

Discerning Truth, Detecting Error

Some examples of both and some strategies which help

Paul tells us in 2 Thessalonians 2: 9-11 that we must love the truth or risk losing our salvation..

2 Thess. 2:9-11 *“The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie...”*

Clearly what we believe about many doctrines or scientific theories, etc. is not normally a matter of such importance as our salvation, but this verse does suggest an interesting possibility – in any area of life, if we are not truth seekers then it is easy to be deluded, even to the point that God may help blind us from the truth because our hearts do not seek after all truth.

As believers in Christ, we should desire to seek and know the truth in every area of our lives and endeavours – this is simply an act of obedience – we are called to love the truth and not lies, as Satan is the Father of lies. Even when we sincerely believe we love the truth we may still be deluded – this presentation is an effort to explain some of the reasons why this happens and offer some help in unearthing God’s truth.

The Castle Concept:

If we love & seek the truth then we should always be open to correction. That means we should be able to face our accusers, those who disagree with us, look openly and honestly at their arguments and criticisms of our beliefs and try to dispassionately seek adequate answers to these differences of opinion and perceived truth.

Let me try to paint a picture to help clarify this – one that I use with my own beliefs:

Think of each of your beliefs/understandings about some area of life or scientific theory or biblical doctrine as a castle. Your castles may come under attack from many different angles and approaches.

How do you defend your castle?

If you simply ignore these attacks by just ridiculing your opponents or by pretending that your ‘castle’ is impenetrable (i.e. – putting your head in the sand or building a sand castle or a ‘castle in the air’ – not really supported by reality!) you are not a lover of the truth but are easily deluded.

Obviously, when you allow these attacks on your castles you may be risking a lot.

Your castle may not be able to stand up to the attack, either because you don’t have the skill/knowledge to defend it, or the time to defend it (regardless of its ultimate veracity), or even because you may find your castle cannot be defended. That is, some of your castles may still be truth, but not truth that you are capable of defending or they may even need to be dismantled.

Over time, perhaps many years, you will, with this truth seeking approach, build up some castles to be much stronger, but most probably, you may also have to give up some other castles.

Part of the challenge in defending a castle is to be clear when attacked if the attack is really an attack on the foundations of your castle or on some supplementary belief which is really like an out-house and therefore not an essential part of your castle – it may in fact, be a weakness or liability, that in giving up or removing you actually strengthen your main foundations.

Be open and try to even enjoy attacks on your castles, as in defending them you should grow in knowledge, in understanding, in wisdom and if you end up having to leave a castle which is destroyed, you may also grow in humility and tolerance!

So assuming you are prepared to have your castles attacked and consequently your beliefs challenged, how do you approach your attackers and how do you try to discern truth?

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To appreciate this challenge we need to understand a little of how human nature approaches disputes; how we can so easily be so wedded to a paradigm that we fail to see its faults; how we can be deluded by logical fallacies and appeals to emotion, etc.

Thus, we need to learn to recognize logical fallacies and to learn appropriate techniques for critical thinking. Let us start with some very common logical fallacies::

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Hellenism/Greek Philosophical thinking/Christo-Platonism:

This is possibly as big a problem as any with regard to seeking the truth of God's word. It so clouds people's vision and more particularly, it sets the lens or glasses through which all scripture is judged.

We need to appreciate that the Bible is a Hebraic book written to Hebrews and to Gentiles who are adopted into God's chosen race.

The lens of Hellenism is a most serious and distorting lens. It leads to a spiritualizing of the Holy Scriptures that in turn allows such unhelpful and misleading doctrines like Calvinism's TULIP principles to flourish.

I will not dwell on this issue in any depth here, as our next speaker Frank Selch is a much greater expositor on this issue.

Quoting Frank Selch again (from "Is There A Need For A Fresh Reformation Of The Church?"):

"Without going into detail here it seems this de-judaizing was effected to help remove the Jewishness of the Bible.

If the Jewish race could be made to disappear,

- 1. there would be no physical testimony to the Creator God.*
- 2. the 'New-Testament' could stand as a book of its own.*
- 3. the 'Old Testament' i.e the Hebrew Bible could be relegated to a museum as a historical record or Allegory.*

Without the Jewish race as a witness, Christianity is free to develop into whatever religion it desires."

The Jews argue that someday the Messiah will come and teach the world that 'God is One and His Name is One'. It seems Christianity has moved an awfully long way from this creed. Yes, the Jews didn't recognize their Messiah, but I don't think much of today's church would now recognize him either!

1) the 'genetic fallacy':

The genetic fallacy is a type of argument in which an attempt is made to prove a conclusion false by condemning its source or genesis. Such arguments are misleading because how an idea originated is irrelevant to its viability. Eg. Finding fault with the proponents educational training, or beliefs/arguments in unrelated domains.

In the end, the inherent intellectual merit of an idea or argument needs to be assessed independently of the credentials of the person who proposes the idea or makes the argument. Well-credentialed people can mess up even in their fields of expertise. Conversely, non-credentialed people can make valid points even outside their field of expertise.

a) Many may have originally demised the 'theory of relativity' because the guy who proposed it was only a Patents clerk!

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b) James White for example tries to negate the arguments of Prof. Anthony Buzzard by identifying him as formerly part of Herbert W Armstrong's church and therefore discredited because Armstrong's church was apparently discredited.

c) Daniel C. Dennett. *'Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon.'*

Reviewed by Chris Winchester: *'Dennett postulates that belief in God is the result of humans' tendency to attribute "agency" to "anything complicated that moves (p. 114)."* However, this argument does not negate God's existence. How humans came to believe in God is a different question from whether God exists. Consequently, Dennett commits the genetic logical fallacy (in which the origin of a claim is confused with its justification) by insinuating that belief in God is false based on the way humans came to believe in God.'¹

2) ridicule by association & 'emotional blackmail

a) Professor Leonard Krishtalka, Evolutionary Biology, University of Kansas: *"Scientists aren't threatened by Intelligent design, scientists are bored by intelligent design, much like scientists would be bored by notions of a flat Earth or by the stork theory of sex."*²

Here the Prof. tries to associate ID with flat earth & storks! Why, perhaps, because many evolutionists believe ID is a cover for YEC and they believe that the argument that the universe is less than 10,000 years old is as unbelievable in today's society as belief in a flat earth.

b) Emotive language and ridicule - William F. Dankenbring speaking about the anti-trinitarian Prof. Anthony Buzzard:

Thus with a subtle, slick, back-door approach to the subject, these neo-Gnostics defy and deny the divinity of Christ!

... If Christ was a "mere man," and not truly Divine, and not the Creator of all mankind, then I ask you -- of what good is the fact that He lived a perfect life? On that basis, then, His death might atone -- on the basis of a life for a life, or one for one -- for JUST ONE other human life! If he was merely a "perfect human being," and died sinlessly, his death might have atoned for ONE human life -- but not for billions of billions! In order for a sinless life to be equal to all sinful mankind, that sinless life had to be equal to ALL HUMAN LIVES -- that is, He had to be equal to the CREATOR of all human life, or that Creator Himself!

... Why is it that modern so-called "scholars" and professors of theology cannot grasp this simple, singular truth? Why is it that in their ignorance, arrogance, and conceit, that they overlook this fundamental TRUTH of Scripture?

... That is pure unadulterated poppycock and pishtwaddle! Can't we believe the simple words of Scripture? Do you really think God had the words of the Bible written in such a way that only blowhard errant intellectual "elite" could understand the real underlying meaning?³

Note: Intriguingly this writer is a great admirer of Isaac Newton and says of some of Newton's writings: Referring to Newton he writes: *"Amazing words! Here was the testimony of a TRUE believing Christian, one of the greatest scientists of all time!"*

However, it appears from the latest research & scholarship that Newton was an anti-trinitarian and therefore would be condemned by this writer if he was aware of this.

3) guilt by association (a variant of the genetic fallacy):

It could be argued that any Christian denying the Trinity is aligning himself with Jehovah Witness's, and Christadelphians, etc. As mainstream evangelical Christianity considers these groups cults, it is often totally unprepared to even consider their arguments.

Anyone thus being associated with them in this way can expect a similar degree of ex-communication or avoidance. I observed this 20 years ago when I found the views of the physicist Alan Hayward most believable – because he was a Christadelphian, everyone tried to tell me his views should be ignored!

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This technique is used against ID in the sense that because most of the proponents of ID are Christians, it is seen as a Christian belief and therefore religious and unscientific because it introduces moral considerations.

Yet, Darwinism does exactly the same thing!

Some examples:

Evolutionists such as Barbara Forest, decry the religious and moral implications drawn from ID because they point to God. But what about those drawn by evolutionists from evolutionary theory?

Consider the following:

ON RACISM AND GENOCIDE:

“At some future period, not very distant as measured by centuries, the civilised races of man will almost certainly exterminate, and replace, the savage races throughout the world.... The break between man and his nearest allies will then be wider, for it will intervene between man in a more civilised state, as we may hope, even than the Caucasian, and some ape as low as a baboon, instead of as now between the negro or Australian and the gorilla.” [Just so there is no doubt, the author in particular is claiming that whites will exterminate blacks.] —Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 1871, ch. 6.

ON BESTIALITY:

Evolution teaches that *“we are animals”* so that *“sex across the species barrier ceases to be an offence to our status and dignity as human beings.”* [Just so there is no doubt, “sex across the species barrier” is a euphemism for bestiality.] —Peter Singer, *“Heavy Petting,”* 2001

ON RAPE:

Rape is *“a natural, biological phenomenon that is a product of the human evolutionary heritage,”* akin to *“the leopard’s spots and the giraffe’s elongated neck.”*—Randy Thornhill and Craig Palmer, *“Why Men Rape,”* 2000

ON THE BASIS FOR MORALITY:

“As evolutionists, we see that no [ethical] justification of the traditional kind is possible. Morality, or more strictly our belief in morality, is merely an adaptation put in place to further our reproductive ends. Hence the basis of ethics does not lie in God’s will.... In an important sense, ethics as we understand it is an illusion fobbed off on us by our genes to get us to cooperate. It is without external grounding.”—E. O. Wilson and Michael Ruse, *“The Evolution of Ethics,”* 1991

4) Invalid analogies:

Analogies are really attempts to help explain an idea of concept by comparing it with something that we may be more familiar with. In a sense parables are forms of analogy. Also scientific models are in a sense detailed analogies. A scientific model is an attempt to represent something we don’t fully understand in a way which helps us understand it and also gives us a means to test our understanding.

The model of the universe as being in the skin of a balloon being blow up without any interior existing in the balloon is one such model put forward over 30 years ago.

Scientific models by there nature of only being approximations to the truth, consequently always have some errors in them. Similarly, we need to be aware that even very good analogies are not perfect – always be aware that analogies, by there very nature may introduce error if pushed too far.

Let us look at a few examples of invalid analogies:

a) Miller argues that *“evolutionary theory enjoys the same status as other well-tested explanations in science (such as Einstein’s theory of general relativity), and there is no rational basis for suggesting that it, and it alone, should be mentioned in the context of doubt and scepticism”*

This is wishful thinking. Evolutionary biology, is a historical science — it’s business is constructing historical narratives. The suggestion that evolutionary theory enjoys the same status as the theories of physics, for instance, is therefore absurd. Some biologists claim that evolutionary theory is as well established as Einstein’s theory of general relativity.

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But as far as I am aware no physicist, to bolster Einstein's theory of general relativity, has claimed that it is as well established as evolutionary theory! Evolutionary theory does not enjoy the same status as the rigorous sciences. For this reason alone, it needs critical scrutiny.

b) The 3 fingers of God – an analogy by Dr Hugh Ross (www.reasons.org)

William L Craig in a critique entitled '**HUGH ROSS' EXTRA-DIMENSIONAL DEITY:**

*Ross asserts that "The charge that 'Trinitarians' accept a mathematical absurdity would seem appropriate ... if the biblical God were confined to the same dimensional realm as humans" (p. 82). There is not even the appearance of contradiction in affirming that "There is one only and true God, but in the unity of the Godhead there are three eternal and coequal Persons. ... the term 'person' is used, as the ancient Fathers employed.... It certainly does not make the Trinity more intelligible."*⁴

c) An acquaintance, Chris Godde, from a personal email discussion

"His (David Burge's) false premise⁵ is that agency does not imply equality. The truth is that agency has no bearing on equality either way. David Burge waves the magic wand of 'Agency' over any instance in Scripture where Jesus is declared to have the same majestic titles or the same divine power as YHWH. Theologically, David Burge is closer to the Jehovah's Witnesses than to orthodox Christians. If it is alright to assume titles when acting as an agent, then I can justifiably go around declaring myself as the Resurrection and the Life, since I act on behalf of the One who is such. I am the Lord of Heaven and Earth. I am the light of the world. I am the good Shepherd. I am the Rock. As an ambassador for Christ, what title can I not assume in my actions and proclamations on behalf of Christ? "

How do we address this false analogy and conclusion that we can go around claiming to be the Lord of Heaven & Earth?

My reply in part:

You suggest this is ridiculous and therefore, by implication, the whole argument of agency is ridiculous. Yes, Christ is unique but we as his agents are to be the light to the world; a rock for the drowning to cling on to; the world is to see God and Jesus through us and most especially through our example in our love for each other and for the lost. You are to act on behalf of the Lord of Heaven and Earth but not proclaim yourself as him. James and John's mother did not proclaim herself as her sons; the Jewish friends of the centurion did not proclaim themselves as the centurion and most significantly, Jesus NEVER proclaimed himself as God the Father. So your argument by extrapolation does not hold.

d) A question: Jesus tempted by the devil vs his miracles:

Pastor Tim Hanna of Gateway Baptist Church a few weeks ago in his sermon 'Changing Our Default' said that when Jesus was in the desert, the creator of the universe was tempted by the Devil. Tim implied here that Jesus was God. When I asked him if he had sensed any unease when he argued that the devil had tried to tempt God he intimated in the negative. I had said in an email regarding this that I thought it 'seemed unlikely' that the Devil knew Jesus was God. Tim answered as a comparison that it would 'seem unlikely' that a man would work on water; raise the dead; etc.

What is wrong with this comparison?

Simply, that as other human beings have walked on water; raised the dead and healed the sick it is not a valid comparison to argue that because Jesus did these 'unlikely' things or miracles, he must be God. If so, then so is Moses, the Apostles Peter & Paul, etc.

5) Historical fiction or fact:

Speaking of historical narratives, it can be extremely difficult to ascertain truth. For example, it is the nature of mankind that those who win the battles in history tend to write the records of history to suit their viewpoint. That is, they may suppress or even destroy the writings and hence beliefs of those who opposed them, regardless of the merits of those beliefs. Because these historical figures were successful, does that make their views and beliefs correct?

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As Christians we do not believe that success in this life or age is the criteria by which a man's life and hence his belief systems is judged, but that judgement will only occur when the new age is ushered in by the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

An example from history is found at Nag Hammadi – around 367 AD, Athanasius, the bishop of Egypt demanded that all writings that did not conform to his list of accepted writings be destroyed. Someone ignored him though and hid over 50 of these books which were found in 1945. These books ranged in content and theology, from Gnosticism to typical Hebraic inspired renderings.

Regardless of the truth, or lack of it, contained in these books, history was clearly distorted by this effort of Athanasius.

Also, when we look at historical accounts which are in conflict, how do we differentiate between them and try to discern the true historical record?

In trying to discover historical truth I would suggest there are at least 3 approaches we can take:

1. we can look for sources who at least appear not to be pushing a particular interpretation, (hopefully found in academic reference sets from scholars whose passion is revealing history rather than promoting doctrines)
2. we can look for statements that both sides affirm, i.e commonality, and try to work from this position to find the truth which is consistent with this commonality
3. and we can look for illogical or contradictory comments and assume that the conclusions (supposed historical facts) from these are unlikely.

a) Calvin vs Servetus

The debate regarding Calvin and the burning at the stake of Servetus is an example. Using approach 1, look at the following Encyclopedia comment:

The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 6th ed:

***Servetus, Michael** , 1511–53, Spanish theologian and physician... He became well-known for his ability in dissection and had unusual success as a physician; he discovered that some of the blood circulates through the lungs. From 1541 to 1553 he lived in the palace of the archbishop of Vienne as his confidential physician.*

This encyclopedia comment, along with the following excerpts from a pro-Servetus site suggest it is fair to consider him to have had a great intellect and to stand for his principles.

From http://www.socinian.org/michael_servetus.html

"... At the same ceremony, professor of philosophy Otto Karmin said: "Amidst the most inhuman sufferings, he affirmed the principles of free thought which has triumphed since and the principle of free belief which became the Magna Carta of the Unitarian Protestants and of the liberal churches. These churches live by the doctrines for which Servetus sacrificed his life." ... José Barón Fernández, who emphasized the contribution of Servetus to medicine, which alone would guarantee him immortality, called him one of the brightest geniuses through whom Spain contributed to universal culture: "The profound knowledge of any of the disciplines on which he discoursed manifests the depth of his erudition combined with the rigor and honesty of the inquiry."

Now look at a Calvinistic site:

<http://www.challies.com/archives/001318.php>

Michael Servetus was a Spanish theologian and physician who lived from 1511-1553. In his early years he came into contact with many leading Reformers and while he broke with the Roman Catholic Church and became at least nominally Protestant, he adopted a particularly heretical belief, denying that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. He also denied paedobaptism, a belief which further alienated him from Protestant and Catholic alike. . .

*Quoting Calvin: "Servetus wrote to me a short time ago, and sent a huge volume of his dreamings and pompous triflings with his letter. I was to find among them wonderful things, and such as I had never before seen; and if I wished, he would himself come. But I am by no means inclined to be responsible for him; **and if he come, I will never allow him, supposing my influence worth anything, to depart alive.**"*

When Servetus, at last, arrived in the city, Calvin was left with the unenviable position of having to decide whether to allow the heretic to continue his teaching in Geneva, which would inevitably lead people to believe

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that the Reformed church was lenient towards heresy (softer even than the Roman Catholic Church that had already condemned this man to death), or to attempt to take action ...

In this pro-Calvin reference the statement is made that Servetus did not believe Jesus was the Son of God! (They may here suffer from the same semantic blindspot as Dan Brown, the author of the Da Vinci Code, and see the term 'God, the Son' whenever they read the term 'Son of God'. It is a staggering statement to suggest that any theologian reading the Bible could come to this conclusion, as there are many scriptures that declare explicitly and directly that Jesus said he was the Son of God, as did the apostles, etc. This would certainly appear to be an illogical, erroneous conclusion.

What the Socinian (pro-Servetus) site states on this issue is much more illuminating and believable:

During the process at Geneva in the debate with Calvin he was ready to modify his views provided that his opponent's arguments were extracted from the biblical text. After he was condemned to death, Servetus with humility asked Calvin, who was directly responsible for his unjust martyrdom, for forgiveness. To be saved from the stake he only had to state "Jesus Christ the eternal Son of God." Instead, his last words were: "Jesus Christ, Son of the eternal God." He was convinced of the correctness of his reading of the scripture, which he revered, and died defending not his life but his doctrines. Also from

http://www.socinian.org/michael_servetus.html

There is absolutely no question that the Bible tells us that God is eternal; there is also no doubt that Jesus is the 'Son of God'. Where there is doubt is whether Jesus was pre-existent before His conception. Thus, Calvin was clearly trying to coerce Servetus to agree with his belief in Jesus as 'God, the Son' or some other pre-existence dogma.

Note also that the pro-Calvin site implicitly labels child (paedo)-baptism as a biblical doctrine. Most theologians today, at least in Protestant circles would not agree with child baptism, although I have observed that the Lutheran Church in Australia still does.) Also note, that the pro-Calvin site agrees that Calvin desired Servetus's death! (An example of commonality).

In summary, we can see that the pro-Calvin site clearly contains some significant historical error as well as totally denying the error of Calvin in desiring Servetus' death, regardless of his apparent heresy!

This can not be excused away by arguing it was the culture of the day – these were theologians who studied the Holy Scriptures! They have no excuse for believing it is acceptable to murder someone!

Regardless on the merit or otherwise of Calvinism and the TULIP doctrine, Calvin was unquestionably, and by his own words, to some significant degree culpable in the murder of a man who sought to seek the whole truth of God.

6) Appeals to Spiritual Revelation

Again from Chris Godde, in a personal email discussion *"The REAL task, and only accomplished through Spirit-revelation, is to apprehend the Divinity of Christ. This CANNOT be fathomed by human intellect, and CANNOT be revealed by flesh-and-blood. This is a GIFT from the Father.*

It IS found in the Scriptures, but it is NOT apprehended through human effort.

...because it takes humility, it takes faith, and it takes illumination of the heart by the Spirit of GOD."

How do you address this argument – if correct, then those of us who have with all our heart sought to seek the truth that the scriptures reveal are hopelessly lost because the Father has not given us this 'gift'.

Perhaps this is a form of 'ridicule by association' because we are being bracketed with unbelievers as in 'the preaching of the cross to those who are perishing is foolishness...'

Taking Chris' last sentence above as correct, we look inward; we believe we are humble; we believe we have faith so it must be that we have not been illuminated by the Holy Spirit. We must therefore be condemned! And yet, when we look at all passages regarding salvation and condemnation we do not read that we need a spirit led revelation of the divinity of Christ. Instead we see this refuted by Jesus himself in congratulating Peter (in Mark 16:16) on his declaration that Jesus was the Son of Man and Messiah.

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Part of my answer to the quote above was:

“What you are implying here though Chris is ... you are implying that you and those brethren who share your view of the Trinity are the only ones who possess humility, faith and the in-dwelling spirit of God. Obviously, as mistaken as I may be, I would argue for a similar measure of all three to you!”

While Chris tells me that it is only by spiritual revelation we can discern the divinity of Christ; in the many email debates we have had he continually attempts to use scripture in the defence of his position.

7) The ‘scientific method’:

It is a major problem trying to read the scriptures without our preconceived beliefs and paradigms blinding us to the plain sense.

We tend to start with our theological position or perspective and then look see if biblical exegesis is supportive of this position. This is analogous to the scientific method of presenting a hypothesis and then seeking empirical evidence to support this hypothesis. The problem with this approach is that our adherence to our ‘hypothesis’ can become so strong and emotional that we seek its confirmation in scripture so earnestly as to go beyond the plain and reasonable sense.

If we try to know God from His Holy Scriptures without any preconceived notions of Him, then I would suggest there are many things we can be sure of. He tells us very clearly that He created the Universe; He tells us that He is the God of Abraham, Isaac & Jacob, He tells us that He is the same, yesterday, today and forever, and so on.

When we seek to know the validity of such doctrinal positions as the pre-trib rapture, I would contend that we may be seeking more than to simply ‘know God’. If this is the case then perhaps the ‘scientific method’ alluded to has at least some merit in dealing with these issues.

Therefore, if we can find and agree to a very clear and well-defined theological position **and if** the most obvious and plain exegetical position agrees with this theological position **then** it is probably correct.

The converse though is that, **if** the exegesis is very tortured and engenders serious objections, **then** our original theological position may need a re-think and should not be too tightly adhered to.

As an example, (not to start a new debate!) but for illustration purposes only, let us briefly consider the case of ‘natural evil’ and God’s plan.

Many theologians would argue that Adam’s sin ‘caused’ not only human sin to enter the world but also natural catastrophes and animal death (i.e. ‘natural evil’). While we could argue strongly about this theological position let us for the sake of argument, agree with its premise.

This is essentially the starting point for many Young Earth Creationists (YEC), who then argue, as an apparently valid consequence, that all animal death occurred only after the sin of Adam. i.e. that there was no animal death before the creation and sin of Adam.

In seeking then to support this position biblically YEC’s turn to three main verses in the Bible, Romans 5:12; Romans 6:23 and 1 Corinthians 15:20-23.

All three of these passages very clearly set the context as human death only.

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned—

- clearly talking of mankind not plants and animals.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- again clearly speaking to mankind as only mankind can inherit eternal life through the Messiah.

1 Cor 15:20-23 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

- also, only speaking of mankind not animals.

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While there may be other passages that address this issue, it has been my experience, that these are the main three generally used by YEC's to support this case (Romans 5:12 in particular).

So here we have a theological position that may well seem most reasonable and yet the evidence exegetically is not supportive. This doesn't make the theological position wrong, but it should certainly encourage a more open and honest appraisal of the biblical evidence for it.

DISCERNING TRUTH:

Some important issues for effective critical analysis of doctrinal positions and for effective Biblical Exegesis:

1) Good scholarship is essential

a) **The Da Vinci Code:** Most Christians responses, in trying to refute the claims of this work of fiction claim that Isaac Newton was Arian. While this is a common understanding, recent research particularly has shown this to be unlikely or at least a simplification. It is also possible that these writers did not clearly understand what the term 'Arian' means.^{7,8,12}

b) An example from Biblical Interpretation: Matt 5:32.

Bernie Koerselman (<http://www.bereanpublishers.com/>) has written extensively on marriage and divorce and has generally used the NASB translation of the Greek 'porneia' which is 'marital unfaithfulness' (meaning adultery). Many other translations write 'sexual immorality'. However, this work in Greek is distinct from the Greek word *moichao* which does mean adultery. [Strong's Concordance here suggests that *porneia*, which means fornication, harlotry or whoredom, can mean adultery – this is not strictly correct.]

If Christ wanted to be very clear that He was indicating adultery, it would seem he would have used 'moichao' not 'porneia'. It is interesting to note that the story of Mary & Joseph is the ONLY account of this situation in the NT.

Despite, Bernie's best efforts and my earnest Berean comparison of his writings against scripture neither of us spotted this error which I have only recently had pointed out to me. It may be argued here that our scholarship was lacking to some degree.

c) Academics & Peer-review:

While the academic implementation of 'peer-review' may have had much merit; it has often (in cases such as ID) been used to prevent opponents of the currently held consensus to have their voices heard. The argument then that a particular person's paper has no merit because it has not been accepted for publication in a reputable academic journal or magazine is not necessarily just.

In the sphere of science, Thomas Kuhn, in his *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, argued strongly us that the old guard is not going to change its mind. By being wedded to a failing paradigm, they suffer from the misconceptions, blind-spots, and prejudices that invariably accrue to a dying system of thought. This same human emotional failing is most apparent with many in the church today, especially those who very livelihoods depend on the status quo, the existing beliefs of who and what they are.

2) Biblical Inerrancy & Bible Translation problems⁹:

The question asked by some, when the issue of errors in Bible translations is raised, is how then can we have assurance when we read the Bible, that we are reading the true revelation of God? Do we all need to be scholars & experts in Hebrew and Greek?

Thousands of years of study in such areas as medicine and science have led to great agreement about the basic laws of physics and chemistry (with some notable exceptions such as the theory of evolution), and the anatomy and mechanics of the human body, etc.

However, the same thousands of years of study of religion and God have not led to any real consensus. Possibly, the opposite is true – with the relatively recent introduction of naturalistic evolution and the much greater access to different research and ideas, there is probability much greater divergence of opinion than ever before. This, at a time in history when some of us would argue that there is less excuse,

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theologically, prophetically, historically, & scientifically# for not believing in the God of the Bible than ever before.

Jesus of course, warned that there would be great delusion at the end of the age and even strongly hinted at this in saying rhetorically “... when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8).

The Bible presents itself as the written revelation of God. It asserts that it is a special revelation of God – it claims to be a trustworthy source of knowledge of religious truth, that is knowledge of the ultimate destiny of the world and man, as well as the meaning of life. These are questions that science cannot hope to fully answer.

There are many books that detail the historical, archaeological and even scientific support for this assertion. This short treatise will assume the reader is somewhat familiar with these details.

The original manuscripts (autographs) of the 66 books of the Bible, must by necessity be without error, if they are to be useable and reliable divine revelations.

This inerrancy (freedom from error) is necessary though, only in the original manuscripts of the biblical books. They could not have been truly inspired by the God of truth if they contained anything erroneous or false.

But what about the text of the Bible as we now possess it?

There have clearly been copyists errors as we have found discrepancies among handwritten copies. For example, 1 Samuel 13:1 “Saul was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel forty-two years.” (NIV) The NIV adds the comment that the Hebrew does not have thirty. The Amplified Bible reads “SAUL WAS [forty] years old when he began to reign; and when he had reigned two years over Israel,” and has the footnote: “The complete numbers in this verse are missing in the Hebrew. The word “forty” is supplied by the best available estimate.”

Apparently the correct number ‘fell out’ so early in the transmission of this particular text that it was already lost before the 3rd century BC.

There are a number of scholarly works that you can read which clearly establish that numerous errors have crept into our translations of the Bible.

If we are studying a religious document then, which may contain truth and error, how are we then to proceed?

Clearly we can use the faculty of human reason to weigh the evidence by applying rules of logic such as the rule of self-contradiction.

We can also look for historical support, especially through archaeological discoveries and through the fulfilment of biblical prophecies. Unlike other religious documents which have few prophecies, the Bible is around 30% prophecy!

There is a limit though, to this rational and logical approach.

Man cannot pass judgement on the truth or falsity of divine revelation.

For such judgements to be made, they must come from a judge who possesses knowledge of the truth superior to that of the revelation itself that is being judged. In other words, man would need to know more about God; than the Bible itself declares about God, if he is to pass judgement on the truth of divine revelation in the Bible.

So how can these translations which are not inerrant, serve as reliable mediums for disclosing God’s will? Are we not back where we started with the same problem as we have with books such as the Koran or Vedas which contain truth and error?

No, not at all. There is a great difference between a document that was wrong at the start and a document which was right but which has been miscopied or mistranslated, despite the reverent efforts of the copyists and translators.

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You can read a letter from a friend or relative and find in it common slips of the pen such as an 'of' instead of 'or'; 'and' instead of 'an'; 'led instead of 'lead' and yet, by a simple process of correction in the light of context, you may easily arrive at the true sense intended by your friend or relative.

If the reader knows the author's fundamental nature/personality and purpose in writing, then this correction of minor errors is made even easier. In the case of God and the Bible, we can know the Father's fundamental nature and purpose.

Whether these errors are copyist errors; translation errors, or even deliberate modifications, such as 1 John 5:7, made to support doctrinal positions, would the God of love, espoused so strongly throughout the pages of the Holy Scriptures, allow them to pervert the Bible to the point where it no longer contains and reveals the most important aspects of God's revelation to mankind?

We surely would argue no. I would contend that all modern versions of the Bible (not necessarily paraphrases such as The Message), do contain the central message of God. That is, they all clearly reveal the nature of God; the Good News of the Kingdom of God, the Messiah Jesus and the saving grace of his crucifixion.

There is, of course, a great deal more to be said on the inerrancy of the Bible. If you would like to learn more and at the same time be uplifted and even more in awe of God's amazing revelation through the Holy Scriptures then I suggest reading 'A Survey of Old Testament Introduction' by the late Prof. Gleason Archer and 'In Search of Certainty' by Josh McDowell & Thomas Williams.

Also a true and proper belief in the inerrancy of Scripture involves neither a literal nor a figurative rule of interpretation. What it does require is a belief in whatever the biblical author (human and divine) actually meant by the words he used.

3) Context:

a) Hebrews 1:8-12 is one of the best examples of the miss-application of scripture by the failure to heed the context. The context for this passage is set at least 3 times.

In Hebrews 1:1-2 *In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he **appointed** heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.*; (Note: 'universe' is a poor translation-should be age or eons, as in this present age and the Coming Age of the Messiah – see Dueble p234)

In Hebrews 1:6 *And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says,* And in Hebrews 2:5 *It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking.*

Hebrews 1:1-2 helps set the scene in stating the God used the prophets in the OT days but He speaks now through Jesus. Hebs 1:6 and Hebs 2:5 so clearly bracket everything between them as a reference to the future Kingdom of God.

b) Matt 19:10 (also in Mark 10:6). *"Have you not read that the Creator from the beginning 'made them male and female'?"*

There is no parallel to this passage in Luke or John. So what does Jesus mean in Matthew 19:4 and Mark 10:6?

By comparing Mark with Matthew, the first thing to note is "from the beginning of creation" is equivalent to the simple phrase "from the beginning." What "beginning" is Jesus speaking of? The immediate context indicates he was speaking of the beginning of human history, when marriage was first instituted at the creation, not necessarily of the beginning of the creation process. This interpretation is confirmed by a study of the phrase in Mark.

The phrase "the beginning of creation" can be interpreted in several ways. In order to select the proper interpretation, one must examine the context and then compare the result with the general teaching of Scripture.

In Matt 19:4, the word "beginning" could be understood in a number of ways: for example, the beginning of humanity with Adam, the beginning of the Hebrew people with Abraham, or the beginning of Israel as

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a nation with Moses. Jesus clarifies the word "beginning" by identifying it as the creation of humanity, the time of the very first humans, Adam and Eve.

In Matt 19:4 therefore Jesus is saying, "In the beginning, that is, at the creation, God made them male and female." By using the words "beginning" and "creation," Jesus is contrasting the original creation ordinance of marriage from the much later legislation of Moses, with its incorporation of divorce laws. He is emphasizing the ancient origin of marriage and its vow to lifelong faithfulness, as opposed to the relatively recent legislation of Moses permitting divorce.

To claim Jesus is referring to the first part of the creation process itself introduces unnecessary confusion. Jesus and his Jewish audience knew Adam and Eve appeared at the end of the creation process. The "beginning" he is speaking of is not the beginning of the history of the universe, the stars and galaxies; it is the beginning of human history with Adam and Eve. Therefore, this passage is not talking about the beginning of the universe and therefore provides no evidence for a recent creation.

In fact, Mark 13:19 uses the same phraseology in "For in those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be."

(Mark 10:6 But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. Both KJV)

This argument (for YEC) would therefore also infer that affliction was present when Adam and Eve were first created.

This simplistic or absolute literalism view of scripture is also often used inconsistently – scripture is often taken at 'face value' only when it suits someone's argument.

An absolute literalism would, for example, commit us to the proposition that in Matthew 19:24 (and parallel passages) Christ actually meant to teach that a camel could go through the eye of a needle. But it is abundantly clear that Christ was simply using the familiar rhetorical figure of hyperbole in order to emphasize how difficult it is spiritually for a rich man (because of his pride in his material wealth) to come to repentance and saving faith in God.

Or again, when Jesus said to the multitude that challenged Him to work some miracle, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19), they were in error when they interpreted His remarks literally.

John 2:21 goes on to explain that Jesus did not mean this prediction literally but spiritually: "But He was speaking about the temple of His body. Therefore when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this, and they believed the Scripture."

In this case, then, literal interpretation was wrong because that was not what Jesus meant by the language He used; He was actually referring to the far greater miracle of His bodily resurrection.

Matthew 24 & the rapture: Pastor Aeron Morgan argues that Jesus was answering the disciples in his discussion here of the signs of the last days; but that he was referring to the Jews when he mentioned fleeing to the mountains on the Sabbath, etc.

Look at the context – Jesus answers a question from the disciples who clearly represent Christians and he speaks to them directly. He does not use the 'third person'.

4) The limits of logic?

My friend John Saunders, from a personal email discussion:

"The question raised is could Christ if He was man alone have sinned since He was tempted in all ways like us. Considering Acts 2:23 it would seem impossible for Christ to sin because God by His determinate counsel had decided Christ would be crucified and thus propitiate for our sins...

How could God be sure and hang the whole of His creation and redemption of it on the shaky hopes that a man (no matter how inspired, you argue he is just a man with only the nature of man and not God) would chose to follow Him? Unless of course you make this man out to be a robot without "free will", assuming you hold to the free will of all men.

As can be seen from James, God cannot be tempted because He is Holy, Holy, Holy, so there is no risk of Christ failing in His mission because only God cannot be tempted.

John's preconception here of God and his limited view of God give him a logical paradox. Yet scripture is very clear.

Heb 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.

John's view is Calvinistic. Where does Calvinism, etc lead?

Consider my Reply to John re Prof John Murray on **Irresistible Grace**¹⁰:

(John Murray was professor of systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)

In the gospel we have the supreme revelation of the grace of God, and Christ is the embodiment of that grace. The glory of God is nowhere more effulgent than in the face of Jesus Christ. Hence unbelief is resistance of grace at the zenith of its disclosure and overture....

*When we speak of irresistible grace, therefore, it is not to assert that all grace is irresistible, nor is it to deny the numberless respects in which grace is resisted and resisted to the culmination of resistance in everlasting doom. In fact the truth of and necessity for irresistible grace may be most cogently demonstrated in the premise of resistible grace. **The enmity of the human heart is most virulent at the point of the supreme revelation of God's glory.***

Where is there any Biblical support for this notion that is espoused above. To suggest that accepting the Gospel is the hardest thing for mankind to freely choose is to deny the reality of Christ's life. His first public statement was 'Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near'. If it were so impossible would the greatest teacher who ever lived start with this simple statement and call to turn to God. Surely, he would have developed his case over time before coming to such an impossible request?

Accepting Christ is not the difficult part - it is living for Christ that challenges people because this is where their lives and daily choices are called to account. This is where their free will and the attractiveness of sin continues to call them to turn from the Christ. From Adam & Eve's example to today this lesson is clear - Adam & Eve knew God- they did not need to accept Him or His Messiah, yet their free will and the attractiveness of rebellion got the better of even them.

In much of present-day evangelism it is assumed that the one thing man can do in the exercise of his own liberty is to believe in Christ for salvation. ... Paul tells us that not only is the mind of the flesh not subject to the law of God but also that it cannot be (Rom. 8:7).

Wrong - so very wrong - this was my understanding as a non-believer - this is the flawed logic of an unbeliever - 'the preaching of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who are saved it is the Word of God'. Before accepting Christ my mind could only see the seemingly total impossibility, if this statement be true, to go from a state of condemnation to one of salvation. As a non-believer, I would have agreed with this Calvinistic concept of Murray's.

Read on from Romans 8 and you will see most especially in Paul & John the need to take action to accept Christ. Eg. Rom 10:9 'If you confess with your mouth ...'

*Coming to Christ is the movement of commitment to Christ, coming that engages the whole-souled activity of the person coming. It is not that he may come, not that he has the opportunity to come, not that he will in all probability come, **and not simply that he is empowered to come, but that he will come. There is absolute certainty.** There is a divine necessity; the order of heaven insures the sequence.*

It may be that all who are drawn to Christ, accept him, but this does not imply that they can't at some future time reject him. The Bible is absolutely full of exhortations and prayers to be obedient to Christ and 'Christ's law', that we may remain in Him and not lose our salvation. To deny this is to deny most of John's writing.

There is by Jesus' verdict the invariable conjunction of these two diverse kinds of action—"all that the Father giveth me will come to me." There is invincible efficacy in the Father's action and this means grace irresistible.

No. Whether we can or can't resist the call to Christ (the main point of contention here) we can turn our backs on it after we have been saved. God never removes our free will; to do so would be to remove our humanity. So to suggest that God does

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remove our free-will at the point of accepting or rejecting Christ is to suggest a very unlikely contradiction.

Using Murray's logic and belief in the Trinity it would seem the conclusion that he must arrive at from John 12:32 is that God draws all people and therefore ALL are saved! And yet we know from so many statements, especially by Jesus that the Way is narrow and few will find it and that when he returns he will find few with faith.

*In concluding, may we return to John 6:37, 44, 65. When a sinner comes to Christ in the commitment of faith, when the rebellious will is renewed and tears of penitence begin to flow, **it is because a mysterious transaction has been taking place between the persons of the Godhead.** The Father has been making a presentation, a donation to his own Son. **So perish the thought that coming to Christ finds its explanation in the autonomous determinations of the human will.** It finds its cause in the sovereign will of God the Father. He has placed upon this person the constraint by which he has been captivated by the glory of the Redeemer and invests in him all his interests. Christ is made wisdom from God, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Here is grace surpassing; and it is grace insurmountable.*

Murray argues forcefully but fails to apply the proper tests for interpreting the literalness of scripture. We must look at how a doctrinal position sits with the whole of the Bible and we need to try to read the text from the mindset of the authors. In interpreting John as Murray does he has gone way beyond John's clear purposes for writing (which John clearly details - in Jn 20:31 for example) and developed a doctrine that defies any Hebraic reality.

Conclusion:

To sum up the ideas I have put forward today; I first introduced you to my Castle Concept as a ways to view the doctrines you hold so as to allow them to be better defined or if necessary destroyed in order to know God's truth more fully.

In terms of detecting error I mentioned just a few of the tricks to be aware of such as:

- The genetic fallacy
- Ridicule by association
- Guilt by association
- Invalid analogies
- Historical fiction
- And the scientific method.

In terms of discerning truth we need to seek always to better grasp the Hebraic mindset of all scripture. I also suggested some important approaches such as:

- Good scholarship
- An understanding of Bible inerrancy & Bible translation issues
- The crucial importance of context
- And the limits of logic. (time permitting I will introduce Dembski's theodicy here¹¹).

Even if we know all and utilise all the techniques for Discerning Truth and Detecting Error we can not know all truth as that would make us God. But if we do seek to know God with all our heart; all our mind and all our power, we will be well rewarded!

To quote Jeremiah: "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the LORD, ... (Jeremiah 29:13-14)

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2. Dateline Archives - February 08, 2006 Monkey Business
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6. 'A Brief Look at the Faith of Sir Isaac Newton' by P F Herring July 2006 (unpublished)
7. 'Isaac Newton, heretic : the strategies of a Nicodemite' by STEPHEN D. SNOBELEN
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8. 'A Survey of Old Testament Introduction' by the late Prof. Gleason Archer
9. Irresistible Grace by Prof. John Murray – an article in *Soli Deo Gloria: Essays in Reformed Theology*, ed. R.C. Sproul, published by Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1976.
http://www.the-highway.com/Irresistible_Murray.html (Accessed 30/09/05)
10. 'Christian Theodicy in Light of Genesis and Modern Science' William A. Dembski April 2006
http://www.designinference.com/documents/2006.05.christian_theodicy.pdf (Date Accessed 09/08/06)
11. 'ISAAC NEWTON AND SOCINIANISM: associations with a greater heresy' Stephen David Snobelen June 2003 <http://www.isaac-newton.org/socinian.doc> (Accessed 18/08/06)

"Newton was an intellectual who passionately rejected the doctrine of the Trinity. The Socinians were not only the largest, but also the most intellectually-sophisticated and vibrant antitrinitarian movement of his time. There is then, prima facie, sufficient reason to investigate whether Newton either appropriated Socinian theology or was attracted to it. ... Without question, Newton was publically aligning himself with known Socinian and Unitarian positions. ...

Newton's writings reveal no slavish dependence on any one theological tradition and this includes the Polish Brethren, as his differences from them attest. Newton was above all an eclectic theologian who added to his own innovation ideas from several theological streams. ... he was certainly a Socinian in several of the senses common in his own day. ... Isaac Newton is possibly the greatest figure in the history of science and certainly the leading intellectual of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. He is unquestionably the most significant figure to be associated with Socinianism."