

**Fleming's "Establishing Christian America"; McDowell's "Does It Matter What I Believe?"; Wattenbarger's "Christianity"; Delusion v. Reality, 1 Jn 1:8 Protasis**

43. To emphasize the current crisis in Christendom, I now quote from an article by:

**Fleming, Thomas. "Establishing Christian America." *Chronicles*, June 2007, 10-12:**

We Americans like to think of our country as the most religious, the most Christian nation on the face of the earth. Whatever Americans may say they believe, they do not act like Christians. In a comparison of America's rates of divorce, teenage pregnancy, and abortion with those of the European Union countries, America's reputation for Puritanism takes a beating. Some of our rates are skewed by the somewhat different sexual mores of African- and Mexican-Americans, but they are, after all, Americans, and even discounting those minorities will not produce a statistical profile of the model citizens of the City on a Hill. We do attend church services more frequently than Europeans do, but here, too, the numbers are skewed by the high number of churchgoing Christians who are elderly, Southern, and female.

As (Alexis de) Tocqueville *\*tahk-vēll told us 150 years ago, we are a conventional people, afraid of controversy. Going to church, in most periods of our history, has entailed fewer social complications than a reputation for atheism. (p. 10)

The problem is the dangerous notion that religion is a matter solely between an individual and the god in whom he chooses to believe. In fact, from the beginning, the Christian Church acted as a community, not a random association of individuals, and, from the beginning, the Church spoke with the authority of the Holy Spirit, not only on matters of faith, but on morals and politics. (p. 11)

The American people were probably more Christian in 1850 than they had been in 1780, when the influence of Deism and rationalism were stronger. The federal government had no authority to interfere in the religious affairs of the states, though the passage of the 14th Amendment would eventually turn the Constitution—and American society with it—upside-down.

To explain the decline of American Christianity, conservatives continue to cling to the myth of a nation settled by pious believers seeking to found "a shining City on a Hill." But this republican Eden, on which God had uniquely bestowed His blessings, was corrupted by the Tempter. The American people are still, for the most part, good and faithful Christians, but they are under assault from immoral Hollywood movies, wicked journalists, and pointy-headed intellectuals, etc. We should ask ourselves this: Could men and women of strong faith really be corrupted by Hollywood movies that no Christian has any business going to see? If America were, in fact, a basically Christian or moral nation, Hollywood would be out of business, and so would most colleges and universities.

Conservative Christians are right to complain that they are being persecuted by the government, and I do not have a solution to this grave problem except to suggest that they are wasting their time in trying to change the laws. Instead, they might consider the example of early Christians living under the pagan Roman Empire.

Most Christians paid their taxes to Caesar, served in Caesar's army, and were good neighbors and loyal citizens of Caesar's empire. They did not engage in futile protests about infanticide, nor did they abuse and insult their pagan neighbors. They minded their own business, went to church, and prayed for the empire's conversion. If today's American Christians had the faith of a mustard seed, they would spurn the false prophets who have enslaved them to a party or political ideology and go about their Master's business. (p. 12)

44. And so the search for truth must go on but the only source that offers salvation and eternal life, confidence and courage, and rewards and blessings to its followers is the revelation of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob known to us as the Bible.

Review of principles from CC02-756: and CC02-757:

Verse 8 (of 1 John 1) introduces the warfare of Delusion versus Reality and takes up a second deception of the ascetic, self-righteous Gnostic who asserts that he has no sin, thus the truth is not in him.

Verse 8's delusion is that since we have no sin then mankind is inherently good. Good according to whom? Every ideology, every philosophy, every theology, and every cult draws those who think they have discovered the truth and if followed will make them good people and save the world from those who aren't.

I was questioned recently by one of our Prep School students that inquired, "How do we know that what we are learning is right and true?"

The honest answer is, "You don't *know* because the search for truth requires placing personal trust in a source that claims ownership of the title."

This very issue is addressed in the following excerpts from a book by:

**McDowell, Josh and Thomas Williams. "Does It Matter What I Believe?: The Truth about Truth." Chap. 1 in *In Search of Certainty*. (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003), 1-4:**

One evening at a denominational youth conference, I was speaking to a crowd of high school and college-age young people. These were not ordinary Christian kids; they were the brightest and most exceptional from their churches, handpicked by their leaders. I wanted to find out just how firm and knowledgeable these students were in their Christian beliefs. So at one point in the conference, I took a cordless microphone and waded into the crowd of lively, radiant faces.

Approaching one young man, I held up my Bible and asked, "Do you believe the Bible is the Word of God?"

"Yes!" he said with confidence and conviction.

I probed him further. "Do you believe the Bible is true?"

"Yes!" rang the answer again. (p. 1)

Then I asked, "Is it historically accurate and reliable?"

"O course!" he replied with confidence.

Then I lowered my voice and asked him, "Why?"

He looked back at me, shrugged his shoulders, and said, "That's a tough one."

I turned to another student and fired the same questions. He also enthusiastically agreed that the Bible is the true Word of God. But when I asked why he believed it, he also drew a blank.

It was the same with every student I interviewed that night. Each confidently affirmed belief in the Bible, but not one of them could tell me *why* he or she believed. Though these young people were the cream of the crop in their denomination, when it came to understanding the basis for their belief, they were stumped.

The next day at the morning session, a young man—I'll call him Darren—came up to me, bursting with excitement. "I know the answer," he said.

He caught me off guard, and I wasn't sure what he meant. "The answer to what?" I asked.

"The answer to your question about why the Bible is true."

"Wonderful," I said. "Let's hear it."

"Because I believe it," Darren replied.

I wanted to be sure I understood his point. I said, "Come again?"

He held up his Bible and said, "It is true because I believe it." He beamed as if he had just won a new Ferrari. The young people who had gathered around him smiled and nodded in enthusiastic agreement. A great mystery had apparently been solved.

I asked him, "Does this mean that the Bible would also be true for other kids in your school?"

"It is if they believe it," Darren responded. (p. 2)

I gazed at him for a moment. "Do you know the basic difference between you and me?" I asked. "To you the Bible is true because you believe it. For me, I believe the Bible because it is true." (pp. 2-3)

#### Which Comes First: Truth or Belief?

At first glance, my statement to this young Christian may sound as petty and insignificant as the debate over which came first, the chicken or the egg. Does it matter which comes first? Is one really more important than the other?

Yes, the difference I pointed out to Darren between these two approaches to belief and truth is significant. In fact, these views are diametrically opposed; you can't have it both ways. I assert that the Bible is inherently true even if one chooses not to believe it. Darren thinks the Bible is true for him or his friends *because* they believe it. I contend that truth is already established and we must respond to it with faith. His position is that we create truth by what we choose to believe. I say that truth exists as an objective reality outside ourselves and that it is true for all people, at all times, in all places. Darren says that truth is fluid and adaptable to one's own internal belief system. The difference between these two views is not merely an abstract theological point; it has far-reaching practical implications. Make no mistake: What you believe about the nature of truth will determine whether or not you find and experience certainty in your life. (p. 3)

Young people like Darren may feel some sense of certainty about their unexamined beliefs in the morning of their lives simply because life is full of hope and promise. Caught up in the busyness and energy of youth, few find the time to check out what they believe and why. But this unexamined sense of certainty will not carry them far. Sooner or later everyone's beliefs will be tested by jarring encounters with reality. At that point certainty will evaporate unless it is grounded firmly in absolute truth. (pp. 3-4)

In today's world, people are becoming less concerned with truth than with certainty. They see truth as an abstract concept that is perhaps of little practical concern. But they crave a sense of certainty because it gives them a feeling of security. That feeling may be unwarranted because people can feel certainty about beliefs that are false. And they can lack certainty about beliefs that are true. Actually, it's not really certainty that we should be searching for but a way to know solid truth. Knowing truth and knowing why you believe it will give you lasting certainty. You may feel certainty for a while without examining your beliefs, but at the end of the day no real, lasting certainty is possible unless you know your beliefs are firmly grounded in absolute truth. So, the search for certainty is really a search for truth. When people understand the absoluteness of truth—when they have solid reason to know that what they believe is truth—certainty will follow. (p. 4)

[The book *In Search of Certainty* is no longer in print but is available in the "Family with Teenager" package on the Beyond Belief Web site: [http://www.beyondbelief.com/crg\\_ftpsampler.spl](http://www.beyondbelief.com/crg_ftpsampler.spl)]

45. In conclusion I present a poem by my good friend out in Oildale, California that sums up the issue while leaving volition free to choose:

**Wattenbarger, James L. *Confessions of a Wordsmith*. (Oildale, Cal.: TCL Press, 2003), 144:**

#### "Christianity"

Is the God of the Bible the creator of ALL  
with a perfect plan?

Is planet earth serving as the courtroom  
to resolve an angelic conflict—Good vs. Evil?

Is Christ who and what He claims to be:  
the hypostatic union of deity and perfect man?  
God's provision for spiritual birth?

Christianity: Fact or Fairy Tale?

When arguments fail, when rhetoric falls short,  
it comes down to a matter of individual choice—

to believe, or not to believe.

I choose to believe ...

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46. One of the reasons there is an absence of truth is the idea that there is no sin, or that we do not sin. If a person doesn't have the humility to accept the fact he is fundamentally corrupt he will develop a set of values that establishes truth for him. This is self-deception and is the subject of our next verse.

#### XV. 1 John, Chapter 1:8, The War of Delusion vs. Reality:

**1 John 1:8 -** If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

1. This verse presents either an illusion or a delusion. The subtle difference between the two is pointed out by:

**Shaw, Harry. *Dictionary of Problem Words and Expressions*. (New York: Washington Square Press, 1975), 19-20:**

**Allusion, delusion, elusion, illusion.** These words, somewhat alike in sound and spelling, have different meanings and uses. An *allusion* is an indirect reference or mention: "He made an *allusion* to a character in a TV melodrama."

**Delusion means "a false belief," one usually held as a result of self-deception.** It is commonly used to refer to a person suffering from a mental disorder: "Bob suffers from *delusions* of grandeur." "Alice is under the *delusion* that she is Joan of Arc." *Elusion*, a rarely used word, means "an escape," "an evasion": "Not attending the meeting is an *elusion* of your obligation to vote." **Illusion** is related in meaning to *delusion*; it **refers to a false mental image or idea, to something that is imagined and that may or may not be based on fact:** "A mirage is an *illusion*." "At times, Charlie is under the *illusion* that he is a star football player." **A Delusion is more likely to be harmful or serious than is an illusion.**

2. What we have in verse 8 is more of a delusion, a false belief which can be the result of a pathological problem in which the person afflicted is unable to distinguish what is real and what only seems to be real. It can also be self-deception due to chronic residence and function in the cosmic systems.
3. Both categories can be in play in verse 8 since one's lifestyle in darkness eventually leads to a loss of both moral and spiritual direction. In a futile effort to reorder his soul, a person moves into delusions where self-deception creates an unreality that he perceives as reality which enables him to function.
4. In this way a believer in the cosmic systems is able to conjure a false reality that convinces him he is executing the Christian way of life.
5. The delusion of the believer in verse 8 is the assumed reality that he is in sinless perfection. He is not. He is in the cosmic systems and is covering up sin with a sin.
6. The sin he has committed is one that he wishes to justify as a good work. To do so he rationalizes through delusion that what he did was not sin but rather the clear and righteous application of doctrine.
7. The verse begins with the protasis of a third-class conditional sentence. It starts with the conditional particle **ἐάν, ean**, plus the aorist active subjunctive of **λέγω, legō**: "to contend, maintain, or assert."

aorist: Gnomonic; used to describe an event that "has taken place" over a long period of time or, like the present (tense), *does* take place. This presents the idea that there is nothing new about believers making this kind of assertion.

- active: Believers who have spent considerable time in the cosmic systems produce the action of the verb.
- subj.: Potential; implies future reference and implies the contingency that the believer is in the cosmic systems.
8. This is followed by the conjunction **ὅτι, *hoti*** which introduces the content of the delusion, translated “that.” The delusion is stated next beginning with the present active indicative of the verb **ἔχω, *echō*** plus the negative conjunction **οὐκ, *ouk***: “we do not have”:
- present: Aoristic (also referred to as an Instantaneous present); denotes punctiliar action in present time and sets forth an event as now occurring.
- active: Cosmic, deluded believers produce the action.
- indicative: Declarative; indicates that the statement is real and thus a statement of fact: these kinds of delusions do occur among believers.
9. The description of the delusion follows with the direct object, **ἁμαρτία, *hamartia***: “a sinful nature.”
- 1 John 1:8a - [protasis of a third class condition ] If we assert that we do not have an old sin nature ...**
10. Several conclusions about this person’s attitude can be drawn from the protasis: (1) A person who asserts that he has no sinful nature also contends that he does not sin. (2) The opinion that he has no sin leads to the opinion that he is righteous before God. (3) This means that he considers his standards of behavior to be righteous. (4) By complying with these self-established standards he reinforces his view of personal righteousness. (5) This attitude is indicative of self-righteous arrogance, gate 4 of the arrogance complex. (6) Belief that one’s standards are righteous and therefore superior motivates him to try and impose them on others. (7) Often at this point the arrogance of self-righteousness interlocks with authority arrogance and power lust as he seeks to impose his standards on others by force. (8) Those who disagree are considered benighted and become objects of ridicule, character assassination, and dictatorial control by the self-appointed anointed.
11. This is a dangerous disposition that creates extreme asceticism in the church and tyrants outside it. In the church such people head up Clipboard Committees while in the political world he can become a Robespierre and preside over a reign of terror.