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A Liberal Christian's Perspective on Christianity in America

[FEATURED POST] For The Record (an interlude)

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Before diving into the deep nuances of random Bible topics, I wanted to take some time to reflect a little on how I've gone about the blog and reinforce my motivation for starting it. Hopefully, you will get a better sense of my headspace at the moment and what my plans are for the future of the blog.

Why I Am Writing This Blog (again)

As I said in my first blog post, I aim to (1) bring more perspectives into Christian discourse and (2) to show those who aren't Christian that there are more perspectives than what is currently mainstream. But the core issue that inspires me is in that second point, that many aspects of "mainstream" Christianity are inherently flawed, and can lead us to very problematic areas (as they have done in the past). I think the most glaring flaw, as I have mentioned, is the way that the Bible is deified and done so in an uneven manner, where certain verses that are more useful for structuring power and values are prioritized over others. In this blog, I'll admit, I have been extremely hard on the Bible. Hopefully, if you've read through it, you can understand that the reason that I've gone about it this way is to show just how problematic some of it can be if we approach it in the way we currently do, how unclear and conflicting it is at times, and how it absolutely should not be looked at as the final, uncontestable word of God or the peak of morality.

How I Interact With The Bible

I want to cover more aspects of this in this post, but before that, I again want to say that I believe that the Bible is such a beautiful and interesting book that does have divine inspiration in it. I still read it every day, in an effort to not only gain information about it but to gain wisdom from it. Of course, the way I interact with it has changed since I started to deconstruct. The main thing that has changed is that I don't take a lot of it as seriously as I once did. You can kind of see this in the way I talked about the Genesis creation accounts in the last blog post. When you accept that the Bible is written by flawed people with flawed perspectives, there is a lot to laugh at, and everything becomes so much more interesting! Instead of trying to justify or solve a lot of the Bible's problems, you get to dive into why they exist in the first place. (**So TL/DR**, I love the Bible, and I have no issues with it as a product of its time, I only take issue with the expectations put on it by many Christians.)

(EXAMPLE (can be ignored)): For an example, let's look at another interesting predicament in Genesis, where Cain (after killing Abel) is sent to the land of Nod to live the rest of his years. The interesting thing here is that based on the narrative thus far, the only people on earth at the moment are Adam, Eve, and Cain¹, but yet Cain is worried that he will be killed by someone after he is banished (and God confirms this risk as well). This is a contradiction. Now, many generations of Christians have tried to reconcile this hole, all in ways that have proved

¹ We know this because in Genesis 4:1, Eve remarks on being able to produce "a man with the help of the Lord" when she has Cain and then in Genesis 4:25, Eve says the reason for Seth being named such is that God appointed for her another child instead of Abel. There really isn't much room for there to be more kids (& especially not sons) from Adam & Eve in the picture here.

insufficient. However, the most likely scholarly explanation is that Genesis 4 was originally composed separately from Genesis 2-3, and was likely an *etiology* (which is, again, a story that is made to explain why things are the way they are) for how a certain nomadic people group (the Kenites) came to be. The idea is that just like their ancestor Cain, the Kenites are doomed to wander forever. Eventually, this story was combined with Genesis 2-3, which is why we go from Adam and Eve being the only ones on earth to there being other potentially hostile peoples in the surrounding lands. Another big Genesis etiology is the story where Noah's son Ham sees his father drunk and naked and does nothing, causing Noah to curse Ham's son Canaan to being a slave of his brothers as well as Ham's brothers Shem and Japheth (and this etiology exists to justify the people of Israel enslaving and murdering a LOT of Canaanites in the Old Testament). This passage was also used to justify slavery and racism in America, though this is more due to a misreading of text than to a problematic Bible endorsement. But as I've mentioned, the most likely happening is way more interesting than being forced by dogma to make these verses make sense while treating every word as inspired by God. Another point to make here is that all of these happenings are probably (most likely) fictional!! Acknowledging this makes contradictory elements of the story less important and the message behind it more important.

So, as I've been saying, I read the Bible for the same reason that other Christians do, but I also keep in mind that it is a product of its time and that it has some ideologies that are outdated and backwards considering what we know today. Does this resolve every issue/concern in understanding the Bible? No. However, it does make Bible reading less stressful and intense.

For example, let's talk about how God is portrayed in the Old Testament. All throughout, we see points where God does or says things that are wrathful, genocidal, or just really unsettling, especially given how we see God today. In the story of the Exodus, the murder of all of Egypt's first born sons is commissioned by God. What appears to the writers of this book as an impressive and strategic act of power by a great warrior God reads to us a genocide of many innocent lives, especially since the only person attributed some sort of fault in this story is the leader of Egypt (and even he doesn't have complete free will here, as his heart is apparently hardened by God (Exodus 10:1, 10:20)). It's the same with the rest of the God-ordained brutal conquests of enemy peoples or the points in books like Psalms where people are praying for the brutalization of their enemy peoples, explicitly including women and children. Many people today try to defend these stories by saying things like "God can do what God wants" or "those people deserved it"², but the more likely (and less problematic) explanation is simply that people at this time expected their God to do things like this for them. In fact, all ancient people groups at this time were thought to have a patron deity that went to war with them. (The Bible says that the "Most High" assigned gods to each people group, and that Yahweh was assigned to Israel this way (Deuteronomy 32:8-9).) Hence, every military victory/decision is attributed to God.

I would argue that this is NOT an actual attribute of God, and more of a bottom up understanding of God by the writers of the Bible.³ Many point out the seeming change of the character of God in the New Testament (where God seems much less genocidal), but I would say that this is the result of a change in how God is perceived by us, not a divine character change. Also, most scholars would say that many of these events (the Flood, the Exodus, Israel's seemingly destructive military victories) didn't happen, or at least, not to the extent that they are presented in the Bible. I personally think that part of the reason Jesus came to earth

² I do think there are points where we have to accept our limited knowledge and realize that God is God (as Job did), but turning our brains off and not at the very least questioning these things is, in my opinion, not what God intended.

³ It's important to admit that this opinion, of course, is coming from my bottom up understanding of God, but there really is no escaping that. I have no qualms with the writers of the Bible considering God in this way, but I do humbly disagree, and hopefully I explain why relatively well.

was to alter this perception by revealing the true character of God. Of course, there is still much more to learn and understand about God, and I doubt we will ever fully see God and other spiritual elements from God's perspective. I mean, even what we know about Jesus is tainted by the views and agendas of the gospel authors. But that very fact is my entire point here. Throughout I and many others' upbringing, many things within Christianity and the Bible have been taught with such certainty that you'd never think of questioning them at the time (or you'd be too scared to question them). Hence, we approach the Bible with a ton of expectations and prerequisites of the text (complete divine inspiration, inerrancy, univocality, historicity, etc.), and we run into contradictions, problematic divine endorsements, scientific inaccuracies, and more. These types of problems have played a role in some pretty horrible historical events, like the Crusades, imperialism, slavery, witch hunts, anti-Semitism (including the Holocaust), and more. They also continue to be a part of the oppression of many marginalized communities today, and it's up to us to be more cognizant of how these dogmas we uphold may continue to perpetrate these cycles of oppression.

However, if we take these expectations of the Bible away, none of these problems really matter (which works to the detriment of many anti-religious talking points). This also allows us to engage with the Bible more honestly, as we are looking for the *most likely* understanding of events and commands in the Bible based on cultural context, not just the one that supports our expectations/presuppositions the most. My faith journey has essentially forced me to open my mind to new possibilities in this regard, and I write this blog to challenge others to do the same and advocate for a Christianity that will bring people closer to God while not misleading them with dogmatic beliefs/traditions that only lead to harm and confusion. Unfortunately, many authorities within Christianity chose instead to continue to push these dogmas/indoctrination for the continued structuring of power and values, as well as the continuation of the unfair systems that are in place. In my experience, doing this only pushes potential believers away from the faith and leads people to label religion as a device of control.

My approach does come with its drawbacks, though. For one, there is a massive gray area when it comes to what to believe and how to live one's life when you can't take everything in the Bible as coming directly from God. Even though there are verses that are very clearly sourced from human beliefs at the time, there are many others that *could* be under this umbrella, but also could be important parts of being a Christian today. These types of gray areas are what I hope to dive into in future posts.

In the meantime, I'd like to point out a great resource for studying the Bible in the way I'm proposing here. **The Bible For Normal People** (founded by Dr. Pete Enns) is a podcast/website/organization run by Christians that basically explains some of the hard-to-understand parts of the Bible with the help of modern Biblical scholarship. They have a podcast (accessible for free on pretty much any podcast platform) with hundreds of episodes covering the Bible (called The Bible for Normal People) and the practical aspects of being a Christian or person of faith (Faith for Normal People). They also do video lectures through their website on a pay what you can basis (as long as you pay before the lecture). So for very little money, you can learn A LOT about the Bible and about the practical aspects of being a Christian. They also have written guides to certain books of the Bible for purchase online. They've been very helpful to me post-deconstruction, and even if some of what I'm saying here is a little progressive for you, these resources are definitely worth exploring. Here's a link to the website, and be sure to check out their social media (IG & Tiktok) as well.
<https://thebiblefornormalpeople.com/>

(footnotes for those using an app)

¹ We know this because in Genesis 4:1, Eve remarks on being able to produce "a man with the help of the Lord" when she has Cain and then in Genesis 4:25, Eve says the reason for Seth being named such is that God appointed for her another child instead of Abel. There really isn't much room for there to be more kids (& especially not sons) from Adam & Eve in the picture here.

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QUESTION ONE: Why are you writing this? What made you want to start this project?

The main reason is simple: I feel that my perspective is very unique, and I have a lot of things to add to the discourse of many hot button issues in the Christian community. Throughout my five years of engaging in a campus ministry at Georgia Tech (Chi Alpha), I have found it hard to really bring forth my perspective on a lot of issues due to my personal struggles with being a people pleaser (and not wanting to start conflict), as well it being hard from me to speak effectively in a lot of situations, especially tense ones. However, I feel that writing here will give me more freedom to express myself and allow me to fully develop my points. My main goal for this “blog” is to (1) encourage more diversity of thought in Christian circles and (2) show those who are unfamiliar with Christianity or those who were formerly Christian that there are more perspectives of Christianity than the ones that are shown the most (i.e. the perspectives usually held by conservatives and/or traditionalists).

[EDIT] To my fellow Christians, I would like to say that a lot of what I say on here is pretty controversial to the standard Christian perspective, but I hope that it is at least understandably so. Please feel free to talk to me or DM me if you want to ask questions or discuss some of these points I'm making.

What in your life has contributed to this “different perspective”?

Well, I was raised in church like many Christians, and I went to Christian private elementary school as well, so I had a pretty solid grounding in Christianity. However, growing up with parents who usually voted Democrat, I had some different views than a lot of my peers at that time, who were a lot more conservative. The slight dissonance definitely affected me at some points, but it wasn't really something that I cared too much about. In most issues where Christianity clashed with social issues, I sided with what I had been taught, which was normally the Christianity side. By the end of my middle school years, I considered myself fiscally liberal and socially conservative. I was in favor of free education, closing the wealth gap, and free healthcare, but also pretty pro-life, anti-LGBTQ+, anti-evolution, and relatively iffy on modern feminism (due to modesty/purity culture, mostly). I also had a 2 year long climate change denier phase later, in high school, but we don't talk about that...

Anyways, I went to a public high school, and slowly but surely, a lot of these perspectives began to change. I was challenged on a lot of aspects of my faith, as well as many aspects of my political views that related to my faith, and this made me start to question what I had been taught. This was a very important step, because it led me to get a better understanding of Christianity and learn more about how history/science supported a lot of the main tenets of the faith. I also had a few very real spiritual experiences that cemented my belief in the truth of Christianity. In this process, my faith became my own, and I'm still a committed

Christian to this day. However, a lot of my political/science beliefs related to my upbringing in faith began to just not make sense anymore. By the end of high school, I had changed my mindset to some extent on most of those beliefs. Through a combination of discussions and personal scientific investigation, I started to accept certain aspects of evolution as scientific truth. Various challenges to my pro-life stance, mainly through social media, made me become more of a “pro-life in theory, pro-choice in practice” person, though I would continue to waver on where I stood for a while. In terms of my stance on the LGBTQ+ community, I quickly realized upon interacting with others in secular circles (around the beginning of high school) that the idea of being gay wasn’t some weird freak alien concept that no sane person believed, and through interacting with and making friends with gay people, I realized that a lot of my predispositions about how people “become” gay were blatantly untrue. From my AP Psychology textbook in 12th grade, I learned more of the science behind what I had been hearing, basically that homosexuality is a natural occurrence in many species on earth, and that one’s sexual orientation is determined way before anyone could make a “choice”.

Due to all these influences, as I started college, I moved into an era of cognitive dissonance. How could I accept the science of evolution while believing in the account of Genesis? How could I support the LGBTQ+ community when the Bible seems to clearly outline that it’s a sin? How could I be accepting of society moving away from traditional familial structures if the Bible and a lot of the Christians I interacted with seemed to advocate for a return to these seemingly outdated traditions? I knew that the science was correct, and I knew that Christianity was true, so what could give?

Well, it turned out that I had to *deconstruct* what my upbringing in the faith had taught me. What is the Bible? What does it actually say? Does situational context change the meaning? Why do I believe certain things about the Bible and about Christianity? Why have I been taught a certain perspective on Scripture? I sought to explore all of these questions through lots of thought, through prayer, and through research. In this process, I gained a new understanding of Christianity and of the Bible, one that I believe is much closer to the true meaning. In this new perspective, I can fully align myself with the scientific truth of our reality. I have now completely flipped in perspective on the conservative opinions I talked about having before high school. With the next few chapters of this blog, I will explain exactly what has changed about how I interact with the faith and the Bible. I have talked about a lot of science that influenced my change in thought, but I would like to make clear that a lot of what has cemented my left leaning views are what I have found in studying the Bible as well. That is a big part of what I will talk about going forward.

[EDIT] To learn more about my deconstruction process and how my core understanding of Christianity and The Bible has changed, head to QUESTION 5.

QUESTION TWO: What is the main issue with Christianity today?

For the Georgia Tech Spring 2023 graduation ceremony, Kansas City Chiefs kicker and Georgia Tech alumni Harrison Butker gave a very interesting speech. In it, he claimed that the antidote to depression, loneliness, and anxiety was simple: to get married and start a family. Now, for me, this claim is untrue for a lot of reasons, the most obvious of which is that there are many married people with kids who are still unfulfilled in their lives, hence the high rates of divorce in America. Also, the idea that someone can fix all their problems through getting married is very unhealthy. Also also, many people's source of depression/anxiety IS their family, usually due to some sort of abuse, mistreatment, or abandonment. Of course, I think that good family relationships and friendships are important for happiness, and I do believe that getting married and starting a family can be fulfilling for a lot of people, but acting like that is the solution for everyone is very close-minded and ignorant.

However, what shocked me more (and what inspires this blog entry) was the condoning of this statement by the Christian community, many saying that this outlines God's main purpose of man on earth. This idea is based pretty much entirely in the Bible in the book of Genesis, from God's commandment in Genesis to the Earth's early inhabitants: "Be fruitful and multiply." Because of this, many Christians today consider it a large part of God's divine purpose for pretty much every person to do this, and they consider our culture's movement away from this traditional structure as the downfall of society. Calls for a return to the "traditional family" are at the forefront of what many Christians propose to solve today's issues. To me however, this very belief outlines 2 major problems in Christianity today:

1. **Christians ignore the temporal and situational context of the Bible.**

Let's focus on this command to be fruitful and multiply, which is found a few times in the first few books of the Bible. What is the context of these verses? Even more importantly, what is *different* about the context of these verses and the context of today? When God commands this, he is speaking either speaking to Adam and Eve (the first humans on earth according to the Bible's account of creation), Noah and his sons (the only humans left after the flood), and people of Israel (a nation that would need to become strong in number to stand up against enemy invasions and protect the generational line of the coming Messiah). In all of these situations, reproduction is necessary for the continuation of God's plan and of humanity. In our current time, this is clearly not the case. We live in an overpopulated world where reproduction may actually lead to the discontinuation of humanity. Along with the earliest commands to be fruitful and multiply is the call to subdue and rule over the earth, something that has been pretty much accomplished at this point. Hence, it is pretty clear that this command was for a specific point in time and a specific people, not an eternal command (or, at the very least, this command is nowhere near as important in today's world). This becomes more evident when we talk about the next point.

2. Christians selectively magnify Scripture that supports their external worldview, while ignoring/negotiating with other scripture that may endorse a perspective that goes against their worldview.

The Bible says a lot about marriage, and it's clear that marriage (or at least, the personal and intimate side of it) is viewed in a positive light (for example, Genesis 2:24). Much of the Bible is devoted to explaining how to go about marriage in a godly way. Marriage is even used to describe the relationship between Jesus and the Church. (**EDIT:** which is actually pretty telling of how unequal marriage was back then, but that's for another discussion.) However, it is important to acknowledge that marriage was never presented as a command for everyone to follow, and that the plight of the institution of marriage was not the focus of any part of Scripture. It was just a major part of the social structure and relationships of that time in many cultures, so of course, it was a major topic in Scripture. In addition, the idea of what marriage entails changes throughout the Bible. For me, it is very funny when people talk about protecting "Biblical marriage" as some single thing, since technically (if we really wanna get into it), the institution of marriage in the Bible varied from being polygamous to being transactional, and in most cases, it involved treating the wife as subordinate or even in some cases, as property. But that's for another discussion....

Throughout the Bible, there are many who didn't get married, most notably the apostle Paul. Not only did Paul remain celibate his entire life, he had some things to say about marriage that are pretty different. In 1 Corinthians 7:8-9, Paul says that it is better for those who are single to stay single and celibate like him, so that they are fully dedicated to the Lord. He also says that single people should only get married if they are essentially unable to control their sexual desire, which is definitely a unique portrayal of what marriage is. It is important to know that this perspective is influenced by popular philosophies at the time (which is another aspect of scriptural interpretation I would love to talk about, but that's for another blog post) and also based on Paul's belief that the second coming of Christ was imminent, but it is still a part of Scripture that can't be just ignored. Similar perspectives also occur in Matthew and in Luke. I would even say that the context of these is *more* relevant to our time than the context of the "Be fruitful and multiply" command. My point in mentioning these verses is that it is never talked about or explored, while other verses that talk more positively about marriage are widely referenced. Why? Because the latter support a view of society that is more familiar to many believers and more closely related to Christianity's traditions. We continuously use our beliefs and traditions to interpret Scripture, instead of using a more accurate interpretation of Scripture to influence our beliefs. There are many other examples of this (for example, in regards to abortion), and they will be covered in future posts.

Through all this, we see that in today's world, getting married and having kids, though definitely a great thing for those who want it (I definitely do), should not be put at the forefront of every person's purpose on earth today. More importantly, the fact that today's society is moving away from "traditional" marriage (which, again, is not at all related to "Biblical" marriage) and the nuclear family structure should not be as big of a concern for Christians as it is today. Also, referring back to Harrison Butker's speech, if we as Christians really want to solve the

widespread depression and anxiety in our society, we should focus on actual solutions like changing the widespread stigma around mental health, better healthcare (including therapy), promoting healthier styles of thinking, and resolving the prevalent wealth inequality in society.

As shown with this specific topic, these issues are mainly tied to how we interpret Scripture. A major mistake Christians today make when interpreting Scripture is making the Bible into something it's not. We read the Bible like everything in it is relevant to our culture today, when much of it is written to an audience that lived a whole 2000 years before us and just saw the world differently. I think the biggest example is treating the Bible as the source of scientific truth, when much of the "science" in it was based on popular beliefs at the time and is pretty inaccurate considering what we know today. Even within the Bible, we see many changes of perspective based on changes within that time (we just talked about one earlier!). We'll discuss these things more when we talk about Biblical perspectives on sexual orientation, evolution, gender identity, and other related issues.

So why mention all this? Well, these issues tie into the main issue with Western Christianity today, which is that we have the wrong *focus*. Instead of focusing on the main mission Jesus gave to us as Christians (i.e. to spread the good news of Jesus Christ's resurrection and the restoring of our relationship with God), we've allowed our dogma and traditions to divert our focus to preserving institutions that aren't relevant to the mission and to creating enemies out of people just trying to live their lives. This topic will be revisited once we discuss some of these "diversions of focus" in detail, starting with a very topical one...

QUESTION THREE: What does the Bible say about homosexuality?

I make the claim that the Bible says **nothing** about sexual orientation (as we understand it today). However, it's important to acknowledge that this is not just *my* claim, this position is held by many Bible scholars. Why can I and many others confidently make this claim? Because the idea of sexual orientation as we understand it today was unbeknownst to those who lived in Bible times. In fact, the idea of sexuality as an orientation is a rather recent discovery from the 1800s. Humans living in Bible times had no grasp of innate attraction towards the same sex and had a lot of theories around (mostly male) homosexual intercourse and what "caused" it (theories that are very untrue and also rather unsavory considering what we know today); these represent the *entirety* of the discourse the Bible offers on the topic. *Hence, anywhere that the word "homosexuality" appears in your Bible is a mistranslation.* To understand the view (or at least, the view that most scholars are leaning towards) the authors of the Bible had on this, we need to understand their very interesting view of sex in general.

Sex & Social Hierarchy in Bible Times

At that time of history, there was a very strict social hierarchy, and any attempt to upend such hierarchy was considered an abomination. Men, as you'd expect, were at the top of this

hierarchy. Sex at this time was basically seen as a representation of this hierarchy, where men dominated their female counterparts through penetration. Hence, there were two categories of people when it comes to sex: the active role (meant to be the penetrator) and the passive role (meant to be the penetrated). Hence, homosexual intercourse was a violation of this hierarchical order, as it subjugated another man (who should only be the dominator in sex) to the submissive and passive role. There was no versatile role in sex, and even in heterosexual intercourse, there were restrictions that reflected this perspective. For example, sexual positions with the woman on top would have been prohibited and seen in a similar way as homosexual intercourse in most of ancient Mesopotamia. Here is a paper that explains this perspective more <https://hcommons.org/deposits/objects/hc:18030/datastreams/CONTENT/content>

All verses that have been wielded against the LGBTQ+ community (these verses are usually referred to as the clobber passages) are verses that reflect this flawed perspective to some extent, and now, we will go through each of them and show this.

GENESIS 19: Sodom & Gomorrah

Sodom and Gomorrah were cities that were destroyed by God for their sin. However, contrary to what many have asserted, what they were destroyed for was not homosexuality, but likely inhospitality towards visitors. In Genesis 19, two angels came to Sodom and were housed by a man named Lot. Then, all of the men of Sodom surrounded Lot's house and threatened to rape the angels. Lot pleads with these men, even offering his daughters to be raped instead, but they continue to try and force their way in. Eventually, the angels strike the men with blindness and they eventually give up and disperse. Then, the angels help Lot to escape the city before it was destroyed with fire and brimstone.

Now, here I ask a very interesting question. Was every man in Sodom a homosexual? Probably not, as (again) there was no sense of sexuality as an orientation at this time, and the text most certainly does not indicate such. Hence, it is likely these men were probably not motivated by sexual desire, but by *power*. The issue with these men threatening to rape these angels (who in this story, are seen as male) is that they are trying to exert power and dominance over other men (because these 2 men were outsiders). Moreover, they are trying to exert power over *angels*, which are regarded as even higher entities. Due to the social hierarchy and sexual ethic at the time (as talked about earlier), any attempt to exert power over another person at the top of the hierarchy (a man or angel) in this way was seen as very wrong (because it was seen as taking away their intrinsic power), and that was the main issue in this story. **[EDIT]** Hospitality was extremely important at this time, this was basically the worst way to treat an outsider (as in to emasculate and demean him).

Even today, we see this phenomenon in many rape and sexual assault cases, where the main motivator is usually power and not sexual desire. No perspective of this story in Scripture attributes the sin of Sodom to homosexuality or even homosexual intercourse. Ezekiel attributes the sin of Sodom to pride, carelessness, and not helping the poor and needy, and the author of Jude attributes it to the perversion of man trying to sleep with angels (described as "other flesh").

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

These verses are used as the crux of the argument that the Bible is against homosexuality. In these verses, we see a prohibition on male homosexual intercourse. However,

these verses cannot be used as a prohibition of homosexuality today for multiple reasons. For one, these verses likely reflect the obsolete social hierarchy and gender roles that we've been discussing. These are a few indicators of this. In the original language of the text, there is an awkward switch from singular to plural in Leviticus 20, implying that the original punishment was originally only for the man in the active role in the intercourse, and it was later changed to include both partners in the condemnation. Also, there is no mention of female homosexual intercourse. Some would say that this is because the writers just weren't concerned about women, but in the very next verse in both chapters, in the prohibition of bestiality, women are mentioned. This means that this omission was likely intentional. Third, in Deuteronomy 22:5, the Bible forbids a woman to wear a man's clothing, and a man to wear women's clothing, calling it an abomination in the same way (as in using the same word) as for male homosexual intercourse in Leviticus. This indicates how strict the social hierarchy and gender roles were and supports the view of Leviticus in the same light. For these reasons, many Old Testament scholars are leaning towards this interpretation of these verses. Take this quote from a survey of scholarly perspectives, written by Mark Stone of Emory University.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361182281_Don't_Do_What_to_Whom_A_Survey_of_Historical-Critical_Scholarship_on_Leviticus_1822_and_2013_Currents_in_Biblical_Research_203_2022_203-233_UNCORRECTED_PRE-PRINT):

"The sheer variety of proposals about Lev. 18.22/20.13 should lead us to emphasize the tentative nature of any hypothesis. While we might find some arguments more compelling than others, all are ultimately more suggestive than decisive. At present, no clear consensus exists, but research trends reflect a growing resistance to understanding the law as a blanket condemnation of 'homosexuality'. As the survey has shown, many now find this to be an unacceptable category error and opt for alternative proposals related to issues of power and social class, ancient conceptions of appropriate gender roles, and maintaining the proper boundaries between these categories."

As shown here, there is no clear understanding of these verses, and using them to condemn the LGBTQ+ community today is based on dogma and not actual data. In addition, this also represents how many Christians arbitrarily choose which verses to obey and which to ignore. There are many other interesting forbidden things in Levitical law, like wearing mixed fabrics, trimming beards, getting tattoos, and others, but many Christians do not adhere to these. Some try to distinguish between what to follow and what not to by saying that some laws were moral and others were ceremonial, but this distinction was not present in Scripture and is also completely arbitrary.

Romans 1:26-27

In Romans 1, Paul basically theorizes about how a lot of the sexual promiscuity he witnessed in Greco-Roman culture came about. He essentially

says that because people "exchanged the truth for a lie" and worshiped the "creature (i.e. mortal humans and animals) rather than the Creator", God's essentially "gave them over" to "degrading and vile passions" like promiscuity, homosexual intercourse, etc **[[EDIT]]** basically saying that lust for homosexual intercourse is the Gentiles' "punishment" for idol worship]. First of all, it is important to acknowledge that Paul's "theory" here is just wrong. He attributes homosexual behavior to people turning from God to worship idols and considers it "unnatural", when we know today that homosexual behavior is a natural occurrence of many species on our

planet **[[EDIT]** and is natural in humans too, as modern biology would illustrate], and also that there are many who worship the Creator and happen to be homosexual. Also, Paul most certainly had a similar perspective of sex and social hierarchy that we've talked about, as we'll see in the next section. Moreover, this is yet **another** instance where we accept some of Paul's sexual ethic and ignore other parts. As talked about in the previous article, Paul viewed marriage and sex as something one does if they can't control their sexual desire enough to be single, and wanted all single people to stay single. **[[EDIT]** And if you accept that Timothy was written by Paul (it wasn't), he also says that women shouldn't speak in church (citing the story of the Fall as a reason why AND saying that women will be saved by childbirth 🧠), and almost no one accepts that today] Today, many Christians ignore this verse or consider Paul's view irrelevant here, but then use his flawed perspective as truth when it's about something they agree with.

1 Corinthians 6:9 and other verses

This verse essentially lists examples of those who are unrighteous. Many translations of this verse used the word "homosexuals", but this is a mistranslation. The word Paul used here actually refers to the active partner of an instance of male same sex intercourse, while the word before it (usually translated as "effeminate") was a reference to the passive partner in male same sex intercourse. Again we see the flawed ancient framework of sex and social hierarchy. These two roles presented were rigid (no such thing as a versatile role) and were seen to have different pathologies and motivations. Most scholars see this verse as a direct reference to the passages in Leviticus. And yet again, there also is no mention of female same sex intercourse. For these reasons, this verse cannot be used to condemn homosexuality as it is today, as the perspective it employs is simply untrue based on what we know today. The same logic applies to a similar verse in Timothy.

Alright, so that pretty much covers all the verses of note. Again, it is important to acknowledge that the Bible is not a science book, and we must consider the context and the perspective of those writing it before applying it to today. I wanted to talk about gender identity and discuss what the Bible says about transgender people today (again, the answer is nothing), but that will probably be another article entry.

So where do we go from here? So, as mentioned, a lot of Christians have wielded these verses against gay people today. Although I think this perspective is wrong and problematic for many reasons, I can understand how people who have been taught their whole lives that the Bible is univocal and the source of scientific truth would come to the conclusion that homosexuality is a sin. However, what has angered me is the bigotry of Christians who, perhaps in an effort to justify these verses, have dehumanized and vilified the gay community for wanting the freedom to be who they are and be represented. All this homophobia has created is more division, and it has caused a lot of gay people to associate the hatred they've received with Christianity and Jesus, whose message has nothing to do with one's sexual orientation. So I urge Christians who are reading this to unpack any internalized biases you may have against the LGBTQ+ community and to really consider what perspective you may have developed on this issue. Also, a big part of me coming to terms with my internalized

homophobia was talking and becoming friends with queer people, so I highly recommend having conversations with these people!

Please feel free to reach out to me for any questions about the information I've presented here. Anyway, it's time for another hot button issue.

QUESTION FOUR: How can you be a pro-choice Christian?

Abortion and its legality are some of the most hotly debated topics in America's current political landscape. I have even added my thoughts to the discourse on my social media many times; I plan to do so here as well, but first, I would like to talk specifically about the Christian's position on abortion, and why **there is absolutely no Biblically supported opinion on abortion**. With this being said, many of the viewpoints expressed in the Bible related to arguments within the abortion debate actually resonate with the pro-choice side of the argument.

A huge topic of today's abortion debate is when exactly the fetus gains the right to life, and many within Christianity have used the Bible to argue that this right begins at conception, specifically Jeremiah 1:5. In this verse, God tells the prophet Jeremiah that He knew him "before [He] formed him in the womb". Many people use this verse (and similar ones like Psalm 137 and Luke 1) to show that a fetus is a God-planned person at conception, and therefore, abortion is murder, but this is a jump in logic for a few reasons:

1. Let's look at this verse in its full context :

The word of the LORD came to me, saying,

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew^[a] you,
before you were born I **set you apart**;
I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."

-Jeremiah 1:4-5

With this context, it is clear that this verse is describing Jeremiah as an **exceptional circumstance**, someone who God had specifically appointed and "set... apart" for his exact role even before he was conceived. This is not some general statement about all humans, and it has nothing to do with a fetus's right to life. A similar instance occurs in Luke 1, talking specifically about the fetus of John the Baptist being moved by the Holy Spirit. The same logic applies.

2. Even if this was a general statement about every human on earth, all this verse would be saying is that God has foreseen everyone and everything who is alive on the earth today

from conception. This also applies to animals and plants, who do not have legal and moral personhood. Also, (if we want to get more technical) the potential line of logic here is: “if you are a person today, God foresaw and planned your exact purpose from the very beginning”. This doesn’t say anything about when said personhood begins. Hence, this verse clearly does not support the claim that a fetus has the full rights of a person in any way.

3. Keep in mind that the verse doesn’t say “when you were in the womb”, and instead says “**before** I formed you”. If this was attesting to the moral personhood of a fetus, then a fetus would be a person even *before* it was conceived, meaning that a couple who plans to have a child and eventually decides against it would be guilty of murder of a hypothetical child (insert skull emoji).

So when does the Bible attribute full moral personhood?

So, based on what we see in the Bible, it’s most likely that moral personhood was attributed when a human took their first breath (i.e. birth in most cases). We know this because that is how Adam was brought to life (God breathed life into him) and because we know it was the common belief in ancient Jewish culture from extra-Biblical sources (and funnily enough, the Jewish rabbis during that time actually attributed personhood even later) (see source <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2582082/>).

Now this is where we get to the really interesting part. There is actually a verse in the Bible that ensures that a fetus absolutely did not have moral personhood. See Exodus 21:22-23:

22 When people who are fighting injure a pregnant woman so that there is a miscarriage, and yet no further harm follows, the One responsible shall be fined what the woman’s husband demands, paying as much as the judges determine. 23 If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, 24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, 25 burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

In this verse, we see that the death of a fetus (miscarriage) results in only a fine paid, while harm to the mother is “life for a life, hand for a hand....” This verse clearly shows that a fetus is not granted full personhood in Scripture.

If you look up this verse in your Bible, there is probably another translation of this verse, where instead of miscarriage, the fine is only delivered if the woman gives birth prematurely and the child lives. It is important to note that this translation is rejected by most Old Testament scholars, mainly because this verse (actually, pretty much all of this chapter) is most likely borrowed from Hammurabi’s Code (see David Wright’s book, *Inventing God’s Law*, for more info on this) and other codes in Southwest Asia, which all clearly have the former interpretation. Also, in Hebrew Law, punitive fines are usually only issued for some sort of material loss, which is not present if the mother delivers prematurely and the baby lives.

With all this being considered, it is clear that the Bible says nothing regarding the morality of abortion today, and if anything, it would agree with pro-choice people over pro-life

people. So can a Bible-abiding Christian be pro-choice and even get an abortion? 100%. Let's move on.

[EDIT] The main point of this post is what I have written above. The only reason I talk about my opinion below is to show how a Christian like me could be pro-choice.

Why I am Pro-Choice.

It is also important to acknowledge that the Bible's perspective on the legal personhood of a fetus is obsolete in today's world. With modern science, we have a better understanding of fetal development, and there isn't anyone on the planet who attributes legal/moral personhood at the first breath anymore. So any argument about the hypothetical personhood of the fetus should not be based in Scripture (ESPECIALLY considering not everyone is a Christian). Hence, let's talk about this modern issue with modern science, modern laws, and our modern sense of morality (that most would agree with).

So, as we've mentioned, most of the abortion debate centers around determining a point where the fetus achieves legal and moral personhood. Eventually, I will show that this debate is irrelevant, but we can still arrive at the same conclusion using this method. In my opinion, the best point to attribute legal personhood is the point where the brain is fully developed and the fetus is able to have a conscious experience. This approach works the best for a few reasons:

1. Unlike other suggested times to attribute legal personhood (i.e. conception, heartbeat, etc.), consciousness is a uniquely human attribute, making it a sensible place to attribute full person status.
2. There are already laws that use this metric, like how people who are brain dead can be terminated by a family member.
3. It is also around this point that the fetus is viable and can survive outside the womb (which is useful for another reason that will be talked about later).

Some would object here and say that the potential of the fetus to have a conscious experience in the future grants it personhood, but it's important to note that there is no law where rights are granted based on potential (for example, a 16 year old can't have voting rights just because they'll have that right in two years).

But let's assume that for whatever reason, we do grant personhood status at conception. Even in this case, a fetus's right to life is trumped by the pregnant person's right to **bodily autonomy**. This is essentially one's right to control of their bodily resources, and it is a well-ingrained aspect of our legal system. It's the same thing that prevents someone from being forced to give blood or an organ, no matter who they are and what they've done. Even if someone in need of a kidney will die without it, no one is forced to give up theirs. In the same way, a pregnant person has the right to refuse to sustain a fetus (who is a person by our assumption) that is inside them, regardless of how they got pregnant (since consensual sex is fully legal). With this logic, in most cases, abortion would become illegal (or mostly illegal, as there are some rare cases where abortion after this point is needed) once the fetus is viable outside the womb, which is around 22-24 weeks.

This is why a lot of the pro-choice discourse is centered around the “woman’s body” and “my body, my choice”. For a long time, I didn’t even understand this, and it was this realization that made me fully pro-choice.

Conclusion

With all this, the only point I am making is that there is no “Christian” or “biblical” perspective on abortion. You are 100% free to see abortion as immoral based on your interpretation of Scripture or anything else, but it is also perfectly valid to see it as moral based on your interpretation of Scripture. Regardless, there is no objective moral standard (in the Bible or anywhere) that would warrant it being fully banned or seen as murder. I urge Christians to redirect their focus to other, much clearer moral issues.

QUESTION FIVE: (a deeper dive into my deconstruction) What has your deconstruction changed about your beliefs?

Before we get into my deconstruction, let’s first establish what exactly deconstruction is (and what it means to me). Deconstruction in the context of Christianity is a re-examination of everything you’ve come to believe and associate with as a Christian. You’ve probably heard this term the most from a lot of ex-Christians describing what caused them to leave the faith. However, my deconstruction journey (which is still ongoing) has made my faith stronger. Here I will talk about this journey in a more specific sense than I did in my first blog entry.

What caused you to deconstruct?

As I stated in my first post, this all started with an influx of new information and new challenges to my current belief system at the time (not just me wanting to fit in with those around me, as some have suggested). In previous posts, I’ve talked about how this changed my stance on many issues relevant to our current political landscape, but these challenges also rocked my beliefs relating to Christianity itself. Many things I had been taught as “core beliefs” and “non-negotiables” of Christianity and the Bible (will talk about some of these in specifics later in this post) were starting to not make any sense in regards to what I knew and what I saw in the world around me, and this caused a dissonance that I had to resolve. In order to do this, I had to examine what I had been taught about the Bible’s content, context, and reliability.

What kept you from turning away from Christianity as a whole?

At this point, I already had a good basis of confidence in the spiritual reality of our world (i.e. that there was something beyond the natural), which I would attribute mostly to my upbringing as a Pentecostal. I was raised in a community that did not shy away from the miraculous. I grew up hearing many miracle stories from my family and community, and I’ve even witnessed some healing miracles firsthand. In my personal relationship with God, this has only grown, and some of what I’ve experienced during prayer and worship I have been unable to replicate by any natural circumstance. I’ve had pastors and others in the church (who I

disagree on a lot of things with, believe me) speak to things in my life that I'd only thought to myself and never told anyone previously.

Also, from a philosophical sense, I think Christianity's portrayal of us as creatures who know to some extent the right thing to do, yet are doomed to fall short in some aspects is the most accurate representation of the human condition any belief system has provided. In addition, modern scientific discovery has, in my opinion, suggested that our conscious existence on a habitable planet is nothing short of miraculous (for a very small taste of this, see this talk I made and presented at Chi Alpha Live Gathering [📺 THE MATHEMATICS OF FAITH](#)). And lastly, I think that what we know about Jesus and about early Christianity after his death strongly point to the plausibility of the resurrection. With all this, if there was anything I felt sure of, I knew that God was real and still active today. Hence, my focus for deconstruction was what had been built upon this foundation.

What was your deconstruction process?

My process focused a lot on learning more about the Bible and the world in which it was written. In the past few years, I've read more of the Bible than I had in my entire life before deconstructing, and I know more of the truth that lies behind the words of Scripture. I mainly accomplished this by paying more attention to Biblical scholarship, not just from Christians, but Bible scholars of many different backgrounds. I've read through many scholarly articles on various topics, and I also have followed some amazing Bible and ancient Hebrew scholars on TikTok (shoutout to Dan McClellan, Candida Moss, Kevin Carnahan, and Alexiana Fry who have provided very objective, educated perspectives on a lot of what the Bible contains (and have very different backgrounds faith-wise but are all pretty much in agreement on a LOT of these things)). So really, there was no process, I just decided to listen more to those who actually specialize (and have decades of experience) in studying various aspects of Scripture and the context of it.

What are some "non-negotiables" of Christianity/the Bible that you've discarded?

1. "Scripture is univocal and has no contradictions"

As I have dived more into the Bible (and Biblical scholarship), I have realized that this idea is completely untrue. The Bible is a compilation of many different voices that contradict each other on multiple occasions. To show this, we look no further than Genesis 1 and 2. I have heard many Christians say that they only accept the Genesis account of creation as truth. My response to this is simply "which one?", because there are actually two **different** accounts of creation in the first two chapters of Genesis. From Genesis 1:1-2:3, we see the traditional 7 day creation account. From Genesis 2:4 on, we see a different account with all the heavens and earth created in one day, plants and animals created AFTER humans, and the story of Adam and Eve. There are a whole lot of other misconceptions about these first few chapters of Genesis that I don't have the time to get into, but I will say that these accounts are more poetic and shaped by a completely obsolete ancient view of the world (i.e. a view should not be seen as true or relevant today). The point of the entire creation story and the Fall of Man was basically to give the people living at that time a rationale for how and why things were the way they were (and the story of the Fall is pretty sexist as well, so if it were true, it would be VERY problematic).

There are many other examples of this (don't get me started on the contrasting ways the Bible says the world will end, or even who killed Goliath (David or Elhanan?)), and I've talked about some earlier in the blog too. The hard reality is that much of the Scriptural narrative taught to us is cherry picked. Anyways, moving on.

2. "All of the Bible has been inspired by God"

This is, without a doubt, one of the most damaging instances of dogma in modern Christianity. Why? Because not only does it give the Bible an unwarranted authority, it also forces Christians to rationalize every problematic aspect of our holy book. The normal verse used to justify this claim is 2 Timothy 3:16-17, which says:

16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the servant of God^[1] may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

This seems like a strong indicator that the Bible is indeed divinely inspired, but there are multiple reasons why this verse is irrelevant and also does not say what many think it says:

- a. The word in this verse that many take to mean divinely inspired ("God-breathed" or "theopneustos" in Greek) most likely was not taken to actually mean divinely inspired when it was written. This Greek word was most likely intended to mean "life-giving", especially since this word had been used to refer to things like springs of water, certain ointments and medicines, and even sandals (lol). For more information about the history and context of this word, and of how it was mistranslated, check out this book by scholar John C. Poirier called The Invention of The Inspired Text.
- b. Another important piece of context is that the word Scripture here does NOT refer to the Bible as we know it today, especially because the Bible had not been compiled into a book at this time (and some of it wasn't even written yet!). At this time, "Scripture" referred to the Old Testament writings **only**, and it most likely included books that are not part of the Bible today. *Moreover, any time God's Word is referred to in the Bible, it is always a reference to the actual words of God, not the entirety of written Scriptures or today's Bible.* Also, it's important to acknowledge that most of the New Testament books were not written to be part of the Bible as we know it today. Most were letters intended for a specific community of believers living in the first century. This is another reason we should be cautious in applying what is said in these books today.
- c. An even more important piece of information is that most contemporary scholars agree that the books of Timothy were not written by Paul, and they were most likely written decades after Paul's death by someone pretending to be Paul. (See article explaining how we know this:
<https://discoveringancienthistory.wordpress.com/2017/06/22/the-pauline-epistles-known-and-suspected-forgeries/#:~:text=There%20are%20currently%20five%20Pauline,demonstrate%20their%20status%20as%20forgeries>)

With all these considered, this verse has little bearing on how we should interpret Scripture.

Anyways, as I was saying, this idea of divine inspiration and intrinsic Biblical authority has caused many Christians to try and rationalize a LOT of problematic Scripture, including (but not limited to) the Bible's condoning of chattel slavery, degradation of women, scientific errancies, and endorsement of literal mass murder of outside peoples. When it comes down to it, every book of the Bible was written by a people [and influenced by a culture] that had moral standards that were VERY backwards considering what we know today, and trying to bring our current sense of morality back to justify theirs does nothing good for us who are Christians today or the world around us.

With all this said, I am not saying that the Bible has no use for us today. It is actually such a cool book (actually so fascinating, seriously, see this video that talks about the beauty of it more <https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZT82wd7NF/>) when you're not trying to read it as some science or objective history book or as the pinnacle of what human morality should be. I will talk more about how it can be very useful to us in the next post. What I am saying here is that it has no intrinsic authority, and that we should not treat it like some sacred, infallible text because it simply is not.

3. Heaven and Hell.

Hell is a place of divine punishment in the afterlife. From what the Bible says, this is pretty much all we know. There are multiple instances of imagery used to describe it (outer darkness, fire (associating it with the valley of Gehenna), etc.), so we don't really have an idea of what is there, only that it involves separation from God. The duration of this punishment is not really shown as well, as some verses talk about an eternal punishment, others endorse the idea of annihilationism (i.e. the wicked will be destroyed and cease to exist) **[[EDIT]** John 3:16, for example., and some talk about some type of punishment followed by annihilation. Jesus actually uses all three of these perspectives. In addition, it is important to acknowledge that most of the ideology of hell (in Scripture) developed at the same time as when early Christians were being persecuted and Israel was still firmly under Rome's thumb. In fact, there is almost zero reference to hell in the Old Testament, and only in the latest writings (and these references are very vague). **[[EDIT]** Paul doesn't mention it in any of his letters either.] Hence, there were probably other motives for making the postmortal punishment of these oppressors as brutal and prolonged as possible, as well as a motive to promise a perfect fairytale ending that we see in Revelation.

In addition, the idea of who goes to hell varies throughout the Bible as well. There are actually very few passages that suggest that everyone who isn't a Christian suffers eternally in hell. Most verses that talk about this are pretty vague. Most passages just refer to "the wicked", which given the context, probably refer more to the oppressors and persecutors of the early Christians. In others (like in Revelation 3 & 21, Psalms 69, and Philippians 4) we see reference to the Lamb's Book of Life, saying that whoever's name is written in it will go to Heaven, but there is no qualifier for being written in this book. In

reality, we really have no idea about the afterlife, and what we “know” is just from centuries of theorizing with the limited and convoluted perspective the Bible gives. The existence of Calvinists should convey just how little we know lol. To better understand the different perspectives on hell, I encourage you to do your own research and explore different scholarly arguments (especially since I haven’t gone into a lot of detail here).

There are definitely more big “foundational” things that I no longer believe in, but that’s enough for now or I will end up writing an entire doctoral thesis lol (maybe I should’ve started a PhD in theology, because I really enjoy writing these, and I usually don’t like writing). Next time, we’ll talk about my ongoing **reconstruction**, talking about how my new beliefs have changed my life and influenced my future plans.

QUESTION 5.5: God’s pronouns?

Posted March 10, 2024

A topic that hasn’t been talked about enough in Christian circles is the attribution of He/Him pronouns to God: how it came about and why many Christians still use these pronouns for God today, even though our current conceptualization of God would suggest that this attribution is unnecessary (and a bit problematic). In this blog, I’ve talked a lot about how different the moral standards and other beliefs of Bible times are rather backwards and in many ways, obsolete. Hence, I think it’s about time that we look at how people in ancient times (especially in the Old Testament) conceptualized God, and why maybe (probably) we shouldn’t follow their lead on the topic of God’s pronouns.

Why is God given male pronouns to begin with?

The most likely answer to this is shockingly simple. In ancient times God was thought to be... a man. As in, God was conceptualized as someone who had male body parts (yep, including a penis) and could walk and talk, just like us (man was made in God’s image, after all). For example, we see in the story of Genesis where God is literally walking with Adam and Eve. We see various references to God’s hands, face, and back. The main difference between us and God was power. God had superhuman powers that made him... God. People at this time had nothing close to our almost unified view of God today, as this formless, dimensionless, all knowing, all powerful entity outside the realm of categorization by human metrics. Their view was closer to the ancient Greek view of gods. In fact, these rather modern concepts of God being all powerful, all-knowing, etc. were far from set in stone at that time. Perhaps that’s why we see points in the Bible where God’s mind is changed or where He feels sorry/regrets doing certain things, (and some point where he endorses lies? (1 Kings 22)). It might also be why Jacob is able to wrestle (and win against) God in Genesis 32. (It’s also important to know that there were many different conflicting conceptualizations in the Old Testament, so not all portrayals agree, and it’s hard to make sense of them all.)

As mentioned earlier, we also have some veiled references to God's genitals. See this verse from the opening chapter of Ezekiel, where Ezekiel is describing what he saw in a vision of God on His throne (Ezekiel 1:27-28 NRSV):

27Upward from what appeared like the loins I saw something like gleaming amber, something that looked like fire enclosed all around; and downward from what looked like the loins I saw something that looked like fire, and there was a splendor all around. **28**Like the bow in a cloud on a rainy day, such was the appearance of the splendor all around. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.

Some versions say "waist" instead of "loins" but the original Hebrew word, "motnaim", is deemed to mean "loins" by most scholars and pretty much any Hebrew dictionary. There is another point that scholars have concluded is a reference to loins, and that is in Isaiah 6:1, where Isaiah seems to say that God's penis "filled the temple" (i apologize for this visual lol). Bible translations use "hem of His robe" instead of genitals, but in the original Hebrew text doesn't mention the robe that would have such a hem (i.e. the proposed preposition has no object), which would mean that the Hebrew word that is present is most likely be translated as "genitals", as it was used similarly by other Biblical prophets. There are more hidden references to divine genitals in the Bible, where "feet" is used as a euphemism by the Bible's writers, but hopefully you get the point (I'd rather not dwell on this topic lol). It's definitely an interesting thing to think about theologically, but the more important takeaway is just how different the conceptualization of God was back then.

There is so much I could go into with this, but I'll just talk about one more aspect of this archaic conceptualization with the topic of God's wife. Yep, most scholars agree that the ancient Hebrew people believed that Yahweh had a wife named Asherah (and these were just two of the members of the divine pantheon). There is a good bit of archaeological evidence of them being worshiped together by the ancient Israelites, and you can find a lot of the sources to confirm what I'm saying through the bibliography of the Wikipedia entry on Asherah ([Asherah - Wikipedia](#)). As we see in the Bible, worship of Asherah was eventually stopped through the cult centralization efforts of King Jehoshaphat, Josiah, and Hezekiah in the Old Testament, which reflects a developing change towards the idea of Yahweh alone being the patron deity of Israel in later Israelite records (again, a point where conceptualization of God changed).

Anyways, this conceptualization was, of course, a representation of the archaic social structure of the time, with men given the most power and daughters and wives considered property (of either their father or their husband). So for God to have the most power of all (and to perform traditionally male roles like leading, commanding, etc), he would have to be male (or at least, have a form most similar to that of a male). In addition, the existence of only male angels (and the story of many of them having sex with human women (in Genesis 6 & the apocryphal book of Enoch)) support this male characterization of God (and of other divine creatures). **For more on everything I've mentioned, check out this excellent (and long) book called *God: An Anatomy* by Dr. Francesca Stavrakopoulou, a Professor of the Hebrew Bible & Ancient Religion (audiobook is available for free for Spotify Premium members).**

You'll also notice that in the New Testament, we don't see this perspective of a corporeal God as much, which shows how later (Greek-influenced) philosophies changed how God was conceptualized.

So what pronouns should God have?

That's up to how you conceptualize God. The way I see it is through a mathematical explanation, which goes like this. So we exist in a 4 dimensional space (x,y, z coordinates & time), and God extends beyond the dimensions of our world (I guess He can be infinitely dimensional in this case). Since gender is a concept that is confined to our universe, we cannot fully represent God by our construct of gender. You could also say that God *transcends* our construct of gender. In math, we can represent a high dimensional object in smaller dimensions by projecting it onto those smaller dimensions. It then follows that we can do the same with God, as long as we recognize our projection cannot possibly fully represent who God is. [EDIT: For example, one understanding of God might remind them of their mother, and in that case, they could feel more comfortable referring to God with she/her pronouns. Things like that.] So one's attribution of pronouns to God fully depends on how they conceptualize God, meaning that God's pronouns are any/all.

With all this being said, it is important to acknowledge that the widespread projection of God onto the male gender is based in sexism and nothing less. I highly encourage you to evaluate who God is to you and what your perspective is based on. I think it's time I evaluate as well. For me, it makes the most sense to move towards an understanding of God as neither male or female, which is why I will from now on refer to God with they/them pronouns in the blog and in my personal faith. But you do you, of course.

Anyways, that wraps up the blog entry. Let me know your thoughts.

QUESTION SIX: (the reconstruction) What is the Bible and how should we interact with it?

Posted July 11, 2024

In my last post, I talked about why I no longer believe that the Bible is entirely univocal and inerrant. This belief obviously has major implications on how I interact with the Bible. The most immediate questions, of course, are:

If the Bible isn't the perfect word of God...

- *What is it?*
- *What use does it have to us?*
- *What parts of it should we adhere to as Christians?*

In this post, I will talk about how I would answer these questions, and discuss a specific example of how I've reconstructed in regards to the creation accounts of Genesis. Of all of my posts, this is definitely the most subjective, so I would really appreciate hearing what you feel about what I've said here.

What is the Bible?

I think we can start the dialogue on this by asking another question. What is the point of Christianity? I think many Christians would actually say similar things to answer this, but it's rare that we actually step back and think about it. WHY do we go to church, read the Bible, pray, and do mission work? Of course, the common theme among the answers to this question is "*relationship with God*". The foundation of most faiths is the idea that God exists and that God cares about us and wants to interact with us. According to Genesis, that's the whole reason God created people to begin with.

So how does the Bible fit into this? Well, the underlying narrative of the Bible (mainly the New Testament) is all about this. Because of our natural propensity to pursue our own interests, we separated ourselves from God, and God, through Jesus Christ, sought to bring us back to the fold. Even aside from this underlying narrative, we see humans throughout Scripture reaching out towards the divine, trying to make sense of what God was doing in and around them, and (later) what Jesus's cameo on our planet could teach them about how to interact with God. Hence, this is what I believe the Bible is at its core: a history about human interaction with God. Because it is written by humans, it is biased by the common beliefs and morals at the time and just wrong at some points, but it also has a lot of ideas and concepts about God that are accurate and that can help us in our relationship with God.

So of course, the question is, how do we know what parts we should follow and what we shouldn't? Well, the first step is getting a **holistic understanding** of what is written. Essentially, the goal is to understand who the writers are, who the audience is, and the full context of what has been written. Current Biblical scholarship brings us a lot of answers on this front, and that is what can be used to decipher whether a certain verse of passage is accurate/applies to today. For an example of this, we look to the *first Genesis account of creation*. Understanding this was one of the first steps of my deconstruction journey, so I'd say it's a good place to start.

So what's clear to anyone with even the faintest understanding of science and evolution is that the Biblical account of creation is at complete odds with our modern scientific understanding. The first account of Genesis asserts that the earth started off as completely formless, chaotic, and covered in water, and what followed was God creating light. Then, God created a "firmament" or dome to separate "the waters [above] from the waters [below]". Then, God created land, the oceans, and land plants. Next, the sun and the moon were created, considered as "two great lights", where the "greater light" rules the day and the "lesser light" rules the night. On the next day, we see the creation of fish and birds, followed by land animals (and humans (male and female)) the day after. Finally, God rests, with everything they created considered good.

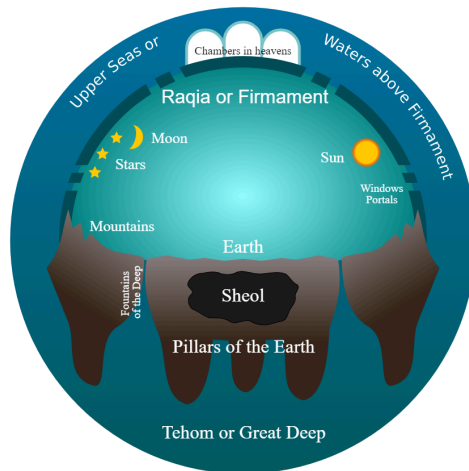
It all seems like a nice story, but there are already questions and challenges with this narrative, even if we just work with basic science. First of all, there is very little water known to exist outside the earth, so the idea that waters were separated by the sky makes no sense. Second, the insides of the earth are made almost completely of minerals, gases, and metals, and there is little liquid water that exists below the earth's crust. Third, the moon in itself has no light, and is just a reflection of the sun's light, so there should only be one great light. In addition to other things, the main issue is that this account is at odds with the *second Genesis account of creation and the rest of Genesis*. In the second account, man is created before any other life, and woman is created after every other life. (Also I find it hilarious that the story seems to say that God created every animal on earth just to find one that could be man's partner. Gotta love

some process of elimination lol.) Also we see that the creation is actually not “good” (as mentioned in the first account), as we have a deceiving serpent and disobedient humans in Genesis 3. And God continues to make tweaks to their creation all throughout the Bible. All of these things are important to keep in mind.

Of course, with modern science, we see even more challenges to this narrative. For one, the age of the earth is much older than the Bible asserts, with radiometric dating pointing to an age of 4.6 billion years. The fossil record points to birds evolving from dinosaurs, meaning that they couldn't have existed before land animals. And speaking of dinosaurs, their past existence (and current lack of existence) makes no sense in the creation/Genesis narrative.

Now, if I believe in the complete inerrancy of Scripture, I would be forced to accept every aspect of these accounts as truth. I would be forced to negotiate with or just outright ignore science, and I would be forced to try and mesh together these two irreconcilable accounts. That's what many people try to do, but there are other options that make these passages make a lot more sense. Let's see what modern Biblical scholarship can make of these passages.

Well, the first thing to note is that these accounts of creation are based on the prevalent (and flawed) understanding of the world that most ancient Mesopotamian peoples had. They viewed the Earth as a flat surface and the sky as a dome surrounding it. See this picture for reference:



This explains the idea of the waters being separated in the creation story, and it explains some of the events in future stories, like how there existed enough water under the earth to flood it to above the highest peak. In reality, there is actually not enough liquid water in or under the earth for a flood of this scale to occur.

We see similar creation narratives in other Mesopotamian cultures as well. The *Enuma Elish*, a Babylonian creation account, has some striking similarities to the creation account, as it also mentions order being brought out of chaos and a firmament to separate the waters. The main difference is the idea of monotheism, which most scholars agree is a later imposition on the Biblical text by later priestly authors.

Scholarship can also explain the differences between the two accounts of Genesis. The second account (or Jahwist account) is the earliest account, which is meant to be an *etiology* (a story that essentially explains why things are the way they are) and a story that represents man as being the main moral agent and the reason for the situations he faces today. However, the main issue with this story is that it depicts God as the imperfect creator of an imperfect creation,

and it depicts man as not godlike (and innocent) and punished for trying to be godlike. These issues probably motivated the later (Priestly) account that starts off Genesis. In this account, God and their creation are completely good (and God nears omnipotence, as they have the power to defeat chaos and bring it into order), and man is made “in God’s image” and given charge of the earth.

For more information on all this, check out this paper and its sources..

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[A](#)

ASIDE [An (kind of) unrelated but interesting thing about the story of the Fall is that if we think about it, the “crafty” serpent (which is nowhere identified as Satan btw) is actually the most honest character, because as it predicts, Adam and Eve’s eyes are opened and they gain knowledge of good and evil when they eat the fruit. In fact, in Genesis 3:22, God admits that man has become like them, and seems to be afraid that with this knowledge, man will gain eternal life by eating from the Tree of Life and be unstoppable. On the other hand, God is a liar in this story, since they say that Adam and Eve will die when they eat (or even touch) the fruit, which doesn’t happen! Some would say that this death is meant to be a spiritual death or an eventual death (like a curse of mortality), but this is nowhere mentioned explicitly or implicitly in the text. From this perspective, it seems that God lies to Adam and Eve to keep them from gaining knowledge of what the tree of life will do and keep them from becoming too powerful to control. As punishment for doing so, they are banished so that they have no chance of getting that power again. Quite the mythical tale, and definitely not the first time something like this has happened in ancient mythology. It even happens again in the Bible with the tower of Babel, where God is again seemingly afraid of humanity getting too powerful (Genesis 11:6), which doesn’t make sense for a God that’s supposed to be omnipotent. This is probably what the story meant to those who lived around that time, so it’s interesting how it’s been turned into a story about sin and damnation (we’ve got a lot of deconstruction to do before we unpack that more btw). This portrayal of God as imperfect and reachable by man is also reflective of the circumstances and beliefs of those who wrote it. See question 5.5 for more on that.]

Here, we have an explanation confirmed by scholars that completely explains what’s going on in these creation accounts. Also, we’ve successfully initiated an avenue of deconstruction with the idea that the Biblical authors had *limited knowledge* of their surroundings and of themselves, and that influenced accounts of stories and influenced their perspectives on various issues. Similar logic applies when we look at the flood narrative (which pulls from other flood narratives in ancient Mesopotamia) or when we see God make the “sun stand still” in Joshua 10 (based on the incorrect view of the Earth and the Sun) or (ideologically) where we see chattel slavery

supported throughout the Bible (Old and New Testaments). With stories and passages like these, it's clear we need full context and understanding of the Bible verses that we read in order to evaluate their relevance to today. If a verse is clearly based on some belief or ideology held by humans that time that is completely irrelevant or obsolete in today's world, it shouldn't be considered as a command from God or have any influence on our lives today. Obviously, some examples of this are clearer than others, and there is a LOT of nuance with all this, but with all my blog entries so far, I've tried to focus on the clearest and most pertinent issues.

Tying back to the idea of relationship with God, that in itself can guide us in understanding Scripture as well. Just like those who wrote the Bible, we are limited in our understanding of the world around us, but we have much more information available than those before us, and we should pray for wisdom to use that knowledge and wisdom in applying things said in the Bible to today!

Anyways, be sure to let me know your thoughts on what I've said here. In the next blog posts, we'll be getting into The Nitty Gritty™, taking on the more specific and nuanced areas of deconstruction, dealing with atonement theories, heaven and hell, Satan, lust, the problem of evil, miracles, and more!

For The Record (an interlude)

Before diving into the deep nuances of random Bible topics, I wanted to take some time to reflect a little on how I've gone about the blog and reinforce my motivation for starting it. Hopefully, you will get a better sense of my headspace at the moment and what my plans are for the future of the blog.

Why I Am Writing This Blog (again)

As I said in my first blog post, I aim to (1) bring more perspectives into Christian discourse and (2) to show those who aren't Christian that there are more perspectives than what is currently mainstream. But the core issue that inspires me is in that second point, that many aspects of "mainstream" Christianity are inherently flawed, and can lead us to very problematic areas (as they have done in the past). I think the most glaring flaw, as I have mentioned, is the way that the Bible is deified and done so in an uneven manner, where certain verses that are more useful for structuring power and values are prioritized over others. In this blog, I'll admit, I have been extremely hard on the Bible. Hopefully, if you've read through it, you can understand that the reason that I've gone about it this way is to show just how problematic some of it can be if we approach it in the way we currently do, how unclear and conflicting it is at times, and how it absolutely should not be looked at as the final, uncontested word of God or the peak of morality.

How I Interact With The Bible

I want to cover more aspects of this in this post, but before that, I again want to say that I believe that the Bible is such a beautiful and interesting book that does have divine inspiration in it. I still read it every day, in an effort to not only gain information about it but to gain wisdom from it. Of course, the way I interact with it has changed since I started to deconstruct. The main thing that has changed is that I don't take a lot of it as seriously as I once did. You can kind of see this in the way I talked about the Genesis creation accounts in the last blog post. When you accept that the Bible is written by flawed people with flawed perspectives, there is a lot to laugh at, and everything becomes so much more interesting! Instead of trying to justify or solve a lot of the Bible's problems, you get to dive into why they exist in the first place. (So TL/DR, I love the

Bible, and I have no issues with it as a product of its time, I only take issue with the expectations put on it by many Christians.)

(EXAMPLE (can be ignored)): For an example, let's look at another interesting predicament in Genesis, where Cain (after killing Abel) is sent to the land of Nod to live the rest of his years. The interesting thing here is that based on the narrative thus far, the only people on earth at the moment are Adam, Eve, Seth, and Cain⁴, but yet Cain is worried that he will be killed by someone after he is banished (and God confirms this risk as well). This is a contradiction. Now, many generations of Christians have tried to reconcile this hole, all in ways that have proved insufficient. However, the most likely scholarly explanation is that Genesis 4 was originally composed separately from Genesis 2-3, and was likely an *etiology* (which is, again, a story that is made to explain why things are the way they are) for how a certain nomadic people group (the Kenites) came to be. The idea is that just like their ancestor Cain, the Kenites are doomed to wander forever. Eventually, this story was combined with Genesis 2-3, which is why we go from Adam and Eve being the only ones on earth to there being other potentially hostile peoples in the surrounding lands. Another big Genesis etiology is the story where Noah's son Ham sees his father drunk and naked and does nothing, causing Noah to curse Ham's son Canaan to being a slave of his brothers as well as Ham's brothers Shem and Japheth (and this etiology exists to justify the people of Israel enslaving and murdering a LOT of Canaanites in the Old Testament). This passage was also used to justify slavery and racism in America, though this is more due to a misreading of text than to a problematic Bible endorsement. But as I've mentioned, the most likely happening is way more interesting than being forced by dogma to make these verses make sense while treating every word as inspired by God. Another point to make here is that all of these happenings are probably (most likely) fictional!! Acknowledging this makes contradictory elements of the story less important and the message behind it more important.

So, as I've been saying, I read the Bible for the same reason that other Christians do, but I also keep in mind that it is a product of its time and that it has some ideologies that are outdated and backwards considering what we know today. Does this resolve every issue/concern in understanding the Bible? No. However, it does make Bible reading less stressful and intense.

For example, let's talk about how God is portrayed in the Old Testament. All throughout, we see points where God does or says things that are wrathful, genocidal, or just really unsettling, especially given how we see God today. In the story of the Exodus, the murder of all of Egypt's first born sons is commissioned by God. What appears to the writers of this book as an impressive and strategic act of power by a great warrior God reads to us a genocide of many innocent lives, especially since the only person attributed some sort of fault in this story is the leader of Egypt (and even he doesn't have free will here, as his heart is apparently hardened by God (Exodus 10:1, 10:20)). It's the same with the rest of the God-ordained brutal conquests of enemy peoples or the points in books like Psalms where people are praying for the brutalization of their enemy peoples, explicitly including women and children. Many people today try to defend these stories by saying things like "God can do what God wants" or "those people deserved it"⁵, but the more likely (and less problematic) explanation is simply that people at this time expected their God to do things like this for them. In fact, all ancient people groups at this time were thought to have a patron deity that went to war with them. (The Bible says that the

⁴ We know this because in Genesis 4:1, Eve remarks on being able to produce "a man with the help of the Lord" when she has Cain and then in Genesis 4:25, Eve says the reason for Seth being named such is that God appointed for her another child instead of Abel. There really isn't much room for there to be more kids (& especially not sons) from Adam & Eve in the picture here.

⁵ I do think there are points where we have to accept our limited knowledge and realize that God is God (as Job did), but turning our brains off and not at the very least questioning these things is, in my opinion, not what God intended.

“Most High” assigned gods to each people group, and that Yahweh was assigned to Israel this way (Deuteronomy 32:8-9.) Hence, every military victory/decision is attributed to God.

I would argue that this is NOT an actual attribute of God, and more of a bottom up understanding of God by the writers of the Bible.⁶ Many point out the seeming change of the character of God in the New Testament (where God seems much less genocidal), but I would say that this is the result of a change in how God is perceived by us, not a divine character change. Also, most scholars would say that many of these events (the Flood, the Exodus, Israel’s seemingly destructive military victories) didn’t happen, or at least, not to the extent that they are presented in the Bible. I personally think that part of the reason Jesus came to earth was to alter this perception by revealing the true character of God. Of course, there is still much more to learn and understand about God, and I doubt we will ever fully see God and other spiritual elements from God’s perspective. I mean, even what we know about Jesus is tainted by the views and agendas of the gospel authors. But that very fact is my entire point here. Throughout I and many others’ upbringing, many things within Christianity and the Bible have been taught with such certainty that you’d never think of questioning them at the time (or you’d be too scared to question them). Hence, we approach the Bible with a ton of expectations and prerequisites of the text (complete divine inspiration, inerrancy, univocality, historicity, etc.), and we run into contradictions, problematic divine endorsements, scientific inaccuracies, and more. These types of problems have played a role in some pretty horrible historical events, like the Crusades, imperialism, slavery, witch hunts, anti-Semitism (including the Holocaust), and more. They also continue to be a part of the oppression of many marginalized communities today, and it’s up to us to be more cognizant of how these dogmas we uphold may continue to perpetrate these cycles of oppression.

However, if we take these expectations of the Bible away, none of these problems really matter (which works to the detriment of many anti-religious talking points). This also allows us to engage with the Bible more honestly, as we are looking for the *most likely* understanding of events and commands in the Bible based on cultural context, not just the one that supports our expectations/presuppositions the most. My faith journey has caused me to open my mind to new possibilities in this regard, and I write this blog to challenge others to do the same and advocate for a Christianity that will bring people closer to God while not misleading them with dogmatic beliefs/traditions that only lead to harm and confusion. Unfortunately, many authorities within Christianity chose instead to continue to push these dogmas/indoctrination for the continued structuring of power and values, as well as the continuation of the unfair systems that are in place. In my experience, doing this only pushes potential believers away from the faith and leads people to label religion as a device of control.

My approach does come with its drawbacks, though. For one, there is a massive gray area when it comes to what to believe and how to live one’s life when you can’t take everything in the Bible as coming directly from God. Even though there are verses that are very clearly sourced from human beliefs at the time, there are many others that *could* be under this umbrella, but also could be important parts of being a Christian today. These types of gray areas are what I hope to dive into in future posts.

In the meantime, I’d like to point out a great resource for studying the Bible in the way I’m proposing here. **The Bible For Normal People** (founded by Dr. Pete Enns) is a podcast/website/organization run by Christians that basically explains some of the hard-to-understand parts of the Bible with the help of modern Biblical scholarship. They have a podcast (accessible for free on pretty much any podcast platform) with hundreds of episodes covering the Bible (called The Bible for Normal People) and the practical aspects of being a

⁶ It’s important to admit that this opinion, of course, is coming from my bottom up understanding of God, but there really is no escaping that. I have no qualms with the writers of the Bible considering God in this way, but I do humbly disagree, and hopefully I explain why relatively well.

Christian or person of faith (Faith for Normal People). They also do video lectures through their website on a pay what you can basis (as long as you pay before the lecture). So for very little money, you can learn A LOT about the Bible and about the practical aspects of being a Christian. They also have written guides to certain books of the Bible for purchase online. They've been very helpful to me post-deconstruction, and even if some of what I'm saying here is a little progressive for you, these resources are definitely worth exploring. Here's a link to the website, and be sure to check out their social media (IG & Tiktok) as well.

<https://thebiblefornormalpeople.com/>