

I really don't feel this Bishop has answered your question in a way that compassionately explains how God works and how it applies to your question. I'll admit, it's the cliffs notes version, maybe he just didn't have time to answer in detail. If you're interested in reading a breakdown on what his answer means (and then some more that he didn't mention) perhaps I can explain and show you why the Bible is referred to as the "Living Word". The Christian God uses the bible to speak to us in many different ways and some parables/verses can actually have many different applications.

Unfortunately, in order to explain this, I will require the use of bible verses themselves. I say unfortunately because, as a former skeptic myself, I am familiar with the concept that Christians using their bible to explain or prove or defend their faith is a bad thing. Unbelievers or non-Christians often say that it is not an acceptable argument tool, and that in order to be taken seriously, Christians are not allowed to reference the Bible when trying to prove that Christianity is the truth.

I'd like to argue that not only is it a necessary tool, but to try to understand a Christians beliefs without letting them use their Holy book is kind of like asking someone to teach you how to ride a bike but they can't use a bike or reference any images or videos of one. While they could explain what a bike is and how it works, you wont really understand until you see it, feel it and try to use it.

Understanding this, I ask you OP of the question thread and anyone who is reading, to try and assume my response is not to prove anything is the "one true religion" but instead to educate you on how the Christian religion believes and answer your question from the perspective of a follower of Christ. I may speak with matter of fact language, implying these things are 100% percent real (ex: Satan is, God said, spoke, etc) but this is what I personally believe (as a Christian) and I want to say things exactly as I understand them to be.

With that aside, I would like to start with a bible verse.

-Mark 4:11-12

And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, so that "they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven."

Think on that as you will as I continue to elaborate my answer. If you don't like reading, you aren't going to like this post, I wrote a lot on this subject because it is both very simple and very difficult to explain to someone who does not believe as Christians do. I have to start with something seemingly unrelated, but I promise you, it is relevant to your question. It is going to sound preachy and for that, I apologize ahead of time, but I want to make sure that the reader sees how the bible is supposedly supposed to work and what it actually says in reference to the Question.

When a non believer (someone who does not believe in God or who has not accepted Salvation through Jesus Christ by faith) opens the Bible and begins to read, they are actually seeing the Word through the eyes of Man. While this may seem obvious, this is also important. Humanity

as a whole, seems to be spiritually disconnected from God and it is up to us to bridge that connection and build upon it.

The Bible says that the word of God is "Alive and active" and that it discerns the thoughts and intentions of your heart. This is not just a Book with words, it is Divine knowledge in the form of written language, perfectly and carefully written to give you access to any question and any understanding you seek to have about God and his creation. What was and what will be... even insight or comfort for every day problems, regardless of what century or age you exist in.

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

When we try to understand the Word of God from a worldly perspective, without any guidance (or willingness to be guided) from God, we are actually missing a lot of very important information and spiritual understanding. This is because the Bible as it is written, is a "Living" book.

Imagine you have a book of seemingly unrelated stories and someone tells you that once you have a certain formula you could interpret and understand it as one complete Masterpiece. A single book of stories and parables and quotes or verses, that works as One, while also being capable of having many different meanings in even single sentences. While you imagine this, I'm sure there is a voice in your head thinking, "Oh God, if she says this is what the Bible is then she must be insane." Well, I hate to disappoint so yes, for the sake of this topic, that is exactly what I'm trying to say the Bible is like. So much so that the Bible itself even says so. (As described in Mark 4:11-12)

-1 Corinthians 2:13

And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths, to those who are spiritual.

So if an unbeliever cannot understand the Bible and its message or purpose, how does anyone manage to become a believer? Why would the Bible be written

in a way that requires some “esoteric key to interpretation”?

The answer is this. The key to understanding in the "Christian way" is available to everyone (according to the bible), but only those who are willing to give it a chance. Assuming God is real, the bible says he will show you the way, all you have to do is ask to be shown. You don't even have to believe as Christians do in order to be granted the “eyes to see”... what you do need to do however is invite the Holy spirit (God) to guide you to the answers you seek.

- James 1:5

“But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”

That reminds me, once someone said something to me that made a lot of sense.

"A man convinced against his will is unconvinced still."

That kind of sounds similar to the verse I started this with only the Bible verse seems to be saying that the truth is there, waiting to be found, yet people will actually refuse to give the Holy Spirit a chance to work through the Scripture because they fear it might actually prove to be real...

Openness to the idea that the Bible could be the true written word of God requires people to also be confronted with a lot of fear and Guilt. Not many people enjoy confronting the worst of themselves. If only they knew how liberating it could be and how fear and guilt are not the point of Christianity. In fact, the point is that we are forgiven even before we repent.

How could the bible be a true Holy book inspired by God, if Christians be in such disagreement about what the Bible actually says and about what God condones or does not condone?

- 2 Peter 3:16

As he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction as they do the other Scriptures.

Well, this is possible through several factors and oftentimes, more than one. The first and most important of these would be the one I have discussed. It is a question of who is in the drivers seat and if an individual is reading the word as a Christian being guided by God/Holy spirit or if they are not and actually have convinced themselves that human understanding is substantial enough to give them a deeper and fuller understanding.

Second it has to do with how "close" they are walking with God through their life and as a Christian. It is absolutely possible to be a Christian, but to have fallen into a phase where the world has pulled you away from a closer relationship with Him or where an individual is feeling weaker in their faith and cannot fully let God work through their lives. Some people call this "backsliding" but I don't like that word.

When a Christian is less connected to God or not fully giving God power to work in their lives, this is just part of Growing in Christ. Just as your understanding of things can change as you grow and mature, or just how someone can be "out of shape"/"out of practice", the same happens to Christians in their walk with Jesus. This is a good example of why humanity is often referred to as hve "sheep" while God/Jesus is the "Shepherd." Just as sheep often wander too far from the path, humans also tend to wander too and fro in the world, leaving us vulnerable to wolves/Satan.

Which leads to a third reason why this confusion and contradiction appears between Christians. Satan has been referred to as the great deceiver, like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. It is possible some Christians are not truly Christians at all and have allowed themselves to become tools for the Devil. An example could be a "Christian" who is proud and boastful and who has convinced themselves that identifying as Christian will make them seem, "Greater than thou" or actually make them seem less sinful in the eyes of God and since their understanding of the Bible is not being guided by God is it instead guided by the Devil to be blatantly wrong and actually cause harm to Christianity and the image it seems to carry.

While this is an extreme example, a true Christian can also be misled by Satan. While Satan could never truly "pluck" a true Christian from God's hand and eternal protection (Salvation), Christians can absolutely be misled by Satan and that can come in the form of other people, exploitation of personal doubts and sometimes, even "Christian" churches that teach flawed Doctrines. This is why you see so many versions of Christianity.

There is a literal war going on around us, every day, Good vs Evil in an attempt to win human souls to God/Jesus and eternal life or trick/lead them away, towards death and eternal separation from God. They call it spiritual warfare and I have no doubt that Satan uses Christianity itself to cause confusion.

Unfortunately it is a powerful tactic that many people fall for. I myself have fallen for it and spent many many years hating God and Christianity. While I still have a distaste for the amount of "Wolves in Sheep clothing" I see in Christianity, I no longer believe these "bad" churches/Christians are one in the same as the Christianity Jesus taught at the start. (In fact, the Bible literally says that Jesus preached that all of these things will come to pass and so Christians should beware and be prepared.

Finally, I would like to address a specific conflict of reason in order to show further how lack of true understanding and true intent can lead non believers to see the Bible as something full of invalidity.

Let's use the topic of Sin and Sinners and the Ten Commandments and maybe even Homosexuality. (Yeah surprised I pulled that one out too) Could one Christian say that it is OK to be gay or commit sin/break commandments, while another says Absolutely not, none of that is OK and those who do so should repent and never do it again/stop, and yet still both parties be correct and true Christians.

My answer and maybe this is just my own opinion, is Yes. While these two statements contradict themselves, according to the Bible they are both correct. See, there are many laws of the Old Testament that God put in place to keep the Jews sort of "In line". Aka don't do this, this, this, etc or else you must repent/give sacrifice to absolve yourself. However, when Jesus was crucified, he said that a lot of the older and stricter laws no longer apply and that with his death ALL sin is forgiven, the price is paid, sacrifice made.

Instead of living a life of following the law or paying the price to clean yourself of sin, Jesus taught that at the time of his arrival, Humanity was so thoroughly infected by Sin that not only were every one of us born with Sin but that no amount of sacrifice could ever possibly pay an individual's way to Salvation. (Imagine Sin as a genetic Illness passed down through the Father (male inherited) that becomes exponentially worse each generation, becoming more and severe until the damage is beyond repair)

John 3:16 (NIV)

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Out of love for His creation, God literally sacrificed himself for us as a pure and innocent soul, untouched by sin.. to take the place of every human that ever lived and ever would live. He took every sin that ever was and ever would be onto himself as he died on the cross and just before dying he said "it is done" implying the deal with Satan was complete and all sin was paid for with his blood and sacrifice of Jesus, the "perfect unblemished lamb".. all we need now do for salvation is Believe in him and accept the gift.

Does that mean that we all have a free ticket to sin as much as we like without consequence?? Absolutely not. Sin is sort of categorized as anything that is harmful to yourself or each other, be it on a micro scale or a macro scale. Meaning, not only does sin hurt you and those you encounter through life but also the future of the human species is at risk of being destroyed if the majority of us choose to continue doing things that are "Sinful".

In modern day, there are many people alive and many different combinations of how Sin manifests through each one. While it is not "OK" to sin on purpose without intentions of stopping, it is still in our nature and our society in such a deep way that not one of us can help ourselves from committing it at some point.

With that in mind, maybe you can see how it is possible for Christians to be so contradictory and so inconsistent on what is and is not OK in their interpretation of the bible. Not all of us are in the same place at the same time mentally or spiritually and often, different levels of maturity in Christ or strengths of faith and closeness to God can lead to varying depths of understanding. It does not mean that the Bible itself is wrong, but it does mean that it can be interpreted in many different ways and just as some ways are wrong interpretations, some opposing understandings can both be partially correct.

-Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

This is a difficult time for Christianity and the bible says that this is how things would become. It is expected that the church will be targeted from the outside as well as the inside because Satan doesn't want a single human to be saved. He wants every one of us to be lost so that we never reach our ultimate potential and true purpose. Too bad he couldn't resist a deal where he could corrupt and kill God himself. I imagine Satan thought.. "So he's going to let me destroy the most perfect and sinless human to walk the earth, to corrupt and punish God himself... in exchange for the promise that I will release each person who truly believes in him, to eternal life and freedom from worldly bondage.

He didn't think Jesus could possibly be enough to win over a single human soul... Especially since many people thought he was a Fake and those who believed he was the son of God, would be lost in time when they all died and the event was forgotten. Just in case Jesus did get the message out and people had a chance to be won, Satan has worked and continues to work

at great length, with great skills in deception and manipulation, to orchestrate a complete and ultimate failure of Gods plan to save Humanity from destruction.

- 2 Corinthians 4:4 (NLT)

Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don't understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.

The questions people are asking in this forum... these are not questions that you will find all the answers to here. Sure, God speaks through his followers... Just as I asked that he would and I do hope that God has spoken through me with this post... I am only human and to err is human. My understanding of Gods word can be flawed and it's possible I have inserted my own opinion in areas... but I can only share what I have received and understood from my experience... If you want real answers, you have to read the bible as a true Christian believer reads the bible. Maybe then the truth will be revealed and it will make much more sense... If it doesn't, maybe i'm kidding myself and God never "spoke" to me through my bible study or prayer. I'm open to the possibility that I am wrong... but just from the things I have experienced and learned, the impossible that I have seen made possible, I just can't say i'm inclined to believe any other way. I hope I answered your question in some sort of way that is satisfactory... Sorry if it came across preachy, it's just I don't know how else to explain it.