

Foreword by David Limbaugh

I Don't Have Enough
FAITH
to Be an
ATHEIST

Norman L. Geisler
Frank Turek

CROSSWAY BOOKS

A DIVISION OF
GOOD NEWS PUBLISHERS
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

Contents

Foreword by <i>David Limbaugh</i>	7
Preface: How Much Faith Do You Need to Believe This Book?	13
Acknowledgments	15
Introduction: Finding the Box Top to the Puzzle of Life	17
1 Can We Handle the Truth?	35
2 Why Should Anyone Believe Anything At All?	51
3 In the Beginning There Was a Great SURGE	73
4 Divine Design	95
5 The First Life: Natural Law or Divine Awe?	113
6 New Life Forms: From the Goo to You via the Zoo?	137
7 Mother Teresa vs. Hitler	169
8 Miracles: Signs of God or Gullibility?	197
9 Do We Have Early Testimony About Jesus?	221
10 Do We Have Eyewitness Testimony About Jesus?	251
11 The Top Ten Reasons We Know the New Testament Writers Told the Truth	275
12 Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead?	299
13 Who Is Jesus: God? Or Just a Great Moral Teacher?	327
14 What Did Jesus Teach About the Bible?	355
15 Conclusion: The Judge, the Servant King, and the Box Top	377
Appendix 1: If God, Why Evil?	389
Appendix 2: Isn't That Just Your Interpretation?	402
Appendix 3: Why the Jesus Seminar Doesn't Speak for Jesus	409
Notes	412
General Index	436
Scripture Index	442

Foreword

AS ONE WHO CAME TO Christ after years of skepticism, I have a particular affection for Christian apologetics. It is one of my passions. There is an abundance of evidence for the reliability of Scripture, for the authority of the Bible as the inspired Word of God, and that the Bible accurately portrays the historical events it covers, including the earthly life of Jesus Christ. Indeed, powerful and convincing proof exists that Christianity is the one true religion, that the triune God who reveals himself in its pages is the one and only God of the universe, and that Christ died for our sins so that we may live.

Proof, of course, is no substitute for faith, which is essential to our salvation and for our communion with God. Nor is the study of apologetics disrespectful to our faith. Rather, it augments it, informs it, bolsters it, and reinvigorates it. Were it otherwise, the Bible would not say, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Pet. 3:15).

I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist is the best single book I've seen to prepare believers to give the reasons for their faith, and for skeptics who are open to the truth. This book will serve as an indispensable evangelism tool, especially when dealing with nonbelievers with “intellectual” obstacles to the faith. As we know, the intellectual obstacles are usually just an excuse for nonbelievers, but when you remove the substance of their excuse they are left naked to confront their real obstacles, their real demons.

But I believe there's another important reason for the scriptural mandate to “be prepared to give an answer.” It's not just to help us effectively communicate the gospel. Being prepared will also arm us with the tools to resist certain nagging doubts that we encounter in moments of weakness. It will—because it marshals the evidence for Christianity—fortify our faith.

Who can doubt that we need to be better equipped with the evi-

dence, whether to help us better evangelize or to strengthen our own faith? As if the temptations of the flesh weren't enough for us to contend with, we are also confronted daily with negative external influences. In modern times these influences have grown increasingly sinister and insidious, as the Bible warned they would.

In times past nonbelievers had to decide whether Christianity was the one true religion, whether any of them were true, or whether God existed at all. But they generally were not saddled with the burden of determining whether there was such a thing as truth.

Our postmodern culture has done a number on the idea of truth. It teaches that truth and morality are relative, that there is no such thing as absolute truth. To the intellectual elite dominating our universities and the mainstream media, these ideas are considered enlightened and progressive, even though we all intuitively understand that absolute truth exists, and more importantly, we all conduct our lives with that recognition.

If you encounter one of these geniuses who is so certain that truth is a social construct defined by the powerful to remain in power, ask him if he would be willing to test his theory by leaping from the tallest building around. You might also want to quiz him on the Law of Noncontradiction. Ask him whether he believes that two contradictory things can be true at the same time. If he has the intellectual dishonesty to say "yes," ask him how certain he is that absolute truth does not exist. Is he absolutely certain?

Yes, truth is a casualty of our popular culture. And when truth goes, the authority of the gospel is undermined, because the gospel tells us all about the Truth. We can see evidence of this everywhere today. The modern notions of "tolerance" and "pluralism" are a direct result of the culture's assault on truth.

Liberal secularists insist that tolerance is the highest virtue. But they don't tell you what they mean by "tolerance." To them, tolerance doesn't simply involve treating those with different ideas respectfully and civilly. It means affirming their ideas as valid, which Christians can't do without renouncing their own beliefs. If, for example, you subscribe to the biblical prohibition on homosexual behavior as sinful, you cannot at the same time affirm that such behavior is not sinful.

The postmodern secularist doesn't have to confront these questions

because he rejects the idea of absolute truth and the Law of Noncontradiction. He can just go on his merry way moralizing to everyone about tolerance and never having to explain the intrinsic contradictions in his views.

The tolerance peddlers are further exposed as frauds when you consider that they simply will not practice what they preach—at least toward those annoyingly stubborn Christians. They are absolutely unwilling to “tolerate” the Christian premise that Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. For them to acknowledge this would necessarily refute their concept of tolerance, which holds that all ideas are of equal merit. In their infinite resourcefulness, they carve out an exception to their demand for universal tolerance when it comes to their treatment of Christians.

To them, Christianity’s exclusive truth claims are simply beyond the pale—so bad as to disqualify Christians from receiving tolerance from others. One secularist university administrator, for instance, disciplined a conservative professor for exposing her class to literature from a Christian viewpoint, which included an article about how teachers should approach homosexuality. The administrator exclaimed, “We cannot tolerate the intolerable.” You see, it’s fairly easy for these types to extricate themselves from their indefensible positions. They simply move the goalposts. Talk about defining truth through power!

But the Christians’ belief that theirs is the one true religion doesn’t make them intolerant of others or disrespectful of their right to believe and worship how they choose. Our modern culture is woefully confused about these distinctions, and they use the Christians’ confidence in their own belief system to paint Christians as intolerant of others with different belief systems. Nothing could be more inaccurate. Besides, for the record, Christianity isn’t the only religion with exclusive truth claims. All major religions have such claims. Many of the central ideas of the major religions cannot be reconciled, which gives the lie to the trendy tenet of pluralism that all religions at their core are the same.

We often hear or read that all people wherever located worship the same God through different languages and cultures. This idea, with all due respect, is absurd on its face. For example, Islam teaches that Christ was a mere prophet, not deity. As C. S. Lewis observed, if Christ is not God, then he could not have been an exemplary prophet or a great moral

teacher, because he claimed to be God. If he was not who he said he was, then he was either a liar or a lunatic, hardly a great moral teacher or prophet.

As another obvious example, the claims of certain Eastern religions that God is in everything and that there is no discrete distinction between the Creator and creation is utterly irreconcilable with Christianity. The examples are endless, but the point is that while various religions may share some overlapping values, many of their fundamental beliefs cannot be squared. It may make people feel better to pretend that all religions are essentially the same, but this concept is demonstrably false.

But political correctness in our culture generally carries the day. Even many of our churches have become corrupted with these misguided notions of tolerance and pluralism. They have allowed their theology to be diluted and have permitted the authority of Scripture to be denigrated in favor of society's "evolved" ideas about morality. Only a version of Christianity that preaches that all religions are the same is tolerant and loving. Traditional, Bible-based Christianity is intolerant, insensitive, exclusive, and unloving.

How loving, though, is it to become an accomplice to the destruction of truth itself—to the evisceration of the gospel? How sensitive is it to aid people away from the path of Life? As a Christian, how can you explain Christ's decision voluntarily to subject himself to the indignities and humiliation of human form, to experience wholesale separation from the Father, to physically accept all of the real wrath of the Father for all of mankind's past, present, and future sins, and to suffer the indescribable torment and death on the cross if all other paths to God are the same? What an immeasurable insult to the finished work of Christ on the cross! What an act of deliberate disobedience to Christ's direction that we spread the gospel to the corners of the earth! For if all religions are the same, then we've made a liar out of Christ and rendered his Great Commission a useless farce because we have removed all incentive to evangelize.

I'm not suggesting that Christians should approach evangelism stridently or disrespectfully. We should certainly honor the principle that all people are equal in God's sight and entitled to equal protection of the laws as well as fair, courteous, and respectful treatment. But there is no

moral imperative that we adopt the notion that all belief systems are equally true. There is a moral imperative that we do not.

The above referenced scriptural passage instructing us to be prepared to give the reasons for our faith is immediately followed by the caution: “But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander” (vv. 15b-16).

We must be mindful of the next sentence as well. “It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God” (vv. 17-18). We must preach the truth, even if it makes us unpopular, even if it leads to the charge that we are intolerant or insensitive, even if it leads to our suffering or persecution. Yes, we must evangelize with gentleness and respect, but above all, we must evangelize. We must not be silenced by the tolerance police.

I frequently come into contact with people who either don’t believe in Christianity or who do but have serious problems with parts of the Bible or elements of Christian doctrine. I’m certainly no expert in theology. So what do I tell these people? Beyond suggesting the daunting task of reading the Bible from start to finish, how do I help them to discover the truths that I belatedly discovered?

There are so many wonderful books available that will help, but there seem to be drawbacks with each one. They are too scholarly or too incomplete or too difficult to read. To get the complete package I usually have to recommend more than one book, which significantly decreases the chances that any of them will be read.

Not long ago a friend asked me for resources on apologetics that he could share with his nonbelieving sibling. I knew that we’d probably only have one shot at this in the immediate future; so I had to come up with just the perfect book. Frankly, I put off the decision because I couldn’t decide among three or four of my favorite sources, none of which, by itself, would have been sufficient, in my opinion.

Just as I was preparing to cop out and make a recommendation of multiple books instead of just one, I received a note from Frank Turek, asking me to review *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*. After reading the first few chapters of the book I was convinced my receipt of the book was providential.

Finally, I thought, there is one book that covers the gamut in a highly readable format. After reading it I told Frank that this is the one book I've been waiting for as an evangelical tool—to explain the ideas and unveil the truth in a way that is far above my pay grade. As of the printing of this book there will now be one source I can recommend to skeptics, doubters, or Christians who need some reinforcing evidence. I already know ten people to whom I will give this book. It's truly a godsend.

Frank Turek, whom I've now come to know as a tremendous gentleman and Christian scholar, coauthored this book with the giant among giants in the field of Christian apologetics—Dr. Norman Geisler. I have a number of Dr. Geisler's other works, including *Christian Apologetics*, *When Critics Ask*, and *When Skeptics Ask*. Interestingly, I was first exposed to Dr. Geisler through my friend and former neighbor Dr. Steve Johnson, a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary and one of my spiritual mentors. Steve loaned me (I can't remember if I ever returned it!) a videotape in which Dr. Geisler was explaining the truths of Christianity in a most entertaining and captivating way. It was at that point that I decided to purchase and consume a number of his incredible books on apologetics.

I would recommend any and all of Dr. Geisler's books. But *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* is just what the doctor ordered for a one-stop source for those who might not be willing to wade through a number of books. I have to admit, the title particularly intrigued me since I have long believed that it does take more faith to be an atheist. It certainly takes more faith to believe that human beings evolved from the random interaction of molecules (which somehow had to come into existence themselves) than to believe in a Creator.

This book also appealed to me because before tackling the issue of the truth of Christianity, it addresses the issue of truth itself, conclusively proving the existence of absolute truth. It demolishes the follies of moral relativism and postmodernism, then proceeds systematically to march toward the inescapable truths of the Christian religion. This is a book that had to be written and even more has to be published. So I'll stop the gushing now and let this book go to press. Many a hungry soul awaits the truths that are brilliantly set out in this work.

—DAVID LIMBAUGH

Preface

How Much Faith Do You Need to Believe This Book?

RELIGIOUS SKEPTICS BELIEVE that books like this one can't be trusted for objective information because such books are written by religious people who have an agenda. In fact, that's the way skeptics view the Bible—it's a biased book written by biased people. Their assessment may be true for some books about religion, but it's not true for them all. If it were, you couldn't trust anything you read concerning religion—including books written by atheists or skeptics—because every writer has a viewpoint on religion.

So what does this mean to you, the reader? Should you disbelieve what an atheist writes about Christianity just because he's an atheist? Not necessarily, because he could be telling the truth. Should you disbelieve what a Christian writes about atheism just because he's a Christian? Again, not necessarily—he too could be telling the truth.

But what about an author's agenda? Does an agenda fatally taint his objectivity? If so, no book is objective, including those by atheists and skeptics. Why? Because *all* books are written for a reason, all authors have an agenda, and all (or at least most) authors believe what they write! However, that doesn't mean what they write is false or not objective. While authors are almost never neutral about their topics (personal interest is what drives them), they nevertheless can present their topics objectively.

For example, survivors of the Holocaust who wrote of their experiences certainly were not neutral bystanders. They believed passionately that the Nazis were wrong, and they were driven to record their experiences so the world would never forget the Holocaust and, hopefully,

never repeat it. Did their passion or their agenda cause them to bend the facts? Not necessarily. In fact, their passion may have produced the opposite effect. While passion may induce some people to exaggerate, it may drive others to be all the more meticulous and accurate so as not to compromise the credibility of the message they wish to communicate.

As you'll see, we think the authors of the Bible took this meticulous and accurate road. It's also the road we're trying to take in this book. (And when you're done reading, we hope you'll let us know if you think we've actually taken that road.)

In the meantime, if you're a skeptic, please keep in mind that you should believe or disbelieve what we say because of the evidence we present, not because we have a certain set of religious beliefs. We are both Christians, but we were not always Christians. We came to believe through evidence. So, the fact *that* we are Christians is not the issue: *why* we are Christians is the important point. And that's the focus of this book.

—NORM GEISLER AND FRANK TUREK
January 2004

Introduction

Finding the Box Top to the Puzzle of Life

*“One who claims to be a skeptic of one set of beliefs
is actually a true believer in another set of beliefs.”*

—PHILLIP E. JOHNSON

THE UNIVERSITY RELIGION professor gave his wide-eyed undergraduate class a clear warning the very first day of the semester. “Please leave your religious beliefs at home!” he demanded. “As we look at the Old Testament, I may make some observations that will run contrary to what you’ve been taught in Sunday school. It’s not my purpose to offend anyone, but it *is* my purpose to be as objective as possible in analyzing the text.”

That sounded great to me. After all, I (Frank) enrolled in that class because I was in the midst of a spiritual search. I didn’t want any religious party line. I just wanted to know if there was a God or not. What better place, I thought, to get some objectivity about God and the Bible than a secular school like the University of Rochester?

From the beginning, the professor took a very skeptical view of the Old Testament. He immediately affirmed the theory that Moses did not write the first five books of the Bible, and that many of the Bible’s supposed prophetic passages were written after the fact. He also suggested that the Jews originally believed in many gods (polytheism), but that one God ultimately won the day because the final editors of the Old Testament were “religious-fanatic monotheists.”

Most of the students had no trouble with his analysis, except one young man a couple of rows ahead of me. As the semester wore on, that student became visibly more agitated with the professor’s skeptical the-

ories. One day, when the professor began to criticize sections of Isaiah, the student could no longer moderate his displeasure.

"That's not right!" he blurted out. "This is the Word of God!"

"That guy's too religious," I quietly whispered to the person sitting next to me.

"Look," the professor reminded everyone, "I told you all at the beginning that you must leave your religious beliefs at home. We will not be able to be objective if you can't do that."

"But you're not being objective," charged the student as he stood up. "You're being overly skeptical."

Some in the class began to heckle the student.

"Let the professor teach!"

"Sit down!"

"This isn't Sunday school!"

The professor tried to defuse the situation, but the flustered student stormed out and never returned.

While I had some sympathy for the student and could see that the professor had his own anti-religious bias, I also wanted to hear more of what he had to say about the Old Testament, and particularly about God. When the semester ended, I was somewhat convinced that the professor was right—the Old Testament was not to be taken at face value. However, I still didn't have an answer to my most basic question: Does God exist? I felt completely unfulfilled when the last class ended. I had no closure, no answer. So I approached the professor, who was surrounded by students asking final questions.

"Professor," I said, after waiting until just about everyone else had left, "thanks for the class. I think I've learned a new perspective. But I still have one huge question."

"Sure, go ahead," he said.

"I enrolled in this class to find out if there really is a God or not. Well . . . is there?"

Without a moment's hesitation he snapped, "I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"No, I have no idea."

I was stunned. I felt like scolding him by saying, "Wait a minute, you're teaching that the Old Testament is false, and you don't know whether there's a God or not? The Old Testament could be true if God

actually exists!” But since final grades were not in, I thought better of it. Instead, I simply walked out, frustrated with the entire semester. I could have respected a qualified “yes” or “no” with some reasons given, but not “I don’t know”—I could get that from an uninformed man on the street. I expected a lot more from a university religion professor.

I later learned that my expectations were too high for the modern university. The term “university” is actually a composite of the words “unity” and “diversity.” When one attends a university, he is supposed to be guided in the quest to find unity in diversity—namely, how all the diverse fields of knowledge (the arts, philosophy, the physical sciences, mathematics, etc.) fit together to provide a unified picture of life. A tall task indeed, but one that the modern university has not only abandoned but reversed. Instead of *universities*, we now have *pluraversities*, institutions that deem every viewpoint, no matter how ridiculous, just as valid as any other—that is, except the viewpoint that just one religion or worldview could be true. That’s the one viewpoint considered intolerant and bigoted on most college campuses.

Despite the denials streaming from our universities, we believe that there *is* a way to discover unity in diversity. And if one were to discover such unity, it would be like seeing the box top of a jigsaw puzzle. Just as the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle are difficult to put together without the picture on the box top, the many diverse pieces of life make no sense without some kind of unifying big picture. The question is, does anyone have the box top to this puzzle we call life? Many world religions claim that they do. Are any of them correct?



Fig. I.1

RELIGION AND THE BOX TOP

World religions are often attempts to provide a box top that allows you to see how the many pieces of life's puzzle make a complete, cohesive picture. This picture usually—and for good reason—begins with some sort of claim about God. What someone believes about God affects everything else that he or she believes. When Mortimer Adler was asked why the “God” section was the largest in the Great Books of the Western World series (which he edited), he insightfully observed that it's because more implications flow from the subject of God than from any other subject. Indeed, the five most consequential questions in life are these:

1. Origin: Where did we come from?
2. Identity: Who are we?
3. Meaning: Why are we here?
4. Morality: How should we live?
5. Destiny: Where are we going?

The answers to each of these questions depend on the existence of God. If God exists, then there's ultimate meaning and purpose to your life. If there's a real purpose to your life, then there's a real right and wrong way to live it. Choices you make now not only affect you here but will affect you in eternity. On the other hand, if there is no God, then your life ultimately means nothing. Since there is no enduring purpose to life, there's no right or wrong way to live it. And it doesn't matter how you live or what you believe—your destiny is dust.

So which world religion, if any, answers the God question correctly? Does any religion provide the true box top for life? The common wisdom says no, for a number of reasons.

First, many say it is unreasonable to believe that one religion could be exclusively true. If one religion were really true, it would mean that billions of religious people from every other religious faith are wrong today and have been wrong throughout the centuries. (And that's a big problem if Christianity is true because Christianity seems to teach that non-Christians are going to hell!) There's also the not unfounded fear that those who think they have the truth will be intolerant of those who won't accept it.

Easygoing Americans are more apt to believe that no religion is *the*

truth. This sentiment is often illustrated by the favorite parable of many university professors: the parable of the six blind men and the elephant. This is where each blind man feels a different part of the elephant and therefore reaches a different conclusion about the object in front of him. One grabs the tusk and says, “This is a spear!” Another feels the trunk and says, “This is a snake!” The one hugging the leg claims, “This is a tree!” The blind man holding the tail thinks, “I have a rope!” The one feeling the ear believes, “This is a fan!” And the one leaning on the elephant’s side is certain, “This is a wall!” These blind men are said to represent world religions because they each come to a different conclusion about what they are sensing. Like each blind man, we are told, no one religion has *the* truth. No one religion has the complete box top. Religions are simply different paths up the same mountain. This, of course, greatly appeals to the broadly tolerant American mind.

In America, truth in religion is considered an oxymoron. There is no truth in religion, we are told. It’s all a matter of taste or opinion. You like chocolate, I like vanilla. You like Christianity, I like Islam. If Buddhism works for you, then it’s true for you. Besides, you ought not judge me for my beliefs!

The second major problem with truth in religion is that some pieces of life seem to defy explanation—they don’t appear to fit any religious box top. These include the existence of evil and the silence of God in the face of that evil. These are especially powerful objections to anyone claiming that an all-powerful (theistic) God exists. Many skeptics and atheists argue that if one true, powerful God actually exists, then he would intervene to clear up all the confusion. After all, if God is really out there, then why does he seem to hide himself? Why doesn’t he just show up to debunk the false religions and end all the controversy? Why doesn’t he intervene to stop all the evil in the world, including all the religious wars that are such a black mark on his name? And why does he allow bad things to happen to good people? These are difficult questions for anyone claiming that their theistic religion is true.

Finally, many modern intellectuals imply that any box top based on religion wouldn’t be legitimate anyway. Why? Because, they say, only science yields truth. Not only has evolution removed the need for God, they say, but only what is testable in a laboratory can be considered true. That is, only science deals in matters of fact, while religion stays merely

in the realm of faith. So there's no sense trying to muster evidence or facts to support religion, because that would be like mustering facts to prove that chocolate ice cream tastes better than vanilla ice cream. You can't prove preferences. Therefore, since they insist that religion is never a matter of objective fact but merely subjective taste, any box top derived from religion couldn't provide the objective picture of life we're looking for.

So where does all this leave us? Is the search for God and for life's box top hopeless? Should we assume that there's no objective meaning to life, and each invent our own subjective box top? Should we be content with the professor's "I don't know" answer?

We don't think so. We believe that there is a real answer. And despite the powerful objections we have identified (which we will address in later chapters), we believe that the answer is very reasonable. In fact, we believe this answer is more reasonable and requires less faith than any other possible answer, including that of an atheist. Let's begin to show you what we mean.

WHAT KIND OF GOD?

Before we go any further, let's be sure we're clear on terminology. Most of the world's major religions fall into one of these three religious world-views: theism, pantheism, and atheism.

A *theist* is someone who believes in a personal God who created the universe but is not part of the universe. This would be roughly equivalent to a painter and a painting. God is like the painter, and his creation is like the painting. God made the painting, and his attributes are expressed in it, but God is not the painting. Major theistic religions are Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

By contrast, a *pantheist* is someone who believes in an impersonal God that literally *is* the universe. So, rather than *making* the painting, pantheists believe God *is* the painting. In fact, pantheists believe that God is everything that exists: God is the grass; God is the sky; God is the tree; God is this book; God is you; God is me; etc. Major pantheistic religions are of the Eastern variety such as Hinduism, some forms of Buddhism, and many forms of the "New Age."

An *atheist*, of course, is someone who does not believe in any type of God. To follow our analogy, atheists believe that what looks like a

painting has always existed and no one painted it. Religious humanists would fall into this category.

Here's an easy way to remember these three religious worldviews: theism—God *made* all; pantheism—God *is* all; atheism—*no* God at all. In fig. I.2 theism is depicted as the hand *holding up* the world, pantheism as the hand *in* the world, and atheism as *nothing but* the world.



Fig. I.2

One other term that we will use frequently is *agnostic*. That's someone who is unsure about the question of God.

So now that we've defined our terms, let's get back to this issue of faith and religion.

FAITH AND RELIGION

Despite its apparent persuasiveness, the claim that religion is simply a matter of faith is nothing more than a modern myth—it's just not true. While religion certainly requires faith, religion is not *only* about faith. *Facts* are also central to all religions because all religious worldviews—including atheism—make truth claims, and many of those truth claims can be evaluated through scientific and historical investigation.

For example, theists (e.g., Christians, Muslims, Jews) say that the universe had a beginning, while many atheists and pantheists (e.g., New Agers, Hindus) say that it did not (the universe is eternal). These are mutually exclusive claims. They can't both be right. Either the universe had a beginning or it did not. By investigating the nature and history of the universe, we can reasonably conclude that one view is right and the other wrong.

The alleged resurrection of Christ presents another example.

Christians claim that Jesus rose from the dead, while Muslims say that Jesus never even died. Again, one of these views is right and the other wrong. How can we know which one is right? By evaluating each of these conflicting truth claims against the historical evidence.

Notice that not only do different religions attempt to answer these questions, but scientists also have something to say about these matters. That is, science and religion often address the same questions: Where did the universe come from? Where did life come from? Are miracles possible? and so on. In other words, science and religion are not mutually exclusive categories as some have suggested.

Certainly not all religious claims are open to scientific or historic investigation. Some are unverifiable dogma. Nevertheless, the validity of many religious beliefs can be checked out. Some beliefs are reasonable—they can be proven with a high degree of certainty—while others are clearly unreasonable.

THE PROBLEMS WITH CHRISTIANITY

Is Christianity reasonable? We believe it is. However, unless one makes a thorough investigation of the evidence with an open mind, belief in Christianity may appear to be problematic. First, there are many perceived *intellectual* objections, like those mentioned above (the problem of evil, and the objections of many scientists).

Second, there are *emotional* obstacles that sometimes obstruct the acceptance of Christianity. Christian exclusivism, the doctrine of hell, and the hypocrisy of Christians are emotional roadblocks to just about everyone. (In fact, hypocrisy in the church probably repels people more than any other factor. Someone once said the biggest problem with Christianity is Christians!)

Finally, there are *volitional* reasons to reject Christianity, namely, Christian morality, which seems to restrict our choices in life. Since most of us don't want to answer to anyone, yielding our freedom to an unseen God is not something we naturally want to do.

Yet despite these intellectual, emotional, and volitional obstacles, we submit that it's not faith in Christianity that's difficult but faith in atheism or any other religion. *That is, once one looks at the evidence, we think it takes more faith to be a non-Christian than it does to be a Christian.* This may seem like a counterintuitive claim, but it's simply

rooted in the fact that every religious worldview requires faith—even the worldview that says there is no God.

Why? Because as limited human beings, we do not possess the type of knowledge that will provide us with absolute proof of God's existence or nonexistence. Outside of the knowledge of our own existence (I know I exist because I have to exist in order to ponder the question), we deal in the realm of probability. Whatever we've concluded about the existence of God, it's always possible that the opposite conclusion is true.

In fact, it is possible that our conclusions in this book are wrong. We don't think they are because we have good evidence to support them. Indeed, we think our conclusions are true beyond a reasonable doubt. (This type of certainty, say, 95-plus percent certain, is the best that fallible and finite human beings can attain for most questions, and it is more than sufficient for even the biggest decisions in life.) Nevertheless, some faith is required to overcome the possibility that we are wrong.

THE FAITH OF AN ATHEIST

While some faith is required for our conclusions, it's often forgotten that faith is also required to believe any worldview, including atheism and pantheism. We were reminded of this recently when we met an atheist named Barry at one of our seminars. Barry was incredulous that a mutual friend, Steve, had become a Christian.

He said, "I can't figure Steve out. He claims to be intellectual, but he can't answer all the objections I pose to him about Christianity. He says he doesn't have all the answers because he's new and still learning."

I (Frank) said, "Barry, it's virtually impossible to know *everything* about a particular topic, and it's certainly impossible when that topic is an infinite God. So there has to come a point where you realize you have enough information to come to a conclusion, even if unanswered questions remain."

Barry agreed but still didn't realize that he was doing exactly what he was chiding Steve for doing. Barry had decided his view—atheism—was correct even though he did not have exhaustive information to support it. Did he know for sure there is no God? Had he investigated every argument and evidence for the existence of God? Did he possess exhaustive information on the question of God? Could he answer every objection to atheism? Of course not. Indeed, it would be impossible to do so.

Since Barry, like Steve, is dealing in the realm of probability rather than absolute certainty, he has to have a certain amount of faith to believe that God does *not* exist.

Although he claimed to be an agnostic, Carl Sagan made the ultimate statement of *faith in atheistic materialism* when he claimed that “the Cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be.”¹ How did he *know* that for sure? He didn't. How could he? He was a limited human being with limited knowledge. Sagan was operating in the realm of probability just like Christians are when they say God exists. The question is, who has more evidence for their conclusion? Which conclusion is more reasonable? As we'll see when we look at the evidence, the atheist has to muster a lot more faith than the Christian.

You may be thinking, “The atheist has to muster a lot more faith than the Christian! What possibly could Geisler and Turek mean by that?” We mean that the less evidence you have for your position, the more faith you need to believe it (and vice versa). Faith covers a gap in knowledge. And it turns out that atheists have bigger gaps in knowledge because they have far less evidence for their beliefs than Christians have for theirs. In other words, the empirical, forensic, and philosophical evidence strongly supports conclusions consistent with Christianity and inconsistent with atheism. Here are a few examples of that evidence that we'll unpack in the ensuing chapters:

1. The scientific evidence overwhelmingly confirms that the universe exploded into being out of nothing. Either someone created something out of nothing (the Christian view), or no one created something out of nothing (the atheistic view). Which view is more reasonable? The Christian view. Which view requires more faith? The atheistic view.
2. The simplest life form contains the information-equivalent of 1,000 encyclopedias. Christians believe only an intelligent being can create a life form containing the equivalent of 1,000 encyclopedias. Atheists believe nonintelligent natural forces can do it. Christians have evidence to support their conclusion. Since atheists don't have any such evidence, their belief requires a lot more faith.
3. Hundreds of years beforehand, ancient writings foretold the coming of a man who would actually be God. This man-God, it was foretold, would be born in a particular city from a par-

ticular bloodline, suffer in a particular way, die at a particular time, and rise from the dead to atone for the sins of the world. Immediately after the predicted time, multiple eyewitnesses proclaimed and later recorded that those predicted events had actually occurred. Those eyewitnesses endured persecution and death when they could have saved themselves by denying the events. Thousands of people in Jerusalem were then converted after seeing or hearing of these events, and this belief swept quickly across the ancient world. Ancient historians and writers allude to or confirm these events, and archaeology corroborates them. Having seen evidence from creation that God exists (point 1 above), Christians believe these multiple lines of evidence show beyond a reasonable doubt that God had a hand in these events. Atheists must have a lot more faith to explain away the predictions, the eyewitness testimony, the willingness of the eyewitnesses to suffer and die, the origin of the Christian church, and the corroborating testimony of the other writers, archeological finds, and other evidence that we'll investigate later.

Now perhaps these three points have raised in your mind some questions and objections. They should, because we're leaving out a lot of the detail that we'll unpack throughout the book. The main point for now is that you see what we mean when we say that every worldview—including atheism—requires some degree of faith.

Even skeptics have faith. They have faith that skepticism is true. Likewise, agnostics have faith that agnosticism is true. There are no neutral positions when it comes to beliefs. As Phillip Johnson so aptly put it, "One who claims to be a skeptic of one set of beliefs is actually a true believer in another set of beliefs."² In other words, atheists, who are naturally skeptical of Christianity, turn out to be true believers in atheism. As we shall see, if they are honest with the evidence, they need a lot more faith to maintain their atheistic beliefs than Christians need to maintain theirs.

DISCOVERING THE BOX TOP

We claim that there is strong evidence supporting Christianity. How will we proceed through this evidence? Since about 1996, we have traveled together around the country conducting a seminar called, "The Twelve Points That Show Christianity Is True." In it, we proceed logically from

the question of truth all the way to the conclusion that the Bible is the Word of God. This book generally will follow this same logical, twelve-point progression:

1. Truth about reality is knowable.
2. The opposite of true is false.
3. It is true that the theistic God exists. This is evidenced by the:
 - a. Beginning of the universe (Cosmological Argument)
 - b. Design of the universe (Teleological Argument/Anthropic Principle)
 - c. Design of life (Teleological Argument)
 - d. Moral Law (Moral Argument)
4. If God exists, then miracles are possible.
5. Miracles can be used to confirm a message from God (i.e., as acts of God to confirm a word from God).
6. The New Testament is historically reliable. This is evidenced by:
 - a. Early testimony
 - b. Eyewitness testimony
 - c. Uninvented (authentic) testimony
 - d. Eyewitnesses who were not deceived
7. The New Testament says Jesus claimed to be God.
8. Jesus' claim to be God was miraculously confirmed by:
 - a. His fulfillment of many prophecies about himself;
 - b. His sinless life and miraculous deeds;
 - c. His prediction and accomplishment of his resurrection.
9. Therefore, Jesus is God.
10. Whatever Jesus (who is God) teaches is true.
11. Jesus taught that the Bible is the Word of God.
12. Therefore, it is true that the Bible is the Word of God (and anything opposed to it is false).

Before we begin presenting this line of reasoning, please note five points:

First, we are not suggesting that the above points are true by definition. Most of these points are premises that need to be justified by evidence. For example, point 3 claims, "It is true that the theistic God exists." That claim isn't true just because we say so. It needs to be backed up by good evidence, by good reasons. We'll give those good reasons when we get to that point in the book.

Second, notice that we are starting at the point of complete skepticism. That is, we are starting with a person who says he doesn't even believe in truth. We need to start there because if the prevailing view of the culture is right—that there is no truth—then it can't be *true* that a theistic God exists or that there is a *true* word from that God. However, if there is truth, and that truth can be known, then we can go on to investigate the truth of God's existence and the other points that follow (e.g., miracles are possible; the New Testament is historically reliable; and so forth).

Third, *if* this line of reasoning is sound (and that's a big "if" that this book will attempt to show), it necessarily disproves other religions where they differ from the Bible. (This sounds incredibly arrogant and presumptuous, but we'll address that later.) This would *not* mean that all other religions are completely false or that they have no truth. Nearly all religions have some truth. We are simply saying that *if the Bible is true*, then any specific claim that contradicts the Bible must be false. For example, if the Bible is true, and it says that there is a God beyond the universe who created and sustains the universe (theism), then any claim that denies theism (e.g., atheism) must be false. Likewise, if the Bible is true, and it claims that Jesus rose from the dead, then the Qur'anic denial of that fact must be false. (By the way, the reverse would also be true. If the evidence showed that the Qur'an was true, then the Bible would be false wherever it contradicted the Qur'an.)

Fourth, we give evidence for Christianity because we ought to live our lives based on truth. Socrates once said that the unexamined life is not worth living.³ We believe that the unexamined faith is not worth believing. Furthermore, contrary to popular opinion, Christians are not supposed to "just have faith." Christians are *commanded* to know what they believe and why they believe it. They are commanded to give answers to those who ask (1 Pet. 3:15), and to demolish arguments against the Christian faith (2 Cor. 10:4-5). Since God is reasonable (Isa. 1:18) and wants us to use our reason, Christians don't get brownie points for being stupid. In fact, using reason is part of the greatest commandment which, according to Jesus, is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your *mind*" (Matt. 22:37).⁴

Finally, we are often asked, "If Christianity has so much evidence

behind it, then why don't more people believe it?" Our answer: Although we believe the evidence we're about to present shows that the Bible is true beyond reasonable doubt, no amount of evidence can compel anyone to believe it. Belief requires assent not only of the mind but also of the will. While many non-Christians have honest intellectual questions, we have found that many more seem to have a volitional resistance to Christianity. In other words, it's not that they don't have evidence to believe, it's that they don't *want* to believe. The great atheist Friedrich Nietzsche exemplified this type of person. He wrote, "If one were to prove this God of the Christians to us, we should be even less able to believe in him"⁵; and "It is our preference that decides against Christianity, not arguments."⁶ Obviously, Nietzsche's disbelief was based on his will, not just his intellect.

At this point a skeptic might reverse the argument by claiming that it's the Christian who simply *wants* to believe. True, many Christians believe only because they want to, and cannot justify their belief with evidence. They simply have faith that the Bible is true. And merely wanting something to be true doesn't make it so. However, what we are saying is that many non-Christians do the same thing: they take a "blind leap of faith" that their non-Christian beliefs are true simply because they *want* them to be true. In the ensuing chapters, we'll take a hard look at the evidence to see who has to take the bigger leap.

The skeptic might then ask, "But why would anyone *want* Christianity to be false? Why would anyone not want the free gift of forgiveness?" Good question, but we think the answer lies in the volitional factors we touched on earlier. Namely, many believe that accepting the truth of Christianity would require them to change their thinking, friends, priorities, lifestyle, or morals, and they are not quite willing to give up control over their lives in order to make those changes. They believe that life would be easier and more fun without such changes. Perhaps they realize that while Christianity is all about forgiveness, it's also about denying yourself and carrying your cross. Indeed, Christianity is free, but it can cost you your life.

There's a difference between *proving* a proposition and *accepting* a proposition. We might be able to prove Christianity is true beyond reasonable doubt, but only *you* can choose to accept it. Please consider this question to see if you are open to acceptance: If someone could provide

reasonable answers to the most significant questions and objections you have about Christianity—reasonable to the point that Christianity seems true beyond a reasonable doubt—would you then become a Christian? Think about that for a moment. If your *honest* answer is no, then your resistance to Christianity is emotional or volitional, not merely intellectual. No amount of evidence will convince you because evidence is not what's in your way—you are. In the end, only you know if you are truly open to the evidence for Christianity.

One beauty of God's creation is this: if you're not willing to accept Christianity, then you're free to reject it. This freedom to make choices—even the freedom to reject truth—is what makes us moral creatures and enables each of us to choose our ultimate destiny. This really hits at the heart of why we exist at all, and why God might not be as overt in revealing himself to us as some would like. For if the Bible is true, then God has provided each of us with the opportunity to make an eternal choice to either accept him or reject him. And in order to ensure that our choice is truly free, he puts us in an environment that is filled with evidence of his existence, but without his *direct* presence—a presence so powerful that it could overwhelm our freedom and thus negate our ability to reject him. In other words, *God has provided enough evidence in this life to convince anyone willing to believe, yet he has also left some ambiguity so as not to compel the unwilling.* In this way, God gives us the opportunity either to love him or to reject him without violating our freedom. In fact, the purpose of this life is to make that choice freely and without coercion. For love, by definition, must be freely given. It cannot be coerced. That's why C. S. Lewis wrote, “the Irresistible and the Indisputable are the two weapons which the very nature of [God's] scheme forbids Him to use. Merely to over-ride a human will (as His felt presence in any but the faintest and most mitigated degree would certainly do) would be for Him useless. He cannot ravish. He can only woo.”⁷

We hope the evidence we present in this book will, in some small way, woo you to God. Keep in mind that it's not our evidence, it's *his*. We are simply compiling it in a logical order. By using real-world stories and illustrations as often as possible, we intend to make this book readable and its reasoning easily accessible.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

As we have seen, many religious truth claims can be investigated and their plausibility determined. Since all conclusions about such claims are based on probability rather than absolute certainty, they all—including atheistic claims—require some amount of faith. As we look at the evidence in the ensuing chapters, we'll see that conclusions such as "God exists" and "the Bible is true" are certain beyond reasonable doubt. *Therefore, it takes a lot more faith to be a non-Christian than it does to be a Christian.*

However, we have also acknowledged that evidence alone cannot convince someone to become a Christian. Some atheists and non-Christians may reject Christianity not because the evidence is inadequate but because they don't *want* to accept it. Some people choose to suppress the truth rather than live by it. *In fact, we humans have a fatal tendency to try to adjust the truth to fit our desires rather than adjusting our desires to fit the truth.*

But wait. Isn't there a third alternative? What about remaining agnostic like the Old Testament professor at the beginning of this chapter? He said he didn't know if God exists. Some may think that such a person is open-minded. Perhaps. But there's a big difference between being *open-minded* and being *empty-minded*. In light of the evidence, we think agnosticism is a decision to be empty-minded. After all, isn't the reason we should be open-minded so that we can recognize truth when we see it? Yes. So what are we to do when there's enough evidence to point us to the truth? For example, what should we do when we see evidence beyond a reasonable doubt that George Washington was the first president of the United States? Should we remain "open-minded" as to who the first president was? No, that would be *empty-minded*. Some questions are closed. As we'll see, there's enough evidence regarding Christianity to draw a reasonably certain conclusion.

As Mortimer Adler observed, our conclusion about God impacts every area of our lives. It is the key to finding unity and diversity and ultimate meaning in life. It is literally the most important question for every human being to address. Fortunately, if our reasoning is correct, we will discover the box top to life's puzzle at the end of our journey. So let's take the first step on that journey. It begins with the question of truth.

Chapters 1–2 will cover:

- 1. **Truth about reality is knowable.**
- 2. **The opposite of true is false.**
- 3. It is true that the theistic God exists. This is evidenced by the:
 - a. Beginning of the universe (Cosmological Argument)
 - b. Design of the universe (Teleological Argument/
Anthropic Principle)
 - c. Design of life (Teleological Argument)
 - d. Moral Law (Moral Argument)
- 4. If God exists, then miracles are possible.
- 5. Miracles can be used to confirm a message from God (i.e., as acts of God to confirm a word from God).
- 6. The New Testament is historically reliable. This is evidenced by:
 - a. Early testimony
 - b. Eyewitness testimony
 - c. Uninvented (authentic) testimony
 - d. Eyewitnesses who were not deceived
- 7. The New Testament says Jesus claimed to be God.
- 8. Jesus' claim to be God was miraculously confirmed by:
 - a. His fulfillment of many prophecies about himself;
 - b. His sinless life and miraculous deeds;
 - c. His prediction and accomplishment of his resurrection.
- 9. Therefore, Jesus is God.
- 10. Whatever Jesus (who is God) teaches is true.
- 11. Jesus taught that the Bible is the Word of God.
- 12. Therefore, it is true that the Bible is the Word of God (and anything opposed to it is false).

Can We Handle the Truth?

“Men stumble over the truth from time to time, but most pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing happened.”

—WINSTON CHURCHILL

IN THE MOVIE *A Few Good Men*, Tom Cruise plays a Navy lawyer who questions a Marine colonel, played by Jack Nicholson, about the murder of one of Nicholson’s men. The dramatic courtroom scene turns into a shouting match as Cruise accuses Nicholson of being complicit in the murder:

Cruise: “Colonel, did you order the Code Red!”

Judge: “You don’t have to answer that question!”

Nicholson: “I’ll answer the question . . . you want answers?”

Cruise: “I think I’m entitled to them.”

Nicholson: “You want answers!”

Cruise: “I want the truth!”

Nicholson: “You can’t handle the truth!”

Nicholson might as well have been yelling at all of America rather than Cruise because it seems that many in our country can’t handle the truth. On one hand, we demand truth in virtually every area of our lives. For example; we demand the truth from:

- loved ones (no one wants lies from a spouse or a child)
- doctors (we want the right medicine prescribed and the right operations performed)
- stock brokers (we demand that they tell us the truth about companies they recommend)
- courts (we want them to convict only the truly guilty)
- employers (we want them to tell us the truth and pay us fairly)
- airlines (we demand truly safe planes and truly sober pilots)

We also expect to be told the truth when we pick up a reference book, read an article, or watch a news story; we want the truth from advertisers, teachers, and politicians; we assume road signs, medicine bottles, and food labels reveal the truth. In fact, we demand the truth for almost every facet of life that affects our money, relationships, safety, or health.

On the other hand, despite our unwavering demands for truth in those areas, many of us say we aren't interested in truth when it comes to morality or religion. In fact, many downright reject the idea that any religion can be true.

As we're sure you've noticed, there's a huge contradiction here. Why do we demand truth in everything but morality and religion? Why do we say, "That's true for you but not for me," when we're talking about morality or religion, but we never even think of such nonsense when we're talking to a stock broker about our money or a doctor about our health?

Although few would admit it, our rejection of religious and moral truth is often on volitional rather than intellectual grounds—we just don't *want* to be held accountable to any moral standards or religious doctrine. So we blindly accept the self-defeating truth claims of politically correct intellectuals who tell us that truth does not exist; everything is relative; there are no absolutes; it's all a matter of opinion; you ought not judge; religion is about faith, not facts! Perhaps Augustine was right when he said that we love the truth when it enlightens us, but we hate it when it convicts us. Maybe we can't handle the truth.

In order to resolve our cultural schizophrenia, we need to address four questions concerning truth:

1. What is truth?
2. Can truth be known?
3. Can truths about God be known?
4. So what? Who cares about truth?

We'll cover these questions in this chapter and the next.

WHAT IS TRUTH? THE TRUTH ABOUT TRUTH

What is truth? Very simply, truth is "telling it like it is." When the Roman governor Pilate asked Jesus "What is truth?" nearly 2,000 years ago, he didn't wait for Jesus to respond. Instead, Pilate immediately

acted as if he knew at least some truth. Concerning Jesus, he declared, “I find no fault in this man” (see John 18:38). By exonerating Jesus, Pilate was “telling it like it is.”

Truth can also be defined as “that which corresponds to its object” or “that which describes an actual state of affairs.” Pilate’s judgment was true because it matched its object; it described an accurate state of affairs. Jesus really was innocent.

Contrary to what is being taught in many public schools, truth is not relative but absolute. If something is true, it’s true for all people, at all times, in all places. All truth claims are absolute, narrow, and exclusive. Just think about the claim “everything is true.” That’s an absolute, narrow, and exclusive claim. It excludes its opposite (i.e., it claims that the statement “everything is *not* true” is wrong). In fact, all truths exclude their opposites. Even religious truths.

This became comically clear when a number of years ago I (Norm) debated religious humanist Michael Constantine Kolenda. Of the many atheists I debated, he was one of the few who actually read my book *Christian Apologetics* prior to the debate.

When it was his turn to speak, Kolenda held up my book and declared, “These Christians are very narrow-minded people. I read Dr. Geisler’s book. Do you know what he believes? He believes that Christianity is true and everything opposed to it is false! These Christians are very narrow-minded people!”

Well, Kolenda had also written a book which I had read beforehand. It was titled *Religion Without God* (which is sort of like romance without a spouse!). When it was my turn to speak, I held up Kolenda’s book and declared, “These humanists are very narrow-minded people. I read Dr. Kolenda’s book. Do you know what he believes? He believes that humanism is true and everything opposed to it is false! These humanists are very narrow-minded people!”

The audience chuckled because they could see the point. Humanist truth claims are just as narrow as Christian truth claims. For if H (humanism) is true, then anything opposed to H is false. Likewise, if C (Christianity) is true, then anything opposed to C is false.

There are many other truths about truth. Here are some of them:

- Truth is discovered, not invented. It exists independent of anyone’s knowledge of it. (Gravity existed prior to Newton.)

- Truth is transcultural; if something is true, it is true for all people, in all places, at all times ($2+2=4$ for everyone, everywhere, at every time).
- Truth is unchanging even though our *beliefs* about truth change. (When we began to believe the earth was round instead of flat, the *truth* about the earth didn't change, only our *belief* about the earth changed.)
- Beliefs cannot change a fact, no matter how sincerely they are held. (Someone can sincerely believe the world is flat, but that only makes that person sincerely mistaken.)
- Truth is not affected by the attitude of the one professing it. (An arrogant person does not make the truth he professes false. A humble person does not make the error he professes true.)
- All truths are absolute truths. Even truths that appear to be relative are really absolute. (For example, "I, Frank Turek, feel warm on November 20, 2003" may appear to be a relative truth, but it is actually absolutely true for everyone, everywhere that Frank Turek had the sensation of warmth on that day.)

In short, contrary *beliefs* are possible, but contrary *truths* are not possible. We can *believe* everything is true, but we cannot *make* everything true.

This seems obvious enough. But how do we deal with the modern assertion that there is no truth? A couple of cartoon characters can help us.

The Road Runner Tactic

If someone said to you, "I have one insight for you that absolutely will revolutionize your ability to quickly and clearly identify the false statements and false philosophies that permeate our culture," would you be interested? That's what we're about to do here. In fact, if we had to pick just one thinking ability as the most valuable we've learned in our many years of seminary and postgraduate education, it would be this: how to identify and refute self-defeating statements. An incident from a recent talk-radio program will demonstrate what we mean by self-defeating statements.

The program's liberal host, Jerry, was taking calls on the subject of morality. After hearing numerous callers boldly claim that a certain

moral position was true, one caller blurted out, “Jerry! Jerry! There’s no such thing as truth!”

I (Frank) scrambled for the phone and began to dial furiously. Busy. Busy. Busy. I wanted to get on and say, “Jerry! To the guy who said, ‘there is no such thing as truth’—is *that* true?”

I never did get through. And Jerry, of course, agreed with the caller, never realizing that his claim could not possibly be true—because it was self-defeating.

A self-defeating statement is one that fails to meet its own standard. As we’re sure you realize, the caller’s statement “there is no truth” claims to be true and thus defeats itself. It’s like saying, “I can’t speak a word in English.” If someone ever said that, you obviously would respond, “Wait a minute! Your statement must be false because you just uttered it in English!”

Self-defeating statements are made routinely in our postmodern culture, and once you sharpen your ability to detect them, you’ll become an absolutely fearless defender of truth. No doubt you’ve heard people say things like, “All truth is relative!” and “There are no absolutes!” Now you’ll be armed to refute such silly statements by simply revealing that they don’t meet their own criteria. In other words, by turning a self-defeating statement on itself, you can expose it for the nonsense it is.

We call this process of turning a self-defeating statement on itself the “Road Runner” tactic because it reminds us of the cartoon characters Road Runner and Wile E. Coyote. As you may remember from Saturday morning cartoons, the Coyote’s one and only quest is to chase down the speedy Road Runner and make him his evening meal. But the Road Runner is simply too fast and too smart. Just when the Coyote is gaining ground, the Road Runner stops short at the cliff’s edge leaving the passing Coyote momentarily suspended in midair, supported by nothing. As soon as the Coyote realizes he has no ground to stand on, he plummets to the valley floor and crashes in a heap.

Well, that’s exactly what the Road Runner tactic can do to the relativists and postmodernists of our day. It helps them realize that their arguments cannot sustain their own weight. Consequently they crash to the ground in a heap. This makes you look like a super genius! Let’s take the Road Runner tactic to college to show you what we mean.

The Road Runner Goes to College

The Road Runner tactic is especially needed by today's college students. Why? Because if you listen to many of our university professors, they'll tell you that there is no truth. What amazes us is that parents all over the world are literally paying thousands of dollars in college tuition so that their sons and daughters can be taught *the "truth" that there is no truth*, not to mention other self-defeating postmodern assertions such as: "All truth is relative" (Is *that* a relative truth?); "There are no absolutes" (Are you *absolutely* sure?); and, "It's true for you but not for me!" (Is that statement true just for you, or is it true for everyone?) "True for you but not for me" may be the mantra of our day, but it's not how the world really works. Try saying that to your bank teller, the police, or the IRS and see how far you get!

Of course these modern mantras are false because they are self-defeating. But for those who still blindly believe them, we have a few questions: If there really is no truth, then why try to learn anything? Why should any student listen to any professor? After all, the professor doesn't have the truth. What's the point of going to school, much less paying for it? And what's the point of obeying the professor's moral prohibitions against cheating on tests or plagiarizing term papers?

Ideas have consequences. Good ideas have good consequences, and bad ideas have bad consequences. Indeed, many students realize the implications of these bad postmodern ideas and behave accordingly. If we teach students that there is no right and wrong, why are we surprised when a couple of students gun down their classmates or a teenage mother leaves her baby in a trash can? Why should they act "right" when we teach them that there is no such thing as "right"?

C. S. Lewis revealed the absurdity of expecting virtue from people who are taught that no virtue exists: "In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honor and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful."¹

The truth of the matter is this: false ideas about truth lead to false ideas about life. In many cases, these false ideas give apparent justification for what is really immoral behavior. For if you can kill the concept of truth, then you can kill the concept of any true religion or any true

morality. Many in our culture have been attempting to do this, and the past forty years of religious and moral decline trumpet their success. Unfortunately, the devastating consequences of their efforts are not just true for them—they are also true for all of us.

So truth exists. It cannot be denied. Those who deny truth make the self-defeating truth claim that there is no truth. In this regard, they are a lot like Winnie the Pooh—they answer a knock at the door by saying, “No one is home!”

Now, let’s see how the Road Runner tactic can help us answer the skeptical truth claim that “truth cannot be known!”

CAN TRUTH BE KNOWN? KNOCK, KNOCK . . .

Evangelical Christians believe that they ought to obey Jesus’ command to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19). In order to help Christians carry out this “Great Commission,” D. James Kennedy created a door-to-door evangelism technique called “Evangelism Explosion” (EE). If you’re a Christian, the EE technique allows you to quickly ascertain where a person is spiritually. After introducing yourself, you are to ask questions like these to the person answering the door:

1. Can I ask you a spiritual question?

And

2. If you were to die tonight and stand before God, and God were to ask you, “Why should I let you into my heaven?” what would you say?

Most people are curious enough to say yes to question 1. (If they say, “What do you mean by ‘a spiritual question?’” you go ahead and ask them the second question.) As for the second question, the EE manual predicts that the non-Christian will usually give the “good works” answer. You know, something like, “God will accept me because I’m basically a good person. I haven’t killed anybody; I go to church; I give to the poor . . .” In that case, the EE manual tells you to respond with the gospel (literally the “good news”): that all (including you) have fallen short of God’s perfect standard, and no good work can erase the fact that you’ve already sinned; but the good news is that you can be saved from punishment by trusting in Christ, who was punished in your place.

While this technique has been very successful, some non-Christians do not respond to the two questions as expected. For example, one evening I (Norm) decided to take EE to the streets along with a fellow member of my church. Here's how it went:

Knock, Knock.

"Who's there?" (A man came to the door.)

I stuck out my hand and said, "Hi! My name is Norm Geisler, this is my partner, Ron, and we're from the church at the end of the street."

"I'm Don," the man replied, his eyes quickly sizing us up.

Immediately I jumped into action with question 1: "Don, do you mind if we ask you a spiritual question?"

"No, go ahead," Don said boldly, apparently eager to have a Bible thumper for dessert.

I laid question 2 on him: "Don, if you were to die tonight and stand before God, and God were to ask you, 'Why should I let you into my heaven?' what would you say?"

Don snapped back, "I'd say to God, 'Why *shouldn't* you let me into your heaven?'"

Gulp . . . he wasn't supposed to say that! I mean, that answer wasn't in the book!

After a split second of panic, I offered up a quick prayer and replied, "Don, if we knocked on your door seeking to come into your house, and you said to us, 'Why should I let you into my house?' and we responded, 'Why *shouldn't* you let us in?' what would you say?"

Don pointed his finger at my chest and sternly replied, "I would tell you where to go!"

I immediately shot back, "That's exactly what God is going to say to you!"

Don looked stunned for a second but then narrowed his eyes and said, "To tell you the truth: I don't believe in God. I'm an atheist."

"You're an atheist?"

"That's right!"

"Well, are you absolutely sure there is no God?" I asked him.

He paused, and said, "Well, no, I'm not *absolutely* sure. I guess it's possible there might be a God."

"So you're not really an atheist, then—you're an agnostic," I

informed him, “because an atheist says, ‘I know there is no God,’ and an agnostic says ‘I don’t know whether there is a God.’”

“Yeah . . . alright; so I guess I’m an agnostic then,” he admitted.

Now this was real progress. With just one question we moved from atheism to agnosticism! But I still had to figure out what kind of agnostic Don was.

So I asked him, “Don, what kind of agnostic are you?”

He laughed as he asked, “What do you mean?” (He was probably thinking, “A minute ago, I was an atheist—I have no idea what kind of agnostic I am now!”)

“Well, Don, there are two kinds of agnostics,” I explained. “There’s the *ordinary* agnostic who says he *doesn’t* know anything for sure, and then there’s the *ornery* agnostic who says he *can’t* know anything for sure.”

Don was sure about this. He said, “I’m the ornery kind. You can’t know anything for sure.”

Recognizing the self-defeating nature of his claim, I unleashed the Road Runner tactic by asking him, “Don, if you say that you can’t know anything for sure, then how do you know *that* for sure?”

Looking puzzled, he said, “What do you mean?”

Explaining it another way, I said, “How do you *know* for sure that you can’t *know* anything for sure?”

I could see the lightbulb coming on but decided to add one more point: “Besides, Don, you can’t be a skeptic about everything because that would mean you’d have to doubt skepticism; but the more you doubt skepticism the more sure you become.”

He relented. “Okay, I guess I really *can* know something for sure. I must be an *ordinary* agnostic.”

Now we were really getting somewhere. With just a few questions, Don had moved from atheism through *ornery* agnosticism to *ordinary* agnosticism.

I continued, “Since you admit now that you *can* know, why *don’t* you know that God exists?”

Shrugging his shoulders, he said, “Because nobody has shown me any evidence, I guess.”

Now I launched the million-dollar question: “Would you be willing to look at some evidence?”

“Sure,” he replied.

This is the best type of person to talk to: someone who is willing to take an honest look at the evidence. Being willing is essential. Evidence cannot convince the unwilling.

Since Don was willing, we gave him a book by Frank Morison titled *Who Moved the Stone?*²² Morison was a skeptic who set out to write a book refuting Christianity but instead became convinced by the evidence that Christianity was indeed true. (In fact, the first chapter of *Who Moved the Stone?* is called “The Book That Refused to Be Written.”)

We visited Don a short time later. He described the evidence presented by Morison as “very convincing.” Several weeks later, in the middle of a study of the Gospel of John, Don accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Savior.

Today Don is a deacon in a Baptist church near St. Louis, Missouri. Every Sunday morning, for years, he’s driven the church bus through the local neighborhood to pick up those kids whose parents wouldn’t come to church. His ministry has special meaning to me (Norm) because two men like Don (Mr. Costie and Mr. Sweetland) picked me up with a church bus more than 400 times—every Sunday from when I was nine until I was seventeen. I was in a position to accept Christ at seventeen largely because of that bus ministry. I guess it’s true what they say, “What goes around comes around,” even if it’s just the Sunday school bus.

CAN ALL RELIGIONS BE TRUE?

The moral of the EE story is that complete agnosticism or skepticism is self-defeating. Agnostics and skeptics make the truth claim that truth claims cannot be made. They say that truth can’t be known but then claim that their view is true. You can’t have it both ways.

So we’ve established that truth can be known. In fact, it’s undeniable. But so what? Can’t all religions be true? Unfortunately, it’s not just the secular world that’s confused about this question; even some church pastors have trouble with it.

Seminary professor Ronald Nash heard of a good example of this. He told us of a student of his who went home to Bowling Green, Kentucky, for Christmas break a couple of years ago. While on break, this Bible-believing student decided to be adventurous one Sunday and attend a church that he had never attended before. But as soon as the

pastor uttered the first sentence of his sermon, the student realized he had made a mistake—the pastor was contradicting the Bible.

“The theme of my sermon this morning,” the pastor began, “is that all religious beliefs are true!” The student squirmed in his seat as the pastor went on to assure each member of the congregation that every religious belief they had was “true!”

When the sermon was over, the student wanted to slip out unnoticed, but the heavy-set, robed pastor was waiting at the door bear-hugging each passing congregant.

“Son,” the pastor boomed upon greeting the student, “where are you from?”

“Actually, I’m from Bowling Green, sir. I’m home on break from seminary.”

“Seminary! Good. So what religious beliefs do you have, Son?”

“I’d rather not say, sir.”

“Why not, Son?”

“Because I don’t want to offend you, sir.”

“Oh, Son, you can’t offend me. Besides, it doesn’t matter what your beliefs are—they’re true. So what do you believe?”

“Okay,” the student relented. He leaned toward the pastor, cupped his hand around his mouth, and whispered, “Sir, I believe that you are going to hell!”

The pastor’s face turned bright red as he struggled to respond. “I, ah, guess I, ah, made a mistake! All religious beliefs *cannot* be true because yours certainly aren’t true!”

Indeed, as the pastor realized, religious beliefs cannot all be true, because many religious beliefs are contradictory—they teach opposites. For example, conservative Christians believe that those who haven’t accepted Christ as their Savior have chosen hell as their ultimate destination. It’s often overlooked, but many Muslims believe the same about non-Muslims—they’re headed for hell as well. And Hindus generally believe that everyone, regardless of beliefs, is caught in an indefinite cycle of reincarnation based on works. These contradictory beliefs can’t all be true.

In fact, world religions have more contradictory beliefs than complementary ones. The notion that all religions teach basically the same thing—that we ought to love one another—demonstrates a serious mis-

understanding of world religions. While most religions have some kind of similar moral code because God has implanted right and wrong on our consciences (we'll discuss that in chapter 7), they disagree on virtually every major issue, including the nature of God, the nature of man, sin, salvation, heaven, hell, and creation!

Think about it: *the nature of God, the nature of man, sin, salvation, heaven, hell, and creation*. Those are the biggies! Here are a few of those big differences:

- Jews, Christians, and Muslims believe in different versions of a theistic God, while most Hindus and New Agers believe that everything that exists is part of an impersonal, pantheistic force they call God.
- Many Hindus believe that evil is a complete illusion, while Christians, Muslims, and Jews believe that evil is real.
- Christians believe that people are saved by grace while all other religions, if they believe in salvation at all, teach some kind of salvation by good works (the definition of “good” and what one is saved from varies greatly).

These are just a few of the many essential differences. So much for the idea that all religions teach basically the same things!

Truth vs. Tolerance

While most *religions* have some beliefs that are true, not all religious *beliefs* can be true because they are mutually exclusive—they teach opposites. In other words, some religious beliefs must be wrong. But you're not supposed to say that in America today. You're supposed to be “tolerant” of all religious beliefs. And in our culture today, tolerance no longer means to put up with something you believe to be false (after all, you don't tolerate things you agree with). *Tolerance now means that you're supposed to accept every belief as true!* In a religious context, this is known as religious pluralism—the belief that all religions are true. There are a number of problems with this new definition of tolerance.

First, let us say that we are thankful that we have religious freedom in this country, and we don't believe in imposing a religion legislatively (see our book *Legislating Morality*).³ We are well aware of the dangers of religious intolerance and believe that we should accept and respect people who have different religious beliefs. But that doesn't mean that

personally we ought to embrace the impossible notion that all religious beliefs are true. Since mutually exclusive religious beliefs cannot be true, it makes no sense to pretend that they are. In fact, on an individual level it can be dangerous to do so. If Christianity is true, then it's dangerous to your eternal destiny not to be a Christian. Likewise, if Islam is true, then it's dangerous to your eternal destiny not to be a Muslim.

Second, the claim that "you ought not question someone's religious beliefs" is itself a religious belief for pluralists. But this belief is just as exclusive and "intolerant" as any religious belief of a Christian or Muslim. In other words, pluralists think all non-pluralist beliefs are wrong. So pluralists are just as dogmatic and closed-minded as anyone else making truth claims in the public square. And they want everyone who disagrees with them to see things *their* way.

Third, the prohibition against questioning religious beliefs is also an absolute moral position. Why shouldn't we question religious beliefs? Would it be immoral to do so? And if so, by whose standard? Do pluralists have any good reasons supporting *their belief* that we ought not question religious beliefs, or is it just their own personal opinion that they want to impose on the rest of us? Unless they can give us good reasons for such a moral standard, why should we allow them to impose it on us? And why are pluralists trying to impose that moral position on us anyway? That's not very "tolerant" of them.

Fourth, the Bible commands Christians to question religious beliefs (e.g., Deut. 13:1-5; 1 John 4:1; Gal. 1:8; 2 Cor. 11:13; etc.). Since Christians have a religious belief that they ought to question religious beliefs, then pluralists—according to their own standard—should accept this Christian belief as well. But of course they do not. Ironically, pluralists—advocates of the new tolerance—are not really tolerant at all. They only "tolerate" those who already agree with them, which by anyone's definition is not tolerance.

Fifth, the pluralist's claim that we ought not question religious beliefs is a derivative of the false cultural prohibition against making judgments. The prohibition against judging is false because it fails to meet its own standard: "you ought not judge" is itself a judgment! (Pluralists misinterpret Jesus' comments on judging [Matt. 7:1-5]. Jesus did not prohibit judging as such, only judging hypocritically.) Indeed, everyone—the pluralist, the Christian, the atheist, the agnostic—makes

judgments. So the issue isn't whether or not we make judgments, but whether or not we make the *right* judgments.

Finally, are pluralists ready to accept as true the religious beliefs of Muslim terrorists—especially when those beliefs say that all non-Muslims (including pluralists) should be killed? Are they ready to accept as true the religious beliefs of those who believe in child sacrifice or other heinous acts? We hope not.

While we should respect the rights of others to believe what they want, we are foolish, and maybe even unloving, to tacitly accept every religious belief as true. Why is this unloving? Because *if* Christianity is true, then it would be unloving to suggest to anyone that their opposing religious beliefs are true as well. Affirming such error might keep them on the road to damnation. Instead, if Christianity is true, we ought to kindly tell them the truth because only the truth can set them free.

Once I Was Blind but Now I See

What does the vast plurality of religious beliefs tell us about truth in religion? At first glance, it might appear that the existence of so many contradictory beliefs just reinforces the elephant parable we mentioned in the introduction—namely, that truth in religion cannot be known. But exactly the opposite is the case.

To refresh your memory, in this parable an elephant is being examined by six blind men. Each man feels a different part of the elephant and thus reaches a different conclusion about the object in front of him. One grabs the tusk and says, “This is a spear!” Another holds the trunk and says, “This is a snake!” The one hugging the leg claims, “This is a tree!” The blind man holding the tail thinks, “I have a rope!” The one feeling the ear believes, “This is a fan!” And the one leaning on the elephant's side is certain, “This is a wall!” These blind men are said to represent world religions, because they each come to a different conclusion about what they are sensing. Like each blind man, we are told, no one religion has *the* truth. Religious truth is relative to the individual. It is subjective, not objective.

This may seem persuasive until you ask yourself one question: “What's the perspective of the one telling the parable?” Hmmm, let's see, the one telling the parable. . . . He appears to have an *objective* per-

spective of the entire proceeding because he can see that the blind men are mistaken. Exactly! In fact, he wouldn't know that the blind men were wrong unless he had an objective perspective of what was right!

So if the person telling the parable can have an objective perspective, why can't the blind men? They could—if the blind men suddenly could see, they too would realize that they were originally mistaken. That's really an elephant in front of them and not a wall, fan, or rope.

We too can see the truth in religion. Unfortunately, many of us who deny there's truth in religion are not *actually* blind but only *willfully* blind. We may not want to admit that there's truth in religion because that truth will convict us. But if we open our eyes and stop hiding behind the self-defeating nonsense that truth cannot be known, then we'll be able to see the truth as well. And not just truth in the areas where we demand it—money, relationships, health, law, etc.—but truth in religion as well. As the blind man healed by Jesus said, “Once I was blind, but now I see.”

The skeptic may say, “Wait a minute! The elephant parable may be a bad parable, but that still doesn't prove that truth in religion can be known. You've proven that truth can be known, but not necessarily truth in religion. In fact, didn't David Hume and Immanuel Kant disprove the idea of truth in religion?”

Not at all, and we'll discuss why in the next chapter.

SUMMARY

1. Despite the relativism that emanates from our culture, truth is absolute, exclusive, and knowable. To deny absolute truth and its knowability is self-defeating.
2. The “Road Runner” tactic turns a statement on itself and helps expose the self-defeating (and thus false) statements that are so common today. These include statements such as, “There is no truth!” (Is *that* true?); “All truth is relative!” (Is *that* a relative truth?); and “You can't know truth!” (Then how do you know *that*?). Basically, any statement that is unaffirmable (because it contradicts itself) must be false. Relativists are defeated by their own logic.
3. Truth is not dependent on our feelings or preferences. Something is true whether we like it or not.

4. Contrary to popular opinion, major world religions do not “all teach the same things.” They have essential differences and only superficial agreements. All religions cannot be true, because they teach opposites.
5. Since, logically, all religions cannot be true, we cannot subscribe to the new definition of tolerance that demands that we accept the impossible idea that all religious beliefs are true. We are to respect the beliefs of others, but lovingly tell them the truth. After all, if you truly love and respect people, you will tactfully tell them the truth about information that may have eternal consequences.