May the Lord do to you what he did to Saul on the way to Damascus. It may be the only way to get through your skepticism.

Elaine Nelson 2 weeks ago

I believe in the principles Jesus spoke. That is all the case I need. A man is judged by his words and actions and not by the multiplicity of claims. One's life should stand alone as the best evidence. He was not considered divine until many years after he died, but they loved him. Many great men lived, wrote, and died without being called "God" or divine.

If all those who believe and follow his advice to "love everyone" whether divine or not, those were the best way to live. I care not what belief my neighbor has but I respect his life if it is honorable and good.

Horace Butler 2 weeks ago

Maybe you need to go back and read your New Testament. Jesus claimed to be the God of the OT. "Before Abraham was, I AM." His disciples worshiped Him; they called Him Lord, in its
highest sense. Jesus was either the greatest imposter the world has ever known, or He was God, as He claimed to be. There can't be any middle ground. Based on your above comments you apparently subscribe to the former view, so I'm surprised that you would admire the principles of someone who (in your apparent way of thinking) deliberately and blatantly deceived so many people.

Elaine Nelson  
2 weeks ago

I also admire the principles of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, John Locke and John Mills and a host of others. Divinity has nothing to do with someone's principles; principles should stand alone based on their proven efficacy.

Anonymous  
2 weeks ago

Herb,

Before I accept David Newman's suggestion that this thread is ending:

I was the first to comment on your blog. (currently titled anonymous).

I asked you two very relevant questions. In fact in light of the outcome of the thread, they were central to the issue.

I am still waiting for your response, so if you have finished getting your head around that Mac, I'm standing by:

I've pasted it below again.

"What would you advise people to do to ensure they are truly evaluating their assumptions a posteriori? Is this even possible if we hold to a fundamentalist view of the authority of Scripture, as such a view apparently must begin with an a priori assumption?"

J. David Newman  
2 weeks ago

cb25

I am back for a moment regarding your comment "For recorded history sunrise and sunset, summer and winter, night and day have not changed. Objects fall, gasses float, wind blows, rain falls. Rivers run, soil erodes etc. You can go on and on looking at our world, from a most basic observation to the most intense scientific analysis. Does any of this very observable data suggest the laws or rules have changed?"

What you have not factored into your argument is the entrance of sin into the universe. Since you believe in God I assume that you also believe in sin. Did sin exist from the beginning of God's
creation? If it did then what is sin? If it did not the same question applies: What is sin? If sin is an intrusion into the world God made how if any did it make a difference in how the world operates? If we take out the factor of sin then I can see some light in your model. And of course I need the Bible to know about sin but at the same time some on this blog don't believe the Bible can inform us of any ultimate realities. So I don't know how you view the bible in this area.

Elaine Nelson 2 weeks ago

What were the changes made by sin's entrance into this earth? Where is there evidence that sin is in the universe? How can that be known? Have the astronauts found it in outer space, or on the moon which they've inspected? What can be given as concrete examples of the effects of sin compared with before sin? The Bible account is extremely sparse and lacking in all the many effects that have been assumed. How can we know that prior to sin the carnivores were herbivores? That there were no poisonous reptiles, plants or insects? Were all the plants perennials? Did the leaves always stay green and there were no beautiful fall colors as we enjoy now? Did the human digestive system operate entirely different than we know today? Were there only "good" bacteria?

Did humans never risk sunburn? Did the lion and lamb really subsist on grass and there were no predators? Did the fish never eat small fish or even plankton? To suggest that "things have not always been as the seem" is merely a vague hope without any evidence whatsoever.

There are so many suppositions imagined about a "perfect" world existing in Eden, and yet when these questions are asked, few have more than an idealistic view that never existed except in their imagination.

Darrel Lindensmith 2 weeks ago

Elaine, what helps me to understand the harmony between the science of long ages/death from the beginning and the reality of sins' effects as Pastor Newman is explaining is to give up my "sequential assumptions.

Even if human sin caused nature to be changed, God, knowing these effects, even before creation, could have front-loaded nature at creation that would be pre-adapted for a world of cause and effect were selfishness would rule and lions would need teeth and gazelles would need speed.

God could have pre-programmed a "completely perfect world," but God wished to create beings like himself with free will and moral powers to understand ethics and the gift of reason. God chose to arrive at his goal of perfection and create beings that were free. If God created only robots then "the greatest show on earth," would be just that: a show!

God foreknew sin in this situation of freedom, and those created nature to work under these conditions, even before the creation of mankind. Jesus (God) would take responsibility for choose this effect of freedom by experiencing the punishment for sin on himself on the Cross. "this was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifested at the end of times for your sake." 1 Peter 1:20
"The Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world." Revelation 13:8   As we see from these verses  God from the quatum his eternity, can act or re-act (respond) to 'situations yet to appear' in the stream of earth-based time, even before they "happen."

cb25  2 weeks ago

David Newman,

Hi, I will start with your last puzzle first: You don't know how I view the Bible in this area, re sin.

1. It is indefensible a posteriori to allow the Bible equal standing with Nature in a effort to understand what is.

Just as it would be indefensible to allow the Koran equal standing with nature to understand what is.

I allow what I see, observe, study, experience, to be the prime source of data. So, what about sin?

2. As I've said before, if you allow/require the Bible to decide this for you, on what basis do you take the Bible's version of sin and not some other holy book? Until there is an a posteriori defensible argument for that choice, your position/choice is indefensible.

Sin? Perhaps we overstate the term, and think that just because we "may" not be able to find such clear definitions from nature, that there is no validation for morality, good, bad, right wrong etc. I **think this is a mistake.**

Whatever we choose to call the way nature is, red in tooth and claw, or sublimely beautiful as we watch the sunset on those autumn leaves Elaine reminded us of, it IS. And it is by every observable method, essentially the way it has been for deep ages. This does not mean the Bible, along with others sources of information cannot shed some light on questions of morality that I may ask.

3. Can you please show me using a posteriori methods how you determine the Bible is the authority to "inform us about ultimate realities"? In doing this, of course, it would be useful using the same aproach to explain why the Koran is not such a source.

(I came across the articles Dr Taylor and yourself did last year on Evolution Yes/No yesterday. Interesting read)

Cheers

Elaine Nelson  2 weeks ago

Each time the phrase "God could have" implies that it is unknown, but the writer is assuming
whatever follows. Are we unable to live with what is known without making assumptions that align with personal beliefs? That is very simple: simply answer every such question with: "God could have----" and fill in the blanks. Saying that "God could have" front-loaded nature to very suddenly adapt to change their entire digestive tracts to accommodate flesh while first creating them as herbivores. Is this your solution?

If God "could have" foreseen the flood, why did he kill all his creation which he pronounced as "good"?

"Could have, should have, would have" are some of the oldest excuses man has used since the beginning of time. Is that also God's excuse? Does God need man to devise excuses for his acts?

J. David Newman

Wow, I have been going on the assumption that you gave some authority to the Bible. No wonder we have been having such a tough time trying to come to some area of agreement. I guess that you don't see much validity to the many many biblical scholars who see the bible as special revelation with its own special authority and nature as general revelation. I have suggested to Herb that he start a thread on apologetics and the bible. The question you are asking me is really another whole subject which I would love to get into. Now I am really intrigued. You said that you believe in God I wonder how you can believe in him when you make nature and science the final determining factor. Since none of them can prove God how do you know there is a God and what evidence do you have for there being a God? By starting there we will find something similar when discussing the authority or lack of for the Bible. I am really curious now as to how you know there is a God.

Darrel Lindensmith

Well, Elaine, you are right that my thoughts in my last post somewhat speculative. Thus I remained in the subjunctive mood. However what I do know for sure is that the designs in nature DID NOT (Could Not) have Come about naturally without God. Bible or no bible, I would know this much.

cb25

David Newman,

Chuckle...I'm sure I noted before, I give the Bible probably a similar authority as Lewis did.

Herb has failed to answer my questions here, so it will be interesting to see what he comes up with:)

I'm not sure my question is a "whole new subject", imho, it is key to the assumptions that are
keeping you, others, and myself on different train tracks. It is the question underlying my very first question to Herb. If he, you or I had answered that question earlier, much effort may have been saved.

You say I "....wonder how you can believe in him (God) when you make nature and science the final determining factor. Since none of them can prove God how do you know there is a God?"

I find this amazing: Does this mean that First one has to accept a priori that the Bible is the ultimate authority on these questions. Then, and only then can we believe there is a God?

If that be the case, how on earth am I ever going to suggest to an atheist there is a God, if first I must convince him the Bible is the ultimate authority, and no one here can give me any (a posteriori) evidence why that is the case for the Bible.

My apologetic for God's existence will be the theme of a blog from me if I'm still expending time here:)

Re biblical scholars who see it as special revelation... Do they constitute evidence? I guess so too would the millions of Christians who hold the same view if we took that as a proof. But, now we are reading back from world views, preconceived oppinions, and assumptions I guess

Must run....

Darrel Lindensmith

2 weeks ago

Elaine, you do realize the degree to which evolutionary theory on the origins Is filled with 'could haves and would haves?' I think you have closed down any consideration that God has spoken In Scripture. Yes. I know man has spoken in the Bible. I agree. But that fact does not rule out that God also has spoken. Have ruled this out? Or do you believe as Spinoza that God is not Personal at all?

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What Good is God? by Philip Yancey

Another Philip Yancey book is reason to look forward to thoughtful answers as he faces difficult questions, and this title is no exception. Yancey professes deep love for God, and as a reader of past Yancey books, I appreciate his candor about his anxious thoughts, as he faces seemingly insoluble challenges. I found that candor again in What Good Is God? published in 2010 by Faith Words.

It’s heavier reading than some of Yancey’s earlier fare, as he confronts 10 horrific contemporary disasters that in several cases are compounded by man’s depravity to man. Why does God allow evil to continue, and if He must, what difference does it make to believe in Him?

Yancey focuses on situations he finds in his travels and shares his journey as he seeks answers to the title question. In each stop on his tour, Yancey is asked to address the locals and encourage those caught up in the distress of the moment. Because the tour provides the framework for the book, he presents each situation in a separate chapter—a departure in format from past Yancey titles.

Here each chapter shares the individual background of the tragedy at hand, followed by the talk he addressed to those directly affected. At book’s end, he answers his title question—an answer I withhold here to save what amounts to an unexpectedly satisfying conclusion to a dark journey.

Of special interest to Adventists is his chapter on his invitation to speak at a professional sex-workers’ conference (where the horrific international epidemic of prostitution is addressed—a topic apparently taboo in Adventist publications). At the conference, Yancey listens as former prostitutes tell their stories and questions them in a three-hour session before his address, telling him of the worthlessness they feel.

Adventists can also relate to his descriptions of the Bible college he attended, far removed from the “real” world. He calls it a “bubble” – “a halfway house on the way to maturity.” In spite of and because of what he found there, he declares, “I met God at the school I am writing about, a life-changing experience worth twenty years in prison, let alone four years in a Bible college.” This book will bring back memories for many Adventists.

The standout chapter for me included the story of a young man who studied to be a preacher, and then took medicine, in hopes of ministering to the whole person. Raised in the South and affected deeply by the civil rights movement, he had traveled the nation searching for a model for treating people holistically. He found nothing, so started his own non-profit, which has become a large medical complex serving more than 50,000 uninsured and working poor a year. There he accepts donations and volunteer service from other health workers to provide care on a sliding scale, the average charge being $20. Why don’t more of us share this preacher/doctor’s vision?
Part of the enjoyment in reading was trying to figure out how Yancey would finally resolve the title question, *What Good Is God?* I found the journey very worthwhile and recommend the book.