

I AM: Knowing the Reality of Jesus presents the compelling evidence for the living Jesus and the truth of the Christian Bible. However, knowing Jesus personally comes from the Bible's promises through practicing one's faith in Christ.

I AM: Knowing the Reality of Jesus

By J.M. Smith

Order the book from the publisher Booklocker.com

<https://booklocker.com/books/14313.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**

J.M. SMITH

I AM

Knowing the Reality
of Jesus



Jesus sees you and
loves you.
You can know Him.

Copyright © 2026 by J.M. Smith

Print ISBN: 978-1-961265-68-4

Ebook ISBN: 979-8-88532-216-4

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Trenton, Georgia.

BookLocker.com, Inc.

2026

First Edition

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

Although the author has done his best to provide accurate internet, website, and contact information at time of publication, no guarantee or responsibility for accuracy is expressed or implied, because such information may be subject to change after publication.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Smith, J.M.

I AM: Knowing the Reality of Jesus by J.M. Smith

Table of Contents

Foreword	ix
One: Some Principles Amidst Controversy	1
Two: The Inadequacy of Science	15
Three: The Knowledge of Good and Evil	27
Four: The Covenant Model of Virtue.....	39
Five: Some Principles of Truth	47
Six: Ethical and Moral Truth.....	59
Seven: The Old Testament	71
Eight: The New Testament.....	85
Nine: The Messiah's Nature and Mission	99
Ten: I AM: Jesus Says Who He Is	109
Eleven: God's Presence.....	121
Twelve: Prayer	129
Thirteen: Worship:	141
Fourteen: Knowing the Reality of Jesus	155
Fifteen: Life Everlasting	171
References	179

One: Some Principles Amidst Controversy

On a basic level, the reality of Jesus may be seen every day from history and the fact of His worldwide following. Among the faithful, however, a deeper reality may be understood from exercising one's faith. This volume explores such a reality that may be experienced by the believer. I am referring to the profound experience of knowing Christ. It strikes one personally as God's Spirit draws one to God. Although logic and analysis may be of help (we shall do some simple analysis in this book), such a peace is not found through argument but is found in the *presence* of the Lord Jesus in one's life. However, first comes belief and understanding of how Jesus has been and continues to be revealed to us. Such an awesome revelation encounters opposition, for not everyone holds the same worldview. To know the reality of Jesus, one must find the truth in Jesus' testimony, which sets us free (John 8:32).

As an historical figure, Christ stands out more than any human in history, for He claimed to be uniquely God and uniquely man. The literary sources as evidence of His life, both secular and biblical, either suggest or strongly affirm that He did what he set out to do, which included offering His own life as a ransom for a world of sinners, and then rising from the dead. Such sweeping statements about one central

figure in human history so demand universal attention that the Western calendar acknowledges this, notwithstanding the recent shift in nomenclature from B.C. and A.D. to the more secular B.C.E. and C.E. Both believers and detractors of Christianity acknowledge Jesus Christ, the source of the largest religious faith, currently counted at 2.4 billion living souls, or 32% of the world's population (2024). The basis for the Christian faith may be found in the person and the deity of Jesus Christ, whom believers claim to be the Son of God, the perfect image of God the Father (Hebrews 1:3; Colossians 1:15), and even God Himself, one with the Father (John 1:1;10:30). God called Himself "I AM" as He spoke to Moses in Exodus 3:14. We shall see as we progress that Jesus made the same statement about 2,000 years later. Who is this God-Man who said, like God, "I AM?"

The account of Jesus may be found in the revelation of God through His prophets, and that revelation to us comes through their writings in the Christian Bible. Jesus came to earth for a purpose: to buy us back and free us from sin. I will quote Chapter Fifteen here as a statement of faith in Holy Scriptures: "The Bible's theme calls for buying us back from death, a redemption for eternity."

In Scripture we find the principles and evidence that answer questions about our existence, our reason for being who we are in the whole realm of nature, the reason why we believe in God, and the reason for believing in the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Christianity is an all-encompassing worldview that begins with core beliefs from the very first sentence of Christianity's guidebook, the Bible, which will be quoted in this reading:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. –
Genesis 1:1

The unique nature of Christianity should be apparent when one realizes that God initiated His relationship with humanity, and as time

progressed, God made provision for contingencies. First, He created humans in His image; He condescended to speak to his first human creatures. As we read the first biblical book, Genesis, we see that He gave man something to do. The covenant God made with Adam gave man dominion over nature, but with one stipulation at that time. Adam and Eve must not eat of a certain tree in their new home, the garden of Eden. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil symbolized man's submission to God. Even though Adam and Eve, being made in God's image, had intelligence and dominion over nature, they were still subject to their Creator. The single act of rebellion known today as the Fall of Man, when Adam and Eve ate the fruit of that tree, broke the covenant. Hence, we see that God condescended further from this contingency and provided a way of reconciliation. Nevertheless, with the Fall came death, and the order of nature was disrupted by death and decay. Reconciliation would occur after a further condescension in the person of God the Son, Jesus Christ. Everything in the Bible centers around the coming of Jesus, the Reconciler.

In Christ, we find the path back to God and discover that without Him, our road has no hope. Christianity is unique in this: God came down to man, lived among us, and offered Himself as atonement for the sins of the world. Our response and our road to salvation and eternal life is the faith in Christ by which we receive His grace. By faith we receive a new birth—we are born again (John 3:3). Of course, much more explanation is needed to fully establish the gospel of Jesus Christ. In a unique way, we do not save ourselves, but we are saved eternally by faith in our Savior, who *is* the Way to eternal life (John 11:25-26; 14:6).

Beginning the Apology

Apologetics involves the discipline of showing the truth of the Christian gospel of Jesus the Christ; therefore, this brief apology relates to developing the logic and evidence for the existence and mission of Christ, overcoming doubt and opposition. It could be said that the apology defends the Christian faith.

Multiple cultures and multiple religions cloud the reality of God, humanity's place in the world, and our ultimate destiny. Perhaps we may agree that contradictory worldviews cannot all be true simultaneously. I accept the Christian worldview. However, if God made the world, it is proposed, and laid down His will for mankind according to the Christian Bible, why then do we have such differing opinions? Of course, we at first would have to agree on God. As a Christian, I am aware of many authors and many thoughts about finding the truth of God's existence and our existence, right down to our origin. Throughout this discussion, I will temper the various sources—whether they be true, false, or speculative—with what is written in the Word of God. The Apostle Paul wrote:

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.
—Colossians 2:8

Paul championed the authority of Scripture, which in his time, the First Century A.D., was the Jewish Bible. Christians expanded on the Jewish Bible, or Old Testament, to include a New Testament canon.¹ We shall explore samples from the writings and quotations of the biblical authors, such as Moses, David, Isaiah, Daniel, Matthew,

¹ I will not focus on the differences between the Catholic and Protestant Bibles; we have enough to guide us from the contents of the Protestant Bible, which includes books accepted by both Catholics and Protestants.

Mark, Luke, John, and Paul. We shall also consider the works of Confucius and Mencius, Plato and Aristotle, Kant and Russell, Oliphint and Schweitzer, Lewis and Stott, and so on. The nonbiblical will be compared with the biblical, but I shall make a point to hold nonbiblical sources up to the standard from the Word of God; for at times the nonbiblical agrees, and at times disagrees with the biblical. We are seeking a standard somehow; we need assurance. Otherwise, you would not be reading this.

Pascal in his *Pensées* (IV, 243) remarked that no canonical author used nature as an argument for the existence of God. Nevertheless, Pascal believed. I lay no claim to an intellect on par with Pascal's, but it seems to me that some scriptures do make assertions of God's existence through the glory of His creation. One could appeal to His apparent existence, quoting Romans 1:20, the idea of general revelation of God's glory from the wonders of nature. Psalm 19 agrees: "The heavens declare the glory of God..." St. Augustine, interpreting the creation narrative of Genesis Chapter 1, asserted that God spoke the universe, all the material world, into existence by His word. God thereby spoke something out of nothing, as Hebrews 11:3 says, "...so that what is seen was not made out of what is visible."

We, the created ones, are, as I say, "in the soup," which makes it impossible to step outside our environment to see God's vista, just as the fish may not see the world from the atmosphere, or more exceptionally, from outer space. How much further we have gone, even if we have not arrived, in our quest as living mortals to reach God's spiritual heaven than, say, either the Tower of Babel or the ancient Mesopotamians with their ziggurats reaching skyward. Now we humans know of the view from outer space through the astronauts' travels and the use of instruments such as telescopes and exploratory robots. But what have we gained from exploration of the world beyond our atmosphere? We have not physically touched the spiritual realm or

the “God World” beyond creation and, in this sense, are no better than fish. Nature alone cannot help us touch the supernatural without God’s condescension.

Yet how do we accept the existence of the omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, eternal God? Since nature alone cannot help us, perhaps logic might help us to accept God’s existence. If one were to assume a scientific or analytical approach to ascertaining God’s existence, one way—perhaps the only way—to accept it derives from the logic of elimination, which concludes that, with all other choices eliminated, no other alternative can be possible. The most complete acceptance from this method—the strongest, in my view—concludes that biological evolution does not work,² and matter could not have created itself. This last assertion shall be stated further by citing K. Scott Oliphint, who poses the impossibility of self-causing existence—the undisputed *principium essendi*. The *principium essendi* says that nothing in nature can be its own reason for being, or its cause for itself. The *ex nihilo* universe—created out of nothing—would only then be derived from the miracle of creation. Furthermore, in my opinion, its full, mature existence could not have been developed from cobbling together a string of impossibilities over eons to arrive at our existence today. No, according to the biblical view of the *ex nihilo* creation assertion, the miracle of creation occurred deliberately and quickly—a full, complete and mature universe from its beginning, set into existence and in motion, even with the rays of light from distant galaxies already “mature,” having reached our view (had we been there) from the moment of creation. This strongest view of the creation calls for a God who created the world by His word and without

² Another essay draws this conclusion from the lack of any known mechanism by which one species may possibly transfer to another, which is the hypothesis of evolution. See my book, *Faith Walk: From Belief in Christ to Total Commitment* (2016).

difficulty, showing His perfect power that leaves no other explanation for the created order.

Two features of the above presentation must likely appear obvious to you. The first would be a worldview that is not entirely embraced by all monotheists, or in my case, Christians. The second pertains to its departure from the view of atheists and, shall we say, those of us who believe in an older, slowly developing universe. As a Christian, I am “all in” when it comes to the biblical view of Genesis Chapter 1, the creation account. I accept the whole account without doubt or qualification—on faith. Mine is not a blind faith. If God spoke the world into existence, as one accepts it, then the miracle of creation should have no further questioning or doubt. The facts of science deal with the created objects themselves, not their origins.³ Some may disagree with me, but I am “all in.”

I would ask whether anyone who has read this far who is educated in the sciences may have acquired the bias in favor of inferences to develop conclusions or “theories.” By inference many scientists assume the evolution of species is a fact. By an undefined inference or no inference they assume abiogenesis came about by an unknown mechanism aided by the right chemical mix on our Goldilocks planet – not too hot, not too cold. By inference many scientists assume the universe is not only very old but was not created by an Intelligent Being. My proposition, therefore, seems to contradict mainstream science. However, the province of science is primarily to observe, hypothesize, experiment when possible or infer when not, and develop theories and laws from the natural world. The inferences drawn from observations require correct, undisputed supporting evidence; otherwise, the conclusion is not justified. What premises would

³ Notwithstanding the speculation from the inferences made by some scientists of differing opinions, I stand by this assertion.

confirm the three great “explanations” of mainstream science – old universe, godless universe, and the combination of abiogenesis and biological evolution? The answer according to the *ex nihilo* creation assertion in the book of Genesis is this: None.

I am not proposing that making inferences is invalid science. However, an inference must be drawn from sound premises. Mainstream science today assumes the supernatural does not exist, God does not exist, and Nature is all there is. Working from these assumptions, the investigator paints himself into a corner when confronted with the impossibility of the *ex nihilo* universe if such a universe has no provenance. St. Paul had it right:

For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

—Romans 1:20

The Christian who agrees with Pascal may confidently assert faith in God, but not by using Nature alone as his testimony.⁴ Nature may or may not provide the perfect answer. It does, however, demonstrate what cannot be, for nothing other than an external, uncreated something or *someone* is the provenance of all things in the physical universe. God *is* the First Cause, and He made it quite clear by excluding all other possibilities for His creation. No other explanation shall ever be credibly established. This firmly lays the first foundation stone of Christianity:

⁴ Proponents of Intelligent Design point to the statistical evidence of intricate design in nature, such as human life, strongly supporting the impossibility of complex development in the face of the incontrovertible second law of thermodynamics, or entropy. I leave this for another essay, as may be found in my book, *Faith Walk: From Belief in Christ to Total Commitment* (2016).

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” –
Genesis 1:1

Assuming the creation assertion to be fact, one’s formal education from reading scientific literature may therefore stand in the way of perceiving the merits of the creation.⁵ I would suggest trying to dissect what is written here. Slay the dragon if you will, since the objective is truth, the one goal on which we may agree.

Ah, truth, once the domain of exclusivity, has recently been subjected to question in what may be deemed by Christians as inordinate relativism. Is truth on any one focal topic absolute, or is it relative? I dare to adopt the traditional view that truth is definite and not a choice, but rather a fixed reality: not “both and,” not “either or,” not multiple paths, but one of three firm factors: an axiom or *principium*, facts based on a *principium*, or facts based on proper observation.

The scientific analyst may follow this train of thought with the idea of alternate logical systems. In modular arithmetic, for instance, twenty-four plus two would be equivalent to two, when the modulus is twenty-four. I am thinking of the twenty-four hour clock, which would appear obvious to the clock reader who understands that two hours past midnight is not deemed twenty-six, but two a.m. The root of the parabolic function may call for two solutions, one solution, or no solution. Two noteworthy theories of light each have supporting evidence—the particle theory of light presented by Newton and the wave theory of light proposed by Huygens. Given alternative solutions, is truth still uncompromised, or is it relative? The answer perhaps appears less obvious with more complicated systems—quantum mechanics or string theory, for example.

⁵ C.S. Lewis referred to false inferences of scientists as scientism.

The assertion we are considering must assume that with complicated systems the alternate solutions, even randomness of solutions, do not negate the assertion by finding a contradictory system, but stem from precise axioms, laws, and theories or theorems that fit logically and without contradictions. Even with a contradiction, the facts may suggest there is more to learn before a conclusion may be reached, for of such is the nature of scientific inquiry. What is a theory versus a hypothesis? Is evolution truly a theory or merely a hypothesis? Scientists have disagreed on this question.

Our mutual point of agreement would seem to entail either the ferreting of a contradiction or confirmation of a system using the axioms and laws that should be consistent by definition. However, an apparent contradiction needs complete and rigorous proof, to the point of indeed establishing the case for negating a perceived truth as pristine and inviolate. Here one may find the Achilles heel, but my argument is in company with others of like mind. We shall touch on the puzzle of truth later.

Returning to the canonical declarations of Romans 1:20 and Psalm 19, God's existence we find confirmed by nature itself, because by the creation assertion no other explanation bears out. The Intelligent Being designed and created us, a bold claim, yet not disproved.

Logic and experience may either be in opposition or harmony, but recently the question of the efficacy of logic has seemed to point to experience as a stronger argument for faith. Arguments in the epistemology of knowledge have questioned whether reasoning may represent reality. Do we know by experience and the senses? If not, can even knowing be real? The absurdity of self-doubt flies in the face of our reason from the raising of doubt *ad nauseam*. This sounds like the stuff of science fiction, as the genius philosopher grows mad.

The epistemology of knowing God's existence continues to drive the divergent arguments for and against God. The doubters and deniers want to either categorize God or deny His existence, for it is too unfathomable for them to contemplate the incomprehensible nature of the infinite God, who has no beginning—no origin—and no end. Therefore, for the most skeptical of us, arguing for God's existence from the perspective of logic and science will never suffice. Such an attempt would be the equivalent of using the created world of nature to explain the presence of the Uncreated Being, who lives independently of everything in the universe. However, we may also judge by other means, such as Divine revelation, answered prayer, and experience. Would God reveal Himself to an unbeliever? Unbelievers and doubters may attempt to enter that sphere, if you are willing to try. This may seem unimaginable to the atheist, yet both feasible and experienced by monotheists of faith. If you do not believe in God but are willing to try, John R.W. Stott proposed an unbeliever's prayer:

“God, if you exist (and I don't know if you do), and if you can hear this prayer (and I don't know if you can), I want to tell you that I am an honest seeker after the truth. Show me if Jesus is your Son and the Saviour of the world. And if you bring conviction to my mind, I will trust him as my Saviour and follow him as my Lord.”⁶

However, your sins may separate you from God's ear; He will not listen to an unrepentant sinner:

If I had been aware of malice in my heart,

The Lord would not have listened. —Psalm 66:18

⁶ John R.W. Stott, *Basic Christianity*, 1958, 2008.

I suggest that you temper that unbeliever's prayer with some contrition, acknowledging your sin as you understand it:

“God, I know I am a sinner. I acknowledge my sin and know what I have done wrong. I know I have failed to believe in you. However, what I do not know, please point out to me through your Bible, so that I may repent.”

The Reverend Stott was an esteemed church leader in Great Britain. I would encourage doubters of any kind to sincerely approach God's throne of grace in this manner. You may very well be surprised and overjoyed by God's answer.

For the most stubborn of us, the question remains: Can the realm of God's presence and divine will be proved or disproved? Proof of faith borne to fruition must be manifest to the observer, but is very often subjective. Two people witnessing the same thing may have differing opinions; one sees a miracle, while the other sees coincidence or natural causes. This is further demonstrated by some responses to miracles in Scripture. The beginning of all things in nature—the creation—without a doubt focuses our attention on the first essential and foundational principle of God's existence. However, there are more elements of God's presence to be explored.

Review and Meditation from Chapter One, Beginning:

1. Explain the logic of Romans 1:20, often regarded by theologians as *general revelation*. How is the logic of elimination valid with regard to the existence of the universe and life itself? Why is humanity left with no excuse for unbelief in the God of creation?
2. Describe the first *principium*, the *principium essendi*, presented by K. Scott Oliphint. How does it rule out the possibility of a self-generating universe or the evolution of life, and further, the possibility of self-generating abiogenesis?
3. Explain the statement in the text, “Therefore, for the most skeptical of us, arguing for God’s existence from the perspective of logic and science will never suffice.” Can the creation explain the Uncreated Being?
4. Review John R.W. Stott’s “Unbeliever’s Prayer.” How could such a prayer be encouraged? How would it help someone transition to the realm of faith?
5. How is revelation from God usually a subjective experience, even when strong enough to the Christian to warrant testimony? How might even the witnessing of a miracle be considered subjective?
6. Consider Paul’s encounter with the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-20). Only Paul heard the words of Jesus, yet his testimony carried him forward to make disciples and plant churches for the rest of his life. Read Paul’s assertion in 2 Timothy 1:12 to encourage *your* faith.

Two:

The Inadequacy of Science

We must not forget the importance of science as a source of some evidence for the supernatural, but not the principal argument. The discipline represents a method of inquiry into nature, but our topic delves into the supernatural. With this point made, however, we may refer to issues that both lead forward and potentially lead us astray with regard to science. Science takes us only to a certain level of inquiry before we are stymied by a mystery. Thomas Carlyle's work entitled *Heroes and Hero Worship*, pages 13-14, marveled at our failure to wonder at the miracle of creation. For example, he said the learned lecturer on electricity, thunder and lightning cannot penetrate the inscrutable mystery of nature, or existence. A.W. Tozer commented in his book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, Chapter 4, that Carlyle's comments more than a century ago still ring true against all scientific advances. Science cannot yet explain "a falling leaf" or "the hatching of a robin's egg." Science can only take us to a point of observation but never penetrate the complete answer to the questions: *What is it? Whence comes it?* Walking about and simply living, we experience a surfeit of seeing the impenetrable mystery of creation, and befuddled by the immersion, we take it for granted—we find no definitive answer that explains the miracle of nature, even for the believer in God: God is mysterious. The little child asking innumerable questions has not yet

lost this sense of wonder over the inscrutable as he asks, *Why? How? What?* Parents know this! Answer the question, mother or father, and you will get a further question, *But Why? But How? But What?* At the age of three, I asked my father these questions in an unrelenting stream that he did his best to answer, until finally, in exasperation, he responded that I asked many questions. The word *question* was new to me, but I made a mental association of a wrapped birthday gift in a box with a big bow on top—this to my young mind was a question. Perhaps the mental image related to the answers that could have been hidden inside that enigmatic package. Are not real answers to unfathomable, wondrous mysteries like a wrapped gift waiting to be opened?

Strong Science?

The scientific method begins with a system of investigation that intends to explain and understand the natural world. We marvel at the scientific advances made in recent history. In fact, pure science—that is, science for the sake of pure knowledge—has given way in part to applied science. We may consider the specific case of one scientist and mathematician, Carl F. Gauss. Pure knowledge from number theory in Gauss's time, especially his early career from about 1795 to 1816, eventually introduced the digital age. His Gaussian distribution helped establish modern probability and statistical analysis, political forecasting, investment analysis, and scientific analysis of every type. He made contributions to several topics in science, including planetoid and asteroid tracking, and potential theory in electromagnetism and gravitation. These endeavors began with his primary quest for pure knowledge.

Applied science, or technology, attempts to harness nature to the will of man. We fly, coordinate freight logistics, and communicate through radio, television, telephone, and the internet due to rapid

progress in technology. Today anyone with a digital “footprint” may be tracked from the opposite side of the globe, unless one manages to go “off grid.” Even then, the technology exists to track anyone by identifiers, including facial recognition and DNA. Buy a mobile device or a laptop, make a purchase on credit, vote in an election, or even apply for an apartment, go to the doctor, or enroll in school, and you will find yourself “tracked.” Our mobile phones or televisions “listen” to our words and target advertisement to us. The potential for listening as control and oppression makes the stuff of science fiction, if not reality. Medical advances have pushed the envelope into genetic engineering, a place where humans could potentially influence future generations and even populations. Heritable human germline modifications are currently banned by some countries and the National Institute of Health. The Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats (CRISPR) combined with the enzyme known as Cas9, or CRISPR/Cas9, serve together as a tool to alter the human genome. This potentially elevates human genetic engineering before birth to the specter of altering a future generation.⁷

Perhaps the influence over future generations began with abortion options and birth control. I am not pioneering this observation. C.S. Lewis described the dilemma of strong science, as I call it, in his insightful work, *The Abolition of Man*. Do we make humans by engineering them before birth? Do we selectively weed out “bad stock” through abortion and breeding? Do we develop a super race? Perhaps “we” strikes one as too strong, for of course not everyone does this. I would say that most of us do not even harness nature in any manner entirely on our own; we fly in an airplane due to the pioneering science and technological careers of others, as well as the regulations of governing bodies. It seems to be a collective process of humanity, or

⁷ Collins, 2015; Cong, et. al., 2013; Niemiec and Howard, 2020; Zhang, 2019.

better said, a dependency of individuals on the inventiveness and skill of others.

Lewis considered the extension of humanity's manipulation of the individual to its logical extreme. Just when we think we are controlling nature, we find ourselves manipulated. Can man lose the core of his being by losing his magnanimous nature, having succumbed to the lure of expediency? At what point does controlling nature revert to nature's control of mankind? We have accidents with our own inventions. Entropy overcomes us. Leave a city unattended and abandoned—like portions of Chernobyl, or like ancient Incan ruins—for only a short period, and the growth and the wild reclaim control. We may find our future genetic engineering to manifest unintended consequences. Will our descendants become dehumanized or pre-programmed beyond the natural processes? The next generation would then succumb to the dictates of the ancestral authors of abortion, birth control, and genetic manipulation. Are we considering science fiction or an Orwellian reality?

My point leads to the big questions. What is the everlasting efficacy of strong science, if any? Do we truly understand the universe, or have we found our discoveries only serve to confound us further? Perhaps we need the supernatural answer, for science at its strongest lacks resolution. As just mentioned, our next generation's collective fate may already be in our own hands, and their freedom could be sacrificed by the happenstance of birth.

Humankind has failed to harness nature to reach significantly greater longevity, avoid the debilitating effects of entropy, find the ethical impetus to overcome massive evils, or even fill the void of what makes us feel ill at ease.

However, our heritage is more than genetic; it is the product of centuries of cultural and intellectual effort, of literature and philosophy,

of religion and the code of decency. In 1899, the young Albert Schweitzer, who in 1952 would become a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, heard the term *Wir Epigonen*, or “we inheritors of a past,” that reminded him of our shared heritage from the best of civilization.⁸ Although holding an optimistic outlook, he was also mindful of the failures of civilization found in all advanced cultures, and he wrote about such problems and potential solutions in his book, *The Philosophy of Civilization*. In this collection of his research and thought that coincided with the advent and conclusion of the Great War, 1914-1918, Schweitzer outlined the decline of ethics in civilization and offered the hope of an ethic of “reverence for life.” The war introduced a glaring example of how death and destruction can overtake the best advances of science and enlightenment. The uneasy truce signed on 28 June 1919 lasted only long enough for Germany to fester under constraints and hyperinflation, but then rebuild its military under an angry dictator, eager for revenge.

A Twentieth-First Century modernizing of Schweitzer’s observations would suggest that the past is being erased in the minds of succeeding generations as the old literature lies fallow from digital addiction, and as new paradigms of history and culture replace the former milestones. Faced with a possible dark future in which the new generation is unaware of such a heritage, or to some extent determined to discard it, we wonder if digital technology does us good or ill. The words of the past are still preserved, but do they now lie dormant and unread, overshadowed by a collective nihilism? May we choose our destiny, or is destiny an illusion, while our purpose languishes in lethargy, *sans raison d’être*? How shall we live; how shall we die? We shall consider life and death in this book.

⁸ Albert Schweitzer, *Out of My Life and Thought*, 1933, 1949.

Weak Science

I hope you are challenged by these questions. Surely these things perturb us. Let us further consider the limiting factors of strong science and thereby expose its weaker side. As mentioned by Carlyle and Tozer, in spite of the advances of science, nature remains inscrutable, and defies the answer to the most basic question. With little effort I thought of 96 distinguished yet nescient scientists, inventors, and mathematicians. There are many more. I shall mention only a few by name, as their names remind us of great advances in our current understanding of nature. The famous names include Linnaeus, Mendel, Levoisier, Pasteur, Lister, Fleming, Salk, the Curies, Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Laplace, Poisson, Hooke, Boyle, Huygens, Halley, Newton, Leibniz, Descartes, Fermat, Pascal, Daniel Bernoulli, Gauss, Riemann, Maxwell, Steinmetz, Tesla, Einstein, Bohr, Planck, Fermi, Hawking, Darwin, Crick, Rosalind Franklin, Watson, and Wilkins. Some of these men and women—listed from the cream of the crop of thinkers and innovators from the Renaissance to the present age—were believers in the biblical God, and some were not. Some were Christians, and some were not. They lived, made breakthroughs, and died, although a very few may still live, but they brought civilization no closer to the real answer to the fundamental question posed by Carlyle: What penetrates the mystery of existence?

Perhaps you already acknowledge the power of nature, for it is not as easily subdued by applied science as you may have thought. We may further question the goal of science, since science at its strongest continues to fail us in its most fundamental purpose, the subjugation of nature to our will. The word that God gave to Adam and Eve in this respect was to multiply, subdue the earth, and rule over every living creature (Genesis 1:28). To some extent we do this in advanced cultures, even exploring outer space and the depths of the sea, and attacking the conundrums of genetics and illnesses with some limited

success, although scientists have still more to learn. However, even in the age of science, with dubious success have we ruled over ourselves. God saw the depravity of mankind in early history, for in Genesis 6:5, He mourned the fact that man's thoughts and desires were only evil continually. For this reason, God made a covenant with Abraham to establish a nation by which all peoples of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3). Thus began the very core of God's redemptive plan for mankind—not rooted in science or humanity's accomplishments, but in God's sovereign control of history for our salvation from evil.

The goal of man's God-ordained subjugation of nature appears to be common to both science and magic. Anthropologists consider magic and superstition as the forerunner of science, yet their goal is one and the same. Although science is stronger and relatively more realistic, its failings should make one think that something about our worldview is probably lacking, especially if our only perspective comes from a strictly material world. At what price does one ignore—or even deny—the spiritual, the supernatural? Something is surely missing. What if the supernatural were greater than the natural? Believers like me contend that by its very existence, the supernatural is indeed greater, stronger, and—most important—everlasting. Can one discover or even communicate with the supernatural? If so, then science does not touch a major element of our existence, one that communicates with the infinite and offers a life beyond the grave.

Shall we prove that the supernatural exists, or rather, prove that it does not exist? We come to an impasse, and we must judge what is true—whether it be religious or atheist, orthodox or unorthodox—to reach a proper conclusion. Science is demonstrably too weak to help us. Logic may help one reach questions already posed, but seems limited in providing answers. Our thinking may be logical and apprehend truth to some degree, but at some point, the investigator needs further enlightenment beyond one's finite mind. Our hope for

resolution may be found in investigation of what is revealed to us. Skeptics contend that perception may not be reality, but merely the psychological response to the five senses. Nevertheless, one cannot know a reality without the apprehension of “something” there, and its consequent interpretation by the mind. The following succinct statement should compel the honest seeker of truth about things eternal to want to learn more and to understand about the mystery of God, and how He relates to us. The statement is this:

To know something means to encounter something; to know God means to encounter Him.

To become a believer in God requires the response to a spiritual encounter, not a natural or scientific encounter. By “believer” I mean one who receives Christ and accepts His message of revelation. To the Christian that revelation is the Incarnate Word, Jesus. The words of John 1:12 and 17:8 invoke receiving and accepting, respectively. The idea of Jesus as the *Logos*, the Word, is derived from the Gospel of John:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word *was* God.” –John 1:1

God spoke, and things happened. We speak because we are made in God’s image. As humans, our word is associated with an act of mind and with the will. In a much greater and more perfect sense, *God’s Word* came into the world as His revelation in the form of God’s Son.

The principles behind the revelation next bring us to the encounter between the supernatural and our hearts. Schweitzer termed the communication with the supernatural—with God—a mystical encounter. Our relationship with Christ given in the promises of the New Testament must be experienced in order to demonstrate its validity and its power. Christian mysticism involves the inner life of the person

and is therefore subjective. Our personal “proof” may be offered as testimony, but it is still a subjective experience. This is why the trusting act of belief in the supernatural revelation of the Christ is called *faith*. The Apostle Peter affirmed the faith of the scattered Christians facing persecution in the provinces of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), and defined their experience of faith.

⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; though not seeing him now, you believe in him, and you rejoice with inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. –1 Peter 1:8-9

Unbelievers cannot understand this until they cross over into the realm of faith. As believers we do not wonder why outsiders cannot comprehend us. Furthermore, we easily understand why the Scripture acknowledges the difference between the spiritually discerning believer and the spiritually blind unbeliever (2 Corinthians 4:4). Therefore, let us consider that revelation not only reaches our mind but touches the core of our being, our spirit.

Revelation comes to us from God, but it must make sense to our physical beings first. Therefore, Jesus lived among humans; as a human He ate, worked, and spoke with humans. The physical connection in nature touches science, yet it also has the supernatural connection in the creation. Nichomachus of Gerasa would be typical of the scientific mindset. A philosopher who flourished near the end of the First Century A.D., he paraphrased Pythagoras’ observation that wisdom is “the knowledge and comprehension of reality,” and “knowledge of the truth in reality” is “the only wisdom.”⁹ The ancient mathematicians in the tradition of Pythagoras assigned reality to material objects from which truth may be ascertained. Thereby, truth and truth finding may be

⁹ Nichomachus of Gerasa, *Introduction to Arithmetic*, c. 100 A.D. Book One, Chapter One.

sought from the natural world. Their immediate concern was not the supernatural, but the natural. However, as the supernatural includes God, the First Cause of all things, then by extension, truth may be accessed from the supernatural by suitable revelation. The ultimate revelation, then, is the God-Man, Jesus. The unseen world of the supernatural may become known as truth as God Himself gives revelation to you.

As the Christ said, “Seek and you shall find” (Matthew 7:7). Once you sincerely seek and have the encounter, you will know. Like the apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 1:12, do you *know* whom you have believed? Knowing and responding to the Lord, therefore, sets the trajectory for the remainder of this book.

Review and Meditation from Chapter Two, Science:

1. Describe the dilemmas of science, including its shortcomings in subduing nature to humanity's will, the Orwellian possibility of too much control, and the lack of understanding of the supernatural. Is something lacking if we hold a strictly scientific worldview?
2. How have you experienced a surfeit of inscrutable nature, to the point of simply taking the wonders of nature for granted? How has "weak science" failed to answer Thomas Carlyle's question: *What penetrates the mystery of existence?* Some helpful passages: Psalm 19; Psalm 139.
3. Compare magic and superstition to science. C.S. Lewis referred to science as "scientism" when used falsely as conjecture of a mistaken worldview. How is the goal of magic and scientism one and the same? In contrast, what role could the spiritual side of humanity's existence play in encountering the inscrutable?
4. Meditate upon the statement: *To know something means to encounter something; to know God means to encounter Him.* Think further about the role of God's encounters with humankind from what you have already heard, read, or even experienced yourself. Write down your thoughts or share them with a believer you respect. Some good verses include 2 Timothy 1:12 and Hebrews 11:6.
5. To prepare for further reading: Are you thirsty for living water? This is the metaphor of Jesus in John 4:14, and it pertains to your potential encounter with the Lord. Set your mind on finding the living water as you read further.
6. What strength may be found in the reception and acceptance of Jesus, the Word made flesh? Why is such acceptance a

subjective experience, even in one's personal testimony? Is the word *faith* made manifest by the fact that knowing God through His Son does not conform to a scientific or mathematical proof-text?

Three: The Knowledge of Good and Evil

Knowledge became revered as the means to an end—whether the end were survival or prestige. In the garden of Eden, Eve was tempted by the appeal of becoming wise like God. Unfortunately, she was tricked, even as she learned that the knowledge had consequences: in this case, the loss of immortality, innocence, and easy communication with God. Hence the revelation of the truth of good versus evil became known in a basic sense with the first humans in the book of Genesis.

Therefore, the knowledge of good and evil became apparent in early human history, as we shall see presently with the account of the first sin in the Garden of Eden. Ever since that seminal event, such knowledge has been expounded, categorized, and codified. Civilizations have a body of legal literature and practice to articulate this knowledge. Accordingly, one may not be overly surprised that the discussion of the revelation of Jesus will begin with the collection of mutually accepted conduct found in many civilizations over thousands of years. I refer to law codes such as the code of Hammurabi and the Mosaic Law, as well as the Confucian principles in the *Analects*, the *Koran*, the tenets of decency found in Vedic religion and early Hinduism, and the works of Plato and Aristotle. An example from

Confucius shows admiration for the man who does not let hardship deprive him of joy, which is similar to St. Paul's contentment in Philippians 4:12.¹⁰ Chinese culture also gave us the post-Confucian writings of Cong-tse, Meng-tse, and Mi-tse. Meng-tse (Mengzi, or Mencius) lived in the Fourth Century B.C., and of the ancient Chinese philosophers, is regarded second only to Confucius. The works of Mencius include seven surviving books. Here is one of his exemplary sayings: "The great man is he who does not lose his child's heart."¹¹ The Persians produced Zarathustra, or Zoroaster, a monotheist of the second millennium B.C. who believed in dualism of good versus evil. He is believed by some to antedate Moses and the Ten Commandments. Something in most cultures tells a person, no matter his intellect, what is truly righteous and what is not.

We all know right from wrong from our conscience, at least before some of us may have drifted away to follow alternative paths.

Perhaps you lied, cheated in school, struck someone unjustly, stole, or bullied someone. I recall my first punishable offense as a schoolboy. I pulled the chair away from a boy as he sat down hard on the floor. The teacher paddled my hand quite severely, teaching me the consequences of unkind behavior. If you were disciplined, this may have been sufficient to set your conscience aright in future. Otherwise, one may develop a seared conscience that over time becomes inured to the demands of basic decency, integrity, and morality.

Let us assume that a universal code of decency exists as a body of duties and prohibitions. The aforementioned exemplary codes share common patterns of thought about proper conduct: prohibitions in a criminal and civil code, such as no thievery, no murder, no adultery, and no falsehood, especially under oath. Duties include one that is

¹⁰ D.C. Lau (trans.), *Confucius: The Analects*, Bk. VI, 11.

¹¹ Legge, James (trans.), *The Works of Mencius*, Bk. IV, Pt. II, Ch. XII.

repeated often: the Golden Rule, which is usually stated in the negative—do not do to others what you would not have done to you. Jesus turned the maxim around in the affirmative, which makes one more proactive for the good (Matthew 7:12).

One may call this code the application of ordinate feelings, of proper feelings, or of just sentiments. In Austen's novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr. Darcy told Eliza Bennet, "You thought me...devoid of every proper feeling," when he confessed his arrogant behavior. Although Austen's novel is fiction, the illustration is realistic. In contrast, ordinate feelings demonstrate the sanguine, altruistic sentiment regarded as magnanimity, which is cited by Aristotle in his book-length essay, *On Virtues and Vices*. "Great-spiritedness [i.e., magnanimity] is goodness of spirit that enables men to bear good fortune and bad, honor and dishonor."¹² If one may bear both good fortune and misfortune with equanimity, such that serenity, kindness and prudence prevail in spite of either triumph or adversity, such a person demonstrates magnanimity. This virtue may be further understood by referring to its two opposite vices. On the one hand a person may behave with gloating and taunting—a reaction to "honor." On the other hand, the response may involve recrimination, sarcasm and even treachery against a perceived offense—a reaction to "dishonor."

Friedrich Hayek, a Nobel laureate in economics, acknowledged religious faith and tradition as the teacher of basic decency, even though he was an atheist.¹³ Aristotle declared the aim of education was the pupil learning "to like and dislike what he ought." Plato's *The Republic* upheld the child's learning to distinguish between beauty and

¹² Aristotle, *On Vices and Virtues*, iii.8.

¹³ Friedrich Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism*, 1988, 1989. Controversy exists over the book's possible authorship by its editor, William W. Bartley.

ugliness. When the child becomes mature enough to learn reason, the harmony between beauty and reason will be apparent. Early Hinduism taught the Vedic sayings that included the *Rta*, the harmony of rightness, correctness, and order, commonly associated with *Satya*, or truth.¹⁴ In Plato's *Laws*, the Athenian discussed laws with his traveling companions. The Athenian invoked God (probably in the abstract) as the giver of good laws and the justification for their creation and enforcement. St. Augustine admired Neoplatonism's thought on God as ideal, although the church Father had the biblical God in mind.¹⁵ This common ancient appeal to deity also occurred in the law codes of ancient Mesopotamia, while some of the inscriptions on ziggurats invoked the gods.

A person's rational mind directs one's activity toward the prudence of wisdom, but may careen toward the expedient, which in the extreme might be called Machiavellian. Aristotle believed in the mean that would suit the circumstances. By "mean" one may understand avoidance of either extreme in the display of emotion or response to circumstances. Indifference could signal lack of proper feeling that approaches one extreme, while a wrathful reaction may represent the worst of vices, even to the point of violence or criminality. Furthermore, one's visceral response may direct one without regard for decency. Fortunately, our magnanimous side lives by the code of virtues and prohibitions and truly shows a heart of kindness and grace toward others. May one be properly angry? Of course, when repugnant deeds or attitudes elicit a strong reaction, but in the spirit of

¹⁴ These comments on Aristotle, Plato's *The Republic*, and the *Rta* are cited in C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 1944, 1947.

¹⁵ St. Augustine (354-430 A.D.) had a major influence on Western philosophy and distilled some Neoplatonism with Christian doctrine. Apropos to the textual comment here, Christians believe at least two concepts from Augustine: God's moral perfection and God as First Cause. (His intelligence predated the universe.) The two doctrines have biblical support.

magnanimity one behaves with love, honor, faithfulness, and truth. The maxim befitting an extreme situation would suggest, “Be angry and do not sin” (Ephesians 4:26).

The Apostle Paul further affirmed the universal code of decency with his comment about those who have not heard the gospel of Christ:

¹³ For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. ¹⁴ (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵ They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.) ¹⁶ –Romans 2:13-15

Perhaps readers may scoff at this proposition of universal decency. Assuredly there exist variations and alternative lifestyles. We may all agree on that likelihood. For example, Bertrand Russell, a mathematician and philosopher of the Twentieth Century, an atheist and a Nobel laureate in literature, commented that he found no definitive code of conduct that could be absolute without a divine mandate. Rather, Russell proposed that ethics were not true or false, but based on desires. His book, *Human Society in Ethics and Politics* (1954), outlines the development of his ethical thought, which differs from some Christian and Judaic biblical principles. Defining “good” according to Russell meant the non-cognitive selection of an action, rather than the cognitive choice. Russell recommended either the optative mood or the imperative, rather than the indicative, to issue an ethical principle. Although the optative mood is not used in English, an

¹⁶ Paul referred to Gentiles in this context as pagans unfamiliar with either the Law of Moses or the teachings of Christ.

equivalent expression in English might say, “Would that all men loved one another.” He contended that such an ethical statement cannot be either proved or disproved simply by amassing facts.

Russell acknowledged feelings and emotions as the fundamental data of ethics, such that ethics are not related to facts or science, but are somehow more relevant than a mere indicative statement. Hence, we understand that an ethical choice to let Jews live is superior to Hitler’s “final solution.” Russell would then probably agree to some extent with our previous discussion of “proper feeling” or “just sentiments.” The indicative example he used, “Nero was a bad man,” expresses an opinion that is somehow more sagacious than saying, “Nero was a Roman emperor,” but neither would be an ethical statement. I would credit Russell with an elegant demonstration of the ethical dilemma of making choices based on feelings, which he found more closely related to politics than science.¹⁷

Although my assertion of universal decency bears some weight and seems at least to some extent confirmed by Scripture, such as the aforementioned passage (Romans 2:13-15), Russell emphasized cultural, ethical differences. There are indeed some exceptions, and not everyone agrees on everything that is right or wrong in all cases. As an atheist, Russell took further exception to revelation from God, but the Judeo-Christian view favors a covenant with God. Indeed, reliance on God stems from the ontological, *a priori* view rather than the heuristic view of science. For example, St. Augustine and most Christians, I venture to say, regard the origin of creation to be born of an uncreated, intelligent source. Furthermore, God in his moral perfection has revealed His covenants with humanity over the course of history, first in the book of Genesis and the Torah, to Adam, Noah, Abraham, the

¹⁷ Bertrand Russell, *Human Society in Ethics and Politics*, 1954, from Ch. 1, “Sources of Ethical Beliefs and Feelings.”

descendants of Jacob (Israel), and so on, down to the new covenant with Christians.

A key point of departure from Russell, therefore, would acknowledge universal understanding of good and evil from the human perspective on the one hand—the pre-legal Garden of Eden account in Genesis 2:17 and 3:7—and the superior ethical law of God, which codifies proper human conduct, on the other. Although just sentiments or proper feelings bear some weight, and conscience serves to guide us, moral truth needs a stronger source. Feelings alone cannot possibly be the basis for a credible moral code. Our source goes back to Eden. God forbade Adam and Eve from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17); when they sinned and ate anyway, “their eyes were opened” (Genesis 3:7). In general, humanity understands the difference between good and evil with open eyes; but in the specifics, we learn the perfect law of God as our guide. The perfect law of God became the subject of King David’s meditations in Psalm 1:2. Psalm 119:105 calls God’s word a lamp for one’s feet. Psalm 119:48 also addresses meditating on the precepts of God’s word. King Solomon cited the commandment of God as a lamp and instruction as a light in Proverbs 6:23.

But what perfect law might we ourselves cite from the Old Testament? With the exception of Psalms, Jesus, in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, quoted the book of Deuteronomy more than any other. When He was tempted three times by Satan in the wilderness, he quoted Deuteronomy thrice. The Hebrew title for the book of Deuteronomy comes from the first words of the book, *‘elleh haddebarim*, and means “these are the words.” Most of Deuteronomy consists of sermons given to the people by Moses as he impressed on God’s people the importance of listening to God’s words, commandments, and precepts, obeying Him, and following Him. The Israelites were about to enter the sphere of pagan, idol-worshipping

nations. The time was ripe for God to exact retribution upon a land full of peoples of abject sinfulness. As the Lord told Abraham over 400 years earlier, his descendants would return to possess the land of Canaan much later, “for the sin of the Amorites had not reached its full measure” (Genesis 15:16). The full measure of every kind of evil imaginable had arrived in Canaan, and now the new generation of Israelites was preparing to enter Canaan. They needed the holiness of God impressed upon them, through His revelation, as a bulwark against the wickedness around them.

We find the Ten Commandments, originally given in Exodus 20, repeated in Deuteronomy 5:6-21. After the exodus from Egypt, the new generation of Israelites heard this law again from Moses—a repetition designed to inculcate righteousness in their hearts as they prepared to enter the Promised Land. Moses also gave them the Shema:

⁴“Listen [*Shema*], Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵ Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. ⁶ These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. ⁷ Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead. ⁹ Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your city gates.” – Deuteronomy 6:4-9

I will give a nod to Russell to acknowledge that a universal code of conduct derived from culture, maxims, sayings, writings, prophets, and divine mandates cannot be without some variance and contradictions. I contend that only God can set things perfectly right; therefore, we have God’s perfect law found in Scripture. However, even in Scripture the careful reader will find cultural precepts and ordinances no longer strictly applicable. The Israelites received three

basic types of Mosaic law: character law (the Ten Commandments, the Shema, moral prohibitions in Leviticus, etc.); civil law (e.g., property rights and customs for inheritance); and ceremonial law (religious rites of sacrifice, etc.). Today even Jews have mostly not practiced animal sacrifice since the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 A.D., although this may be changing in a quest for a new temple for authorized sacrifice. Rabbinical Jewish law has dominated Jewish faith and practice ever since the destruction of the Second Temple of Jerusalem. Essentially, animal sacrifice came to an end as their atonement for sin. As for Gentiles, they may not adhere to the kosher laws of Leviticus, but might indulge, for example, in the eating of pork.

Taboo predated the Law of Moses in various ancient cultures, and so it played a role in ancient Israel and with the descendants of Jacob beginning with the biblical Exodus and the wilderness wanderings, and for centuries after the conquest of Canaan. The Levitical kosher laws may be regarded as not only taboos, but a safeguard of holiness; God wanted His chosen people to be holy, because He is holy (Leviticus 19:2). Strictness in restrictions not only included food but dress codes and ceremonial cleanliness. Worshipers, priests, and Levites each had strict commandments in how they approached God in worship, sacrifices, and ceremony. I interject my opinion here that the kosher commands of God were intended more to instruct the Israelites in obedience and the fear of the Lord than God's revulsion for unclean creatures. Peter's vision in the early Christian era affirmed all creation as cleansed, using animals to be eaten as an illustration (Acts 10:15). Peter promptly preached to a Gentile household, the "unclean" in an analogous way, who were converted to Christianity.

For the ancient Hebrews, clean and unclean things, such as forbidden food and animal carcasses, provided a tangible model of the holy versus the unholy. A strict adherence to the physical rule prepared

the believer for the spiritual perfection. Do not touch! Do not eat! Forbidden things abhorred and carefully shunned could well have provided the training for what God wanted from their hearts: devotion to righteousness and reverence for God's holiness. In my opinion the Apostle Paul seems to absolve Christians of such prohibitions in the fourteenth chapter of his epistle to the Romans, but with a stipulation: the law of love. The strong Christian would then abstain, when otherwise he might possibly tempt a weaker brother to partake against his conscience. All of Romans Chapter 14 touches on the controversy over forbidden food and observance of special days, a question of Jewish law practiced at times by some early Christians. Paul's conclusion in Romans 14:17-23 addresses such practices in the perspective of love, one's conscience, and serving the Lord.

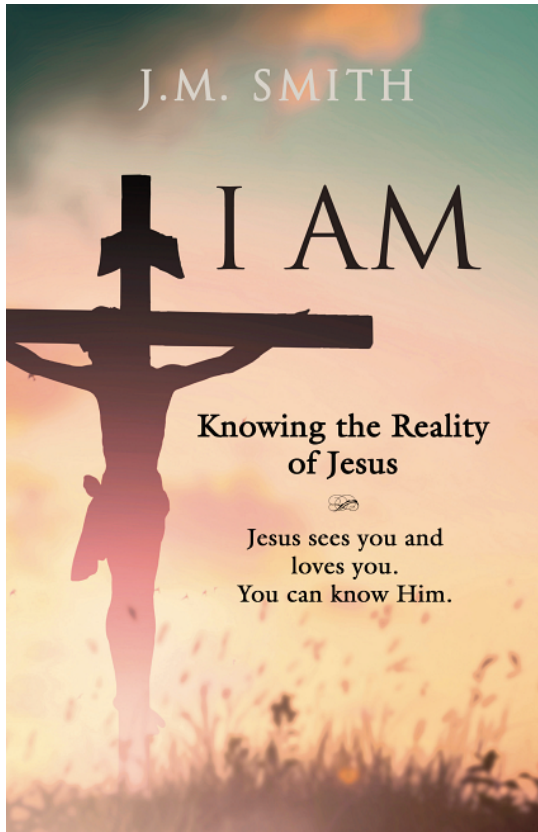
In the Levitical era, God wanted to be feared and taken seriously; however, in exchange for such fastidious precautions demanded of His people, the Lord their God treated them with favor. I am referring to His revelation to His people through amazing victories over their enemies, and prosperity, and blessings, as well as His words spoken in the law through His servant, Moses.

Sexual prohibitions were carefully enunciated, for example, in Leviticus 18, where fifteen examples of incest were summed up with the commandment in verse 6: "You are not to come near any close relative for sexual intercourse; I am the Lord." Other prohibitions in Chapter 18 included male homosexuality, bestiality, and sacrificing one's child to the god Moloch. Such graphic prohibitions were necessary to utterly forbid the practices of the nations being driven out before the Israelites. For these practices, "even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants" (Leviticus 18:25). Furthermore, explained the Lord, "...if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you" (Leviticus 18:28).

How strange, one may think today, that such abominable practices would even be considered; yet such sins are indeed practiced by some criminals to this day. Evil people create variants of wickedness, the product of wicked imaginations. For Israel, the exposure to creative evil in Canaan led them astray. Therefore, much of the Old Testament, especially the history books and the prophets, emphasizes the theme of Israel's unfaithfulness and God's faithful plan of redemption for His wayward people. Covenant renewal—indeed, a new covenant—would come with the Messiah as God promised to write His law on their hearts and bless all nations (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:10; 2 Corinthians 3:3; Genesis 12:3; Joel 2:28-32; Luke 22:20; John 3:16; Acts 2:14-36).

Review and Meditation from Chapter Three, The Knowledge of Good and Evil:

1. Describe how universal ethics, the knowledge of good and evil, aids our understanding of our need for righteousness from God. Like Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:7, do we have “open eyes” to know right from wrong? How do we need help from God in doing the right and avoiding the wrong?
2. Discuss the Hebrew title for the book of Deuteronomy, which means “These Are the Words.” How do the words from Moses’ sermons convey the perfect law of God? How do Jesus’ words as He quoted from Deuteronomy help fulfill the spirit of God’s law in our hearts?
3. What role might kosher laws and taboos have played in keeping Israel holy, as God is holy? Why might Romans 14 and the words of Christ shift the emphasis away from taboos and more toward one’s heart and attitude toward the holy God?
4. Review Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, the two nearly identical sets of the Ten Commandments. Then reread the Shema, Deuteronomy 6:1-9. Finally, read Leviticus 19:18, the “love your neighbor” command. These character laws are regarded as mostly universal to both Christians and Jews. Furthermore, read Matthew, Chapters 5 through 7, the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus gives application to much of these character laws. How is the heart of man emphasized in the law and Jesus’ sermon? Give examples where Jesus clarifies these laws from the heart of man.



I AM: Knowing the Reality of Jesus presents the compelling evidence for the living Jesus and the truth of the Christian Bible. However, knowing Jesus personally comes from the Bible's promises through practicing one's faith in Christ.

I AM: Knowing the Reality of Jesus

By J.M. Smith

Order the book from the publisher Booklocker.com

<https://booklocker.com/books/14313.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**