

In an episode of **Pirates of the Caribbean** – 2 pirates in a rowboat, one seems to be reading a book. The other says *you have that book upside down*. To which the other replies, *It's the Bible – you get credit for trying!*

### **ADAMANT CERTAINTY AND HEALTHY DISTRUST, 7 pgs.**

This essay was inspired by conversations with a friend **who is so sure he is right that he cannot be reasoned with**. Certain subjects launch him into a tirade reminiscent of Martin Luther SHOUTING *This is my body!* referring to Christ's initiation of communion as he pounded the table. Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli had each written forcefully against the position of the other regarding whether the literal body of Jesus Christ was present in **the Lord's Supper** or whether it was merely a **memorial celebration**. The veracity of the Scripture wasn't in question. It was a debate over what the passage meant by what it said. **Luther was wrong** in failing to understand the metaphorical use of the language *this represents my body*.

My friend was a black (well, a brown) man who met with me for Bible lessons. He didn't actually study it or even read the Bible, or any related material for that matter. He was affable enough and we got along pretty well as long as I did all the work. I decided to test his attitude toward knowing and believing because he seemed to be **without doubt and unshakable** regarding certain things he had accepted. **I mentioned that George Washington was a great man**. Well all hell broke loose. His visceral dislike for GW seemed to be instigated by certain **trigger words**. It was founded upon several absolute unassailable facts: GW was a rich white man; he owned black slaves: he didn't set them free soon enough. Evidently this attitude was passed down through his family or had become part of the general knowledge base of the black community. He didn't use the word "believe" - he would say **I know**. **The accuracy of the knowledge passed down to him was unassailable**. **His obstinacy cut off all conversation on the subject and rendered research irrelevant**. There was not the slightest doubt in this perception of GW as it has been apparently handed down through the years. Here are some facts.

**GW grew up in a middle class home**. He inherited an interest in the Mount Vernon family domain and built it into the 7,000 + acre estate. At one time he had a workforce of 316 slaves—less than one-third of whom Washington owned. 153 belonged to his father-in-law's estate and 40 he rented from a neighbor. Most of this wealth can be traced to his success as a land speculator, an enterprise that grew out of his early career as land surveyor. He had firsthand experience of the frontier country beyond the Allegheny Mountains gained during the French and Indian War. The area's strategic and economic potential was the key that opened the door to financial opportunity. He certainly **became a very wealthy man** by the time he died in 1799. In his later years he had evolved into a proto-abolitionist, a remarkable ethical journey for a man of his time, place, and class. He had his slaves freed by will in 1801.

### **Misconceptions are spoken of a lot in the Scriptures**

<sup>1</sup> Jesus ... *saw a man who had been blind from birth*. <sup>2</sup>*his disciples asked, why was this man born blind?* So far this question is entirely appropriate. It envisions a rational cause and effect universe governed by the will of a supernatural being. **Notice that there was no doubt that the man's**

blindness was an **abnormal condition** caused by God's will. *Was it because of his own particular sins or those of his parents? [the only acceptable reason they could think of that would justify God causing such a condition].* Jesus' disciples were MEN OF THEIR TIMES. That is, they were Jews and thought in terms of limited possibilities typical of their time and culture. They really couldn't conceive of any cause other than God punishes for sin and blesses for obedience. **Very few people within such a subculture escape the influence of the simplistic thinking characteristic of it.**

<sup>3</sup> **Neither ...** *This [birth defect] happened so the power of God could be seen [manifestation or display of Jesus' power in the man's miraculous healing]. (Jn.9:)* Jesus introduced a third more complex possibility that doesn't rely upon a moral judgment, but acknowledged the sovereignty of God and his purposes.

## MISJUDGING JOB

The book of Job begins, <sup>1:1</sup> *Job was blameless, a man of complete integrity. He feared God and stayed away from evil.* Unknown to Job, God bragged about him to Satan who replied *Of course ...* <sup>10</sup> *You have always put a wall of protection around him and his home and his pro-property. You have made him prosper in everything he does. Look how rich he is!* <sup>11</sup> *But ... take away everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face!* *[In other words* **Job's real motives for living as a godly man have nothing to do with allegiance to God, but with the benefits he got out of it]** <sup>12</sup> *All right, you may test him ... Do whatever you want with everything he possesses, but don't harm him physically.*

So through various means, all Job's animals were stolen or destroyed, his servants and children killed, etc. <sup>22</sup> *In all of this, Job did not sin by blaming God [for wrongdoing].* So Satan proposed a second test. *Take away his health, and he will surely curse you to your face!* <sup>2:6</sup> *All right, do with him as you please ... But spare his life ...* <sup>7</sup> *So Satan ... struck Job with terrible boils from head to foot.*

Next we find Job sitting among the ashes scraping his itching skin with a piece of broken pottery. And besides this, <sup>9</sup> *His wife encouraged him to Curse God and die.* <sup>10</sup> *But Job replied,* **Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad?** *[That's the question, isn't it, for all of us.] So in all this, Job said nothing wrong.*

Most of the remainder of the book is composed of Job's friends attempting to convince him to repent of his presumed sin so God will once again bless him. They said, *Wicked people are in pain throughout their lives. (15:20) ... the triumph of the wicked has been short-lived and the joy of the godless has been only temporary. (20:4)* **This represented the prevalent view with which Job disagreed.** <sup>7</sup> **Why do the wicked prosper**, growing old and powerful? <sup>8</sup> *They live to see their children grow up and settle down, and they enjoy their grandchildren.* <sup>9</sup> *Their homes are safe from every fear, and God does not punish them.* <sup>10</sup> *Their bulls never fail to breed. Their cows bear calves and never miscarry ... (21:)*

**What seems to represent a basic difference in the observable facts I think of as a philosophical lens,** that is, **one's basic beliefs interpret what he sees or how he understands it.** Job's friends represent the general consensus that Job did not participate in. He was not being swayed by a false view of God nor was he self-deluded. At the end of the book God challenged Job's desire to argue

his case and showed him something of his greatness. **Job accepted his rebuke with humility and confessed his ignorance** in matters of divine sovereignty. Then God affirmed what Job had said to his friends and restored all that he had lost. (42:12-17)

### THE ERROR OF THE SAMARITANS

Jesus left Judea and was returning to Galilee through Samaria. <sup>5</sup> *Eventually he came to the village of Sychar ...* <sup>7</sup> *A Samaritan woman came to draw water*, and Jesus asked her for a drink ... <sup>9</sup> *The woman was surprised, for Jews [typically] refused to have anything to do with Samaritans ...* During their conversation, the woman realized that Jesus was more than a common Israelite. <sup>19</sup> *Sir, you must be a prophet.* <sup>20</sup> *So tell me, why is it that Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place of worship, while we Samaritans claim it is here at Mount Gerizim, where our ancestors worshiped?* [Jesus could have easily answered this question from the history of the northern kingdom (10 tribes) of Israel, 2 Ki.17:15, 24-41. See following NOTE.] However, <sup>21</sup> *Jesus replied ... the time is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. [ie, it is a more complex matter than where you bow down to God]* <sup>22</sup> *You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship, [You're whole culture is wrong about God in many ways.] while we Jews know all about him, for salvation comes through the Jews. (Jn.4:)*

**NOTE:** Gentiles were not included in God's covenant with Israel. The Samaritans were a mixed blood race resulting from the intermarriage of Israelites left behind when the people of the northern kingdom were exiled and Gentiles brought into the land by the Assyrians. They had their own set of Scriptures that were altered to suit the king's purposes. After Jesus had risen from the dead, the new covenant in his blood made people from every nation equally acceptable to be born into God's family. Consequently the Gospel was preached to people of all nations (Mt.28:19).

### The Mormon's Error (by D.A. Carson)

The opening verses of **Hebrews 1** raises a contrast. *In the past* contrasts with *in these last days*. God spoke *to our forefathers* stands over against the fact that *in these last days* he has spoken *to us*. *In the past* God spoke *through the prophets at many times and in various ways*, but *in these last days* he has spoken *by his Son*. The form of that expression suggests strongly that the author does not regard the Son as one more prophet, or even as the supreme prophet. The idea is not that though in the past the word of God was mediated by prophets, *in these last days* it has been mediated by the *Son*, the last of the prophets.

The Greek translation *by his Son* is literally *in Son*. The absence of the article "the" or pronoun "his" is significant because *in Son* contrasts not only with *through the prophets* but with *at many times and in various ways* God has disclosed himself. *In the past when God used prophets*, he sometimes gave them words directly, in dreams, or in visions; sometimes led them through experiences which they recorded; sometimes he spoke through extraordinary events: there were *many times* and *various ways* (1:1). But NOW God has spoken *in the Son revelation*. **Jesus didn't simply mediate revelation, he is the revelation.** He doesn't simply bring a word from God, he is himself the climactic Word of God. *He is the radiance of God's glory – the exact representation of his being* (1:3).

Strictly speaking, Christians do not think of the NT books as being like the OT books, bringing the next phase of God's redemptive plan to us. **Mormons** see Jesus as just another prophet in the tradition of the OT prophets and see **Joseph Smith** as yet another accredited prophet bringing still later revelation to us. However the author of Hebrews sees that the climax of all the OT revelation, mediated through prophets and stored in books is not more books – but **Christ Jesus himself**. The NT writings congregate around Jesus and bear witness to him whose first and second coming is the climax of revelation. Later writings that cannot bear witness to this climactic revelation, such as The Book of Mormon, are automatically disqualified as Scripture.

### THE WORST SINNERS

In another incident, ... *Jesus was informed that Pilate [Roman governor of Judea who held the office of magistrate] had murdered some people from Galilee as they were offering sacrifices at the Jewish Temple (Lk.13:1) [ had his armed soldiers go into the temple in Jerusalem and slaughter unarmed men who were offering sacrifices to God – he mingled their blood with that of their animal sacrifices, an offense known as **sacrilege** . Scripture doesn't say what prompted this] . Jesus asked, <sup>2</sup> Do you think those murdered Galileans were worse sinners than all the other people from Galilee? Is that why they suffered [did God punish them because of specific sins they had committed ?] ? <sup>3</sup> Not at all! [The reason was more general than that] And you too will perish unless you repent of your sins and turn to God.*

Then he mentions another earlier incident where people apparently died as the result of an accident. <sup>4</sup>And what about the eighteen people who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them? *Were they the worst sinners in Jerusalem [so as to incur God's wrath] ?* <sup>5</sup>No, and I tell you again [repetition for emphasis] that unless you repent, you also will perish.

Did you hear about the spectators and runners killed and maimed at a **Boston Marathon bombing**? Have you seen pictures of the Florida swamp where **Valujet Flight 592 crashed**? *Do you think God brought special severe punishment upon those people causing them to suffer so much because they were more deserving than any others* ... more guilty than you? Jesus answers NO! He is not discussing punishment for any particular wicked behavior. Jesus introduces another more basic consideration with regard to God's punishment. He is referring to our general condition as rebels before God and the peril we are all in every moment of every day.

### Sin & death

Adam was the head of the human race and his disobedience condemned us all. <sup>12</sup> *When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned ... [in Adam]* <sup>18</sup> *Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone ...* <sup>19</sup> *Because one person disobeyed God, many [all of us] became sinners. (Rom.5:)*

Death has 2 parts. *Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone, Rom.5:18 . The human race has already died to God.* Now as you know God has addressed our sad condition by sending us a Savior, *now, once for all time, Christ has appeared at the end of the age to remove sin by his own death as a [substitutionary] sacrifice.* <sup>27</sup> *And just as each person is destined to die [physically] once and after that comes judgment,* <sup>28</sup> *so also Christ was offered once for all time as a*



[substitutionary] sacrifice to take away the sins of many people [everyone who believes in him]. **He will come again**, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him, **Heb.9:**

<sup>16</sup> **this is how God loved the world:** He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone [not just Jews] who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him [ie, through his substitutionary sacrifice]. <sup>18</sup> **There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him.** But anyone who does not believe in him has **already** been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son, **Jn.3:**

### Window of Opportunity for inmates

Don't have any doubts about this, **unbelief in Jesus** for the forgiveness of sin **is wickedness**. You [inmates] have had plenty of opportunities to learn of him and God's word has been available to you. **You couldn't ask for a better situation than you have right here in jail.** You're away from those temptations and distractions that have been cluttering and wasting your life until now. Right here, right now is the best time and place to seek the living God and his righteousness. **Remember that what will happen in the next moment of your life is unknown and that the last moment is fast approaching.** You have this window of opportunity now. **Salvation is not universal or automatic.** Christ receives everyone who comes to him in faith. Repentance alone leads us beyond death and judgment to the love of God and new life in his kingdom. John the Baptist said it this way as he heralded the coming of Jesus. **At last the time promised by God [through the OT prophets] has come! The Kingdom of God is near! Turn from your sins [ie, repent] and believe this Good News! Mk.1:15**

### MY TESTIMONY

In 1969, I was in Seattle, Washington training for the All Army wrestling team. We were getting ready to wrestle in the All Services tournament against the Navy, Air Force, and Marines. I had gotten to know Jim and Dave, a couple Greco-Roman wrestlers who were Christians and spoke to me often about Christ and God's promise of new life through believing in him. Once I walked into Jim's room babbling about something foolish and he said, **George, is there any reason not to come to Christ right now?** Well there wasn't, but I didn't commit myself right then. Instead **I struggled with those words in my heart.** I came to Christ a few days later after realizing that my reasons for not trusting Jesus were all selfish, foolish, and worthless. What could possibly compare with embracing the love of God?

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There is something else that made it impossible to discuss truth with **my friend.** He confused the **historic subject with personal experiences.** He has more than once gone off on a rant shouting repeatedly **I know what I saw** [went through or experienced?] as if it had some relevance to Washington or shouting it over and over would make it true. We ended up talking past each other. He didn't think logically. It's as if he wanted or needed to justify his grudge. I think **his mind had been poisoned by a deep-seated prejudice that thrives in the black community.** What else could convince a man that he cannot possibly be wrong on a subject like this? What could erase every scrap of doubt or humility? Thankfully, there are some who break out of their group-think and condi-

tioning whose minds are freed from bias and hatred to think objectively. *Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person **by changing the way you think, Rom.12:2***

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There is a deception, a blindness that infects communities: ethnic, political, religious, scientific or otherwise, that keeps people from considering or realizing the truth. It reveals itself as a **preference for the lie rather than the truth**. It may be racial as a history of abuse propagated and held on to by members of that group which seemed to be the case with my friend. There is also a blindness that prefers a philosophical position such as evolution, that reacts prejudicially to any notion of divine origin. **In these cases the facts, if known, don't matter. Refusal to hear is reactionary,** visceral, illogical, and eventually morphs into hatred. In such cases all it takes to stir people up and incite them to violence is the truth (as in the stoning of Stephen, Acts 7), or manipulation of the crowds as in the call for Jesus to be crucified or protest against the showing of a film on intelligent design (The Privileged Planet) at the Smithsonian.

**One of the points that my friend didn't grasp (or chose not to) is the influence times and cultures have on all of us who grow up in them.** He failed to distinguish between the different relationships that existed between people. Abram also had a lot of slaves, but they are presented as part of an extended family. When he rescued Lot, Abram called together the men born into his household, *318 in all*. (**Gen.14:14**) Since Sarai was childless, Abram was considering bestowing all his wealth on Eliezer, his slave. (**15:2-3**) Cruel treatment was not necessarily a part of slavery. Slavery took on different forms in different circumstances, times, and cultures. My friend painted everything with the same brush. GW was a slave owner. Mere ownership of people at any time in history or in any culture is not all-condemning and unforgivable.

During the time of Jesus and the first-century church, as much as one third of the Roman population were slaves, and another third had been slaves earlier in life. It was a complex community in which it was common for freeborn men and women to work side-by-side with slaves as, dockworkers, teachers, doctors, and business managers.

**The Bible doesn't directly criticize the practice of slavery, but it says a lot about how we are to treat one another whatever our position or station in life is.** There are lots of questions that I am not qualified to address and some I think I know something about. At the founding of this country, delegates gathered ostensibly to amend the **Articles of Confederation**. Instead, recognizing the deficiencies of that document, they scrapped it entirely and formulated a new one, our US Constitution. There were among the delegates those who wanted to abolish slavery, but there were also many slave owners who would oppose this. The only politically viable solution was to leave the issue unaddressed. So a good and strong constitution (though not a perfect one) was ratified. There are good video and audio materials available for anyone interested in the convention and surrounding climate.

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This has been a very sketchy attempt to point out some of the problems in being too sure of oneself and in dealing with a volatile issue such as slavery. The Bible and other historic documents have much more to say on the subject, but they are for those who really want to know. They are practically useless for those who ALREADY KNOW. For instance books on the dumbing down of America such as The Closing of the American Mind would have been of no use to my friend. Neither would it be helpful to discuss the dynamics of conditioning and manipulation or gullibility - how beliefs, false notions, and fears are used as the tools by manipulators. **Can people be duped over and over again by the same organizations, strategies, and lies? You bet!**

*It should be noted that I haven't mentioned a major source of deception in the world – Satan, who is a manipulator, liar, deceiver, and accuser.*