

# **PART 1: Basic Statements**

## **Chapter 1.01 Background**

This chapter explains some ideas about Christianity. Some ideas we will meet again and some are discussed here mostly to get past them. If you do not know the bare facts of Jesus' life, see Chapter 4.01. "Standard" Christians are "orthodox" Christians, meaning "correct believing" Christians. Standard orthodoxy is summed up in the Nicene Creed. Most major churches are standard orthodox. Standard Christians believe Jesus is God, was resurrected, and will come again. They believe Jesus' life on Earth had magical efficacy. Because Jesus came to this world, was crucified, and resurrected, people automatically can be saved if they want. Their primary attitude toward God and Jesus is worship, which can take many forms including following his message.

### **Special Jesus.**

Unless Jesus was special somehow, there is no reason to pay attention to him or his teachings. Great religions claim something unique about their founder and message: Jews have privileged access to the one and only God; Mohammad was the last and greatest of the prophets, so Muslims know the true will of God; Hindus see the unity of all with the deepest reality, and know how to behave as a result; Taoists see how the world really works and how to get along with it; and the Buddha saw clearly how to avoid suffering.

Jesus might not have a unique message in the same way. At first sight, Jesus did not teach any moral lessons that other religions do not also teach. Because his teaching is not radically new, it seems there is no reason to accept that he is a special messenger of God and that we should follow his ideas or to accept that he is God and that we are saved by his having come to this world.

Although Jesus does not seem radically new, I believe he was special enough so that we do have to pay attention to his message and we can accept him as a prophet of God. He taught an image of a better world that is not quite the same as in other religions, and he urged followers to act vigorously to achieve the better world in ways unlike other religions. His message extends normal tendencies in human nature, such as kindness, in ways that could not be done through biological evolution and that are not done in other religions. I explain throughout the book. The specialness resides in the message rather than in the messenger.

Standard Christians do not have to worry about whether or not Jesus' teachings were unique because they do not base their religion on his message but on his status as both God and man (human). The specialness of Jesus comes in the person of Jesus. Our salvation is guaranteed merely because he was God and human, was crucified, and resurrected. I do not know how to engage this idea of how Jesus is unique. I do not think this idea is important. I think his teaching is more important than his status, and that his teaching is enough.

The ideal for standard Christians is that the message and the status of Jesus require each other. If you understand what Jesus was, that he was God, then you have to appreciate his message and follow it; if you understand Jesus' message and feel its appeal, then you have to appreciate that he was God. Despite many theologians trying to show how the two aspects of Jesus require each other, it is still not clear. Most people focus on his status rather than his message because focusing on his status does not require a commitment to difficult acts. It is enough to worship him and then carry on with life. Many standard Christians selectively follow Jesus' teachings, largely in ways that benefit themselves.

### **Special Daily Life.**

If specialness could be found in normal daily life then people would not need religion. When people seek something special in a religion, at first they look outside of normal daily life. Christians have Jesus the God-Man, Jews have direct ties with God through a line of prophets, and Hindus have direct experiences of a world more real than this world of ordinary life.

Although religions refer to something outside of normal life to ratify their truth and power, the average follower does not base his-her daily life on an experience outside of normal daily life even if he-she had such an experience. Most people fear what they find outside of normal life. They accept that the founder of the religion had such an experience, and they can refer to the experience of the founder. Once people can refer to an experience outside of daily life in the lore of their religion, instead of living in that experience, the average person uses religion primarily to validate everyday life, to make daily life seem holy rather than tedious. Average people do something token in daily life to refer to the truth and power of their religion, such as go to church or hang a cross; and that token reference allows them to feel that their daily life is special. It allows them to believe their daily life is the proper daily life. It allows them to do what they need to do to get along, and to consider that holy. Some Christians use Jesus to validate family values. Somehow belief that Jesus was God makes living in a middle class nuclear family holy. Some Buddhists think chanting sutras makes riding the bus to work every day holy. Some Jews and Muslims think the same of prayer.

When people use the special experiences of their religion primarily to ratify what they need in daily life, they create a distinction between what is special in their religion versus their daily life; but they do not often feel the distinction. Jesus said that his followers needed to disdain their normal family but "family values" Christians do not pay attention to that teaching. It does no good to make fun of what normal people need and what they might do with the teachings of their religion. We have to accept that what makes a religion special in official doctrine might not be what matters in the daily life of followers. We have to look at what really happened with Jesus, official doctrine about him, and what ordinary people make of him. We have to consider what we make of Jesus, and we have to be careful not to make something of him only to use as an excuse to ratify our daily lives. When we find something special about Jesus, we have to think how to modify our lives in accord with that, if we can.

### **Universal or Particular.**

Any religion that claims to be important also claims to apply to all people in all places. It claims universality. An important religion is not just a religion for Jews, Hindus, or Christians but for all people. The god of the Jews or Hindus is not just their god but is the God of all people everywhere.

Respect for life is not just true for Muslims or for Jews but for all people everywhere. Jesus did not just save a few people; Jesus had the ability to save everybody.

If Christianity claims to be important and to be about Jesus' teaching as well as his status, then the teaching has to be universal. It has to apply to everybody. Jesus had to be a teacher of universal moral truths.

### **Only a Teacher.**

Some Christians object to seeing Jesus as a moral teacher because they object to seeing him as only a moral teacher. They say seeing him that way reduces his status. It treats him as only a philosopher rather than as God. They do not mind seeing him as a teacher of universal moral ideas as long as we do not forget that he was primarily God, and it is as God that he saves us.

I understand their concern but I find it odd because I believe his importance lies in his teaching of universal moral ideas and that concern with his status can blind us to his teaching. Concern with his status can lead us to go against his teaching. I would rather wrongly take him for a philosopher and follow what he taught than rightly take him for God and overlook what he taught.

### **Conquering Evil.**

We can understand religions, and appreciate their differences, by seeing how particular religions explain evil: where does evil come from, why does God allow evil, and what do we do about it? People tend to think of death as evil, and so religions need to explain why we die, and, if death is not the last step, how we might overcome death. If a religion cannot deal with the problem of evil, then it is incomplete. I do not believe any religion deals with this question well enough so I think all religions are incomplete, including both the teachings of Jesus and standard Christianity. Even so, we can hold to a religion while admitting it is not complete and while getting the best from it that we can.

Traditional Christianity bears a special burden with the problem of evil because it has always claimed that Jesus conquered evil. Standard Christianity could admit that the problem of evil is too much for humans to understand. Standard Christianity had to develop an elaborate explanation of the origin of evil and of how Jesus defeated evil even though evil still flourishes in this world. Standard Christianity sees evil as the direct result of demons contaminating an otherwise good creation of God. Just by being born, dying, and being resurrected, Jesus conquered all the demons and Jesus put an end to evil and death. Evil is tolerated for a while but will finally end when Jesus returns. By all normal standards, this claim is false. I do not believe in demons, and I do not think the coming, dying, and resurrection of Jesus put an end to evil.

I have no explanation for evil. I can explain how humans evolved the capacity to do evil acts. But I cannot explain why God would have allowed the capacity to evolve in the first place, and so I have no ultimate explanation for evil. In the end, I have to accept the presence of evil and just get on as best I can.

### **Salvation.**

Standard Christianity claims something that other religions do not claim in the same way: to save people.

This is why Jesus has a special status. People are lost. Without Jesus, they cannot be saved. With Jesus they can be. The mere existence of Jesus, apart from any message, saves people. The most important message of Jesus is his mere existence. I disagree with the need for salvation in this sense, and therefore I disagree that Jesus' mere presence saved people, so I have to be clear about salvation.

Most everyday Christians that I have talked to are not clear what it means to be saved. Early Christians just after the time of Jesus thought three things. First, Jesus was returning very soon, within months, to establish the Kingdom of God. Second, if they died before Jesus returned, their bodies would be saved from normal decay, and they would be resurrected for the coming of the Kingdom in a special body but a real physical body. Third, the Kingdom of God was a real physical Kingdom on this Earth rather than in heaven. The Earth would be transformed, as were their bodies, but it would still be a real physical Earth. They would be members of a physical Kingdom of God either while still alive or when resurrected after death. Current ideas of salvation probably developed out of the early ideas but current ideas are not like early ideas. I do not think early Christians would fully understand current ideas, and current Christians do not think in the same terms as early Christians. Few people now believe in a physical resurrection as did the early Christians. Christians think the Kingdom of God is not physical, and not on this Earth but in heaven.

Most Christians now think the Kingdom of God is not physical, and is not on this Earth but in heaven. Salvation means to be with Jesus in Heaven after death. Some Christians think salvation means to be given special powers or to have a special non-corruptible body even in this life, and then to go to Heaven to be with Jesus after they die. Some Christians think it means to have a special relation with Jesus in this life so that Jesus listens to them and helps them more than other people, and then to go to Heaven to be with Jesus after death. Starting no later than Saint Augustine around 400 AD, and getting much strength from later Protestantism, Christianity developed the ideas that people had to be Justified to be saved, a person could not be Justified by any acts of him-herself, and God intervenes to Justify and Save certain people of his choosing only. I think these ideas would not have made sense to Jesus or to early Christians.

Contrary to popular belief, most standard Christians still are not clear on what they are saved from, why they need to be saved, and what they are saved to. Early Christians probably did not worry about being damned in hell so much as about being left out of the real physical Kingdom of God. Standard Christians now are saved from damnation in hell, but few people other than standard Christians and Muslims believe in hell or believe that all people will be divided into the two camps of heaven and hell. Most people do not think an ordinary life of mixed modest goodness and badness is enough to warrant eternal damnation, so they do not know what they are saved from. Beginning sometime after Saint Augustine, Christianity developed the idea of Original Sin to go along with the idea of Justification and to explain evil: all people are damned because of Adam and Eve's choice to disobey God. As a result of Original Sin, all people now live irretrievably depraved lives. Few modern people believe this, perhaps because most people do not live irretrievably depraved lives. I doubt Jesus would have thought most normal are people automatically damned to Hell and I doubt he would have understood Original Sin.

Non-Christians often do not understand what they need to be saved from or what they need to be saved to. In Thailand, I heard amusing conversations where standard Christians try to talk non-Christian Buddhists or animists into believing they are first lost so Christians can then save them. Non-Christians

do not understand that they already are lost and do not understand Original Sin. They know frustration, failure, tragedy, bad, evil, disease, obnoxious people, indecency, corruption, bad luck, and even their own role in negativity. They understand the need for consolation, help, and hope. They do not understand Christian ideas of depravity, the need for salvation, and Original Sin. They do not feel inherently depraved. They do not see how simply believing that Jesus is God can save them from inherent depravity. Standard Christians have to talk people into feeling inherently depraved so they can then undeprave them.

Standard Christianity has to explain why people need to be saved and what it means to be saved. It seems that merely understanding the status of Jesus, his birth, death, and resurrection, leads to overcoming evil and leads to eternal life. This answer does not make sense to everybody.

Working directly for salvation, and worrying about justification, original sin, grace, hell, and heaven, does not often help people live according to Jesus' teaching. In fact, these ideas can have the opposite effect by frightening people or because people use them to control the hearts and deeds of others. Rather than oppose these ideas directly, it is better to just ignore them and instead to focus on Jesus' message.

### **Special Universal Teacher or Only a Jewish Teacher.**

Recently, scholars have done very well at seeing Jesus in terms of his time and place, in terms of his context as a Jew in the early Roman Empire. This way of seeing Jesus sheds light on his ideas about the Kingdom of God, community, sharing, healing, non-violence, and other teachings. This way of seeing Jesus helps to overcome two thousand years of prejudice against Jews, and helps to clear our heads of prejudice in general. We have to see Jesus in this way to really appreciate him. It is a good way to see him. We will look at this material in the second part of the book.

This way of looking at Jesus can seem to undermine his uniqueness and the universality of his teachings. To many standard Christians, this way of looking at Jesus undermines his status as God. If Jesus did not do something other than the Judaism of his time, and greater than the Judaism of his time, then Christianity would not have arisen. It would not have been necessary. Jesus' teaching or life must be distinct from Judaism in some way and must be better in some way. The more we want to see him as Jewish, the less we seem him as special and universal. The more we want to see him as special and universal, the less we tend to see him as Jewish. For example, if, by "Kingdom of God", Jesus meant something primarily for Israel, then the Kingdom of God cannot be the basis for Jesus being special, for universal moral ideas, for seeing him as divine universal savior, and for heaven. If Jesus brought something new for all people, then he was not fully Jewish by the standards of his time, and what Jews then believed was not enough.

Since the early Church, Christians have understood that Jesus must stand apart from, and above, the popular Judaism of Jesus' time. Unfortunately, standard Christians made Jesus special by putting down Jews, often by denigrating and demonizing them. They contrasted Jesus not just with the popular Judaism of Jesus' time but also with a made-up unreal universal bad Judaism that few real Jews ever followed, but which later Christians understood to include all real Jews everywhere at all times. Demonizing Jews flatly goes against the message of Jesus. Christians cannot make Jesus more special by making Jews vile. Jesus has to be special because of good qualities that are intrinsic to him and his

message. For Jesus to stand as tall as possible, he has to stand above other people that are tall. For Jesus to be most special, he needs to be special among people that were special before him. To lower Jews so as to make Jesus stand out by contrast really lowers the level from which Jesus stands out and lowers Jesus. That kind of Jesus does not stand out among people in general.

Jesus was fundamentally Jewish. His moral message extended Jewish ideas and improved Jewish ideas. Jews would have appreciated his message, and perhaps would have accepted his message, if historical events had not led to a split between Jews and Christians. I hope to convey how Jews were special, see Jesus as Jewish, understand his message, see how his message extended Jewish ideas for the better, see how he was special, see how his message does not undermine Jews, and see how his ideas came to be universal. I believe we can do this. Moses extended Jewish ideas and improved on them without denigrating Abraham or denigrating what had gone before. In his time, Jews accepted Moses. Even many non-Jews eventually accepted Moses.

For a modern enlightened standard Christian who believes in Jesus as God, the ideal is both to see Jesus in his original situation, including his life as a Jew, and to use that knowledge to appreciate his unique identity as God and his unique mission as God. I am not sure this can be done but many adept standard Christian scholars have made a good case. Many modern scholars do it without denigrating Jews but it is not clear how far their ideas have gotten into the general population of standard Christians. I review some of their arguments later in the book.

### **No Theory of Prophets.**

Nearly all religions recognize some special people that set up the religions. It need not be only one person but might be several, such as the prophets of Judaism, the sages of Taoism, or the writers of the Upanishads. In some cases, the particular identities of the founders were lost but it is still clear there were particular special people, such as with the earliest religious writing in India. In some cases, the religions stem directly from folk tradition or courtly tradition without particular authors, such as Shinto in Japan.

In Judaism, the key human figures were prophets, including the early prophets such as Abraham and Moses. Judaism is clear that these people were human and were not in any way divine. They were not manifestations of God. Judaism is also clear that God somehow did inspire them. If I do not wish to see Jesus as God, then I have to see him as a prophet. I see great figures of other religions along the same lines, although Judaism might disagree. I see the Buddha, Chuang Tse, Mohammad, and Francis of Assisi as great prophets. I have no interest in trying to decide which is greater although I am biased toward Jesus. We should look at the lives and messages of each, and then decide for ourselves how to act.

The problem is that I have no theory of why God needs to inspire some people rather than just clean up the whole human mess directly, how God can inspire people, why God inspires some people but not others, why God does not inspire everybody, and why God gives various messages to different prophets. I have no theory of prophets or of special people in religion. I have no good theory of why we have to pay attention to some prophets and some messages more than others. Nobody has a good theory, not for Judaism and not for other religions.

Skeptics deny there are special people in the sense that I make of Jesus, other Jewish prophets, and other major figures in other religions. Skeptics are glad that there are people of unusual intelligence and insight, but we should not see the hand of God behind them or the breath of God inside them. Natural selection just allowed for the chance that some people might turn out with unusual religious gifts. I understand their point, and for the most part it is true, but I still cling to the idea of prophets. Perhaps God set up natural selection so that it would produce prophets. Skeptics might gain insight into my view by looking in the ideological mirror. Skeptics look on great scientists, such as Archimedes, Newton, Darwin, and Einstein as if they were prophets inspired by God. They tend to look at great philosophers and great politicians in the same way, such as Plato, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln. No matter how skeptics would like to look at such people as if they were only human, skeptics cannot hold back the pang of awe that normal people reserve for prophets. I have seen this gleam in the eye of many Darwinists at conferences.

Until we have a good theory of prophets, we cannot decide about Jesus as God, as divinely inspired prophet, or as merely human. We cannot decide about the relation of Jesus to other prophets. This book cannot wait. In the meantime, I accept that God sends us prophets even though I cannot answer the questions this view raises. I accept that Jesus was only human but also more than human because he was a great prophet, like other great prophets, without thus raising him to God and without implying anything about the rank of various other prophets and of their messages.

### **Selecting from the Bible.**

The Bible is not a scientific text. It has many points of view and many moral teachings. It sometimes even contradicts itself.

Nobody follows all the Bible, not even the most pious Jew, Christian, or Muslim, no matter what they say. It is not possible.

People select from the Bible what to follow and what to discard, and interpret what they do follow. For example, some people follow the Sabbath, and some do not. People that follow the Sabbath interpret following the Sabbath in different ways, so that some people allow themselves to do work at home that they enjoy while some people refrain from doing anything that could be interpreted as work. Some people will cook on the Sabbath while others will not even reheat leftovers.

People do not select and interpret at random; they have a plan; they have “an agenda” or “ulterior motives”. The plan can be more important than the actual material from the Bible. The plan reflects the real reason, spirit, and vision for their particular way of life. The passages from the Bible that they select and interpret only provide the material that fills in the plan and justifies the plan. For instance, people that want to lead a strict sexual life can easily find passages to support that path. Men that wish to have many wives and to use prostitutes can find support too. One of my favorite examples is the “Song of Songs”, a great poem about love and sex. For two thousand years, the Christian Church interpreted the poem not as about love and sex but as about the close relation between Jesus and the Church, thus denying what was blatantly in front of their eyes in favor of the agenda of supporting the Church. Liberals and conservatives both select and interpret so as to support their plans. A plan for selecting from the Bible

can be conscious or unconscious. Usually it is unconscious, because that is how our minds work and because people do not like to think they select on the basis of ulterior motives. When we try to understand any particular point of view, even one that seems to rely a lot on scripture, we need to look behind the scriptures to a way of life that we want for other reasons.

Even Jesus was complex and inconsistent enough so that people can select from him to support their own preferred ways of life. One reason to see Jesus as a Jew in his context is to get over the tendency to select from Jesus only what supports us.

Christianity carries a special burden of selecting and rejecting. According to standard Christianity, Jesus superseded the Old Testament, so Christians need not follow the Old Testament. Yet standard Christians love to use the Old Testament to support their way of life. They clearly do not think Jesus eliminated the Old Testament entirely, and they quote Jesus that we do still have to follow Old Testament law. But in using the Old Testament, standard Christians never use the entire Old Testament; they select and interpret to suit themselves. They rarely offer coherent explanations for selection, rejection, and interpretation.

Christianity has to come up with a clear explanation of what ideas it accepts or rejects, how it interprets the ideas that it accepts, and why. Except for some of the major longstanding churches such as the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, I have rarely read consistent explanations and I have rarely encountered Christians that could give them.

As with using religion to validate daily life, the underlying plan for selection and interpretation is often about a way of life that supports the kind of family and community that is typical of the people selecting and interpreting, and the underlying plan is often about denying rivals the kind of family and community that they need. Urban middle class Christians select from and interpret the Bible to support urban middle class nuclear families and to undermine the alternative expanded families of the poor. Liberals select from and interpret the Bible to support personal choice and their political alliance with the poor, ethnic groups, and people of various sexual-gender lifestyles. Pro-market people select and interpret to support naïve unrealistic capitalism. Nearly all Westerners, both liberals and conservatives, select from and interpret the Bible to make themselves feel justified, righteous, and saved, as if they had a special reason to be alive and a special importance to God.

I also select according to a plan. I have a generally liberal orientation with some streaks of Libertarianism, and I like modern capitalism and modern life. I do not know how much my basic life orientation has affected my understanding of Jesus. When I can see my bias, I point it out.

In fairness to standard Christianity and to other religions based on the Bible, all religions, all philosophies, and all political programs also select from their basic texts and interpret according to ulterior motives. None of them take all their basic texts as wholes. Even Darwinists select from science. Some are worse than Christianity even when they make a public virtue of consistency. I do not explore other religions in this book.

**Selecting and Interpreting Can Be Good.**

Americans seek purity, and so we see any selecting and interpreting from a sacred text as bad. Some selecting and interpreting is really bad, as ten minutes with a TV evangelist or one negative campaign ad can prove. At the same time, selecting and interpreting are inevitable, so we have to see that it can also be good, and we have to try to make it good rather than bad.

Selecting and interpreting the Bible allowed Christians to mix standard Christian doctrine with great moral ideas from the West such as from Greek philosophy and from Celtic and Teutonic mythologies (for example: good citizenship, nature worship, and heroism in the face of certain disaster). If we had not selected and interpreted, we would not be able to use ideas such as “greatest good” or “true moral rules apply to everybody equally”. Selecting and interpreting allows us to mix ideas gradually so that we are not swamped by sudden insights that seem good in the short run but have some long-range odd effects, such as from existentialism, so-called family values, or worship of the free market.

### **The Historical Jesus.**

I include the New Testament when I say the Bible is inconsistent, self-contradictory, and not a historical record. Some sayings attributed to Jesus he did not actually say, and some actions attributed to Jesus he did not actually do. The New Testament is as much about the writer’s ideas of Jesus as about the real Jesus. The New Testament selected, rejected, and interpreted to support agendas. On top of that, standard Christians then select, reject, and interpret from the New Testament to support their own additional agendas. They make Jesus in their own image, to serve their own needs. So, despite the fact that the New Testament is quite short and fairly clear, various Christian groups still cannot agree on basic ideas. They argue vigorously over points of theology that leave ordinary people baffled and that have no relevance to the program of Jesus.

Christianity needs an accurate picture of what Jesus really said and did. Having an accurate historical picture of Jesus would also help place him in his Jewish context. In the last two hundred years, there have been at least three major waves of research on the historical Jesus. Despite problems, scholars have made a lot of progress. Some of the results back up standard Christianity and some support alternate views. We can use these results as long as we do not also make up some self-serving idealized Jesus, or at least as long as we are honest about what we do make up. I hope what I say in this book is consistent with the best results.

### **Discard Scriptures but Keep the Plan?**

If the plan behind selection, rejection, and interpretation is often more important than the Bible, then why not discard the scriptures entirely and keep only the plan? Why bother with the hypocrisy of referring to an ancient outmoded sacred text only to mangle it and defile its sanctity? In effect, this honesty is what many modern people have decided to do. That is why the vast majority of people, even standard Christians, do not read the Bible. Some skeptics additionally argue that getting rid of a sacred text helps get rid of the kind of religion that only justifies prejudice, greed, oppression, killing, and war. Getting rid of the Bible and the Koran would save a lot of grief. I admire the honesty both of ordinary people who do not read the Bible and of skeptics who wish to ban it, but I do not agree with them.

(1) People need to ground their actions in some kind of absolutes, some kind of values, which have no

further rational basis. Even atheists and agnostics have a set of rock-bottom values. We need something beyond logic, although we can use logic to support the set of values on which we rest. Dr. Gregory House, from TV, is ultra-logical and claims to view cases only as intellectual puzzles, yet even he shows values deeper than mere puzzle solving. He does the right thing because it is right, sometimes even when it hurts him.

(2) There is a lot that is very good in the sacred texts, especially the Bible. To discard the Bible entirely is to miss what has brought out the best in people for several thousand years and continues to bring out the best. Having the Bible as a constant background helps us to gradually assimilate ideas and to test ideas thoroughly as we assimilate. We just need to be clear about what we select and discard and interpret, and why, and about the relations between old ideas and new ideas.

(3) I doubt that getting rid of the sacred texts will get rid of official religion, and I doubt that getting rid of official religion will get rid of prejudice, oppression, greed, killing, and war. Religion, the capacity for goodness, and the capacity for bad, are all rooted in evolved human nature. Religion can be a powerful rationalization to do bad but it is not the only rationalization, and people can do horrible things with no rationalization at all. Unless we change human nature, getting rid of sacred texts will not get rid of religion, and getting rid of religion will not end evil. Despite its occasional service for evil, on the whole religion is a net force for good, if only because it powers morality. Getting rid of religion would subvert a force for good in human nature. Because religion is a deep part of evolved human nature, trying to get rid of religion to stop the bad caused by religion is like trying to stop people from having sex. The damage of repression outweighs the benefits. Trying to get rid of religion will cause even more bad. The right thing to do is to shape religion to promote good and to combat bad. To do that, we have to face up to what we really believe.

### **Managing Confrontation.**

Few of us like to have Bible verses quoted at us. When in that situation, ask the Bible “bumper” to list every moral teaching from the entire Bible that he-she both accepts and rejects, and to list all passages that describe each moral teaching both accepted and rejected. Ask why each text is accepted or rejected. Ask for a clear interpretation of each selected or rejected idea-and-text, and the reasons for the interpretation. Open the Bible to the books of Deuteronomy, Leviticus, or Joshua, and then go through them passage-by-passage to ask which passages are selected, which rejected, how interpreted, and why. Make the person explain why each teaching is accepted or rejected, and why each passage is interpreted as it is. Make the person explain why he-she overlooks any passage. Ask whether each passage is in accord with the New Testament or not, and for detailed explanation. You do not even have to know much about the Bible to do this. The entire event usually lasts only a few minutes until the “bumper” gets frustrated. When you are done, think about what you would have done in the place of the Bible bumper. What would you preserve, what would you make of it, and why?