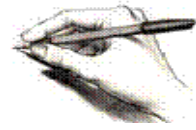


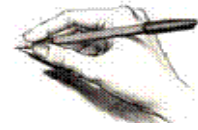
From the Desk of
Joel R. Goheen



What I Believe (and hope for)



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Stating what one believes—in writing for all the world to see and know—is serious business.

Why bother? Why create a stir with anyone who might take exception concerning what I believe? And why do I feel strongly enough about the things that I believe that I would take the time and effort to put them in this written format?

As anyone knows, there are two areas in life that are capable of fueling the most passionate and heated debates: religion and politics. Well, this “declaration” falls into the “religion” category; and it is intended to promote reflection on the fact that **love** cannot be underestimated in its efficacy concerning our relationship with our fellowman, and, most importantly, with God. *And especially with God when it comes to the eternal welfare of every Being that He has created.*

I have no other authority from which my convictions stem besides God’s inspired Words as recorded in the Bible, and the Holy Spirit’s conditioning of my thoughts and convictions as I have enjoyed intimate fellowship with Him while reflecting on His truths that have been written on my heart.

I have *pleaded* with the Holy Spirit to help me understand how I might be able to love *all* my fellow Human Beings—even when there is so much diversity in faiths and religious values. How can I be obedient in loving certain members of Humanity if I am opposed to them? How does God love His Created Beings and desire to be reconciled with them when they seem to be so distant from Him—even rejecting Him?

Love.

God is love; and I am called to live a life of love, imitating Him. Why? Because it is *His business* concerning His Creation and His reconciliation, and I am called to participate by being obedient to His commands—and *I am commanded to love*. I know that the eternity of God’s Created Beings will be what God determines it to be—in many ways far different from what my limited perspective could ever hope to conceive.

My purpose in putting forth my beliefs echoes what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Colossians:

My purpose is that they may be *encouraged in heart and united in love*, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. (Colossians 2:2-4 NIV; my emphasis)

Could my beliefs be dismissed as “fine-sounding arguments” if they seem to be in contention with certain doctrines that argue for predestination or belief/rejection of Christ as Lord while being a conscious Living Being during man’s natural life?

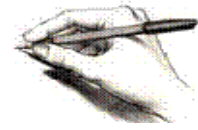
I am very aware of the seriousness of this matter; and I believe that the Holy Spirit has not misled me (He would not), for I have earnestly sought Him on these issues. For He has said:

“You will seek me and find me when you seek me *with all your heart*. I *will* be found by you,” declares the Lord. (Jeremiah 29:13,14 NIV; my emphasis)

And I am relying on His specific promises and revelations as contained in His Word:

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.
(Psalm 119:105 NIV)

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Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart. (Psalm 119:34 NIV)

Let me understand the teaching of your precepts; then I will meditate on your wonders. (Psalm 119:27 NIV)

Turn my eyes toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain. Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word. (Psalm 119:36,37 NIV)

I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I may not sin against you. (Psalm 119:10,11 NIV)

And I must be *very careful* that I am not deceiving myself or anyone else...

For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. (2 Timothy 4:3,4 NIV)

...always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth...
(2 Timothy 3:7 NIV)

...so also these men oppose the truth—men of depraved minds, who, as far as the truth is concerned, are rejected. But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone.
(2 Timothy 3:8,9 NIV)

Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith.
(1 Timothy 6:20,21 NIV)

But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. (1 Timothy 3:9 NIV)

Watch your life and doctrines closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save yourself and your hearers. (1 Timothy 4:16 NIV)

The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. (1 Timothy 4:1,2 NIV)

[Paul's letters] contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do other Scriptures, to their own destruction. (2 Peter 3:16 NIV)

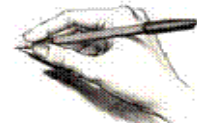
Can you see how serious this matter is?

Central to my beliefs is the conviction that our earthly life *is only part* of the whole equation concerning God's reconciliation and forgiveness.

“[Jesus said] Anyone who speaks a word against the Holy Spirit *will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.*” (Matthew 12:32 NIV; my emphasis)

Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgement. (Hebrew 9:27 NIV)

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Metempsychosis (reincarnation) is ruled out; but what will *really* go on between the “time” of our death and the “time” of Judgement? And how are “events” and “time” to be comprehended in the spiritual realm? What does “after that” mean in the spiritual realm? The Bible does not say, and the Holy Spirit has not revealed this to me, other than the clear conviction that I should not be quick to draw any conclusions that would work against my obedience to love, love, love.

Yes, perhaps God *will* hold certain Souls eternally accountable as a result of their earthly experiences; but that’s God’s business. However, brief reflection begs the question about Souls who have died in infancy, or Souls who had lived their earthly lives prior to Christ’s historical life on earth, and a host of other such circumstances where there simply must be more to the concept of the Christian salvific equation than meets the eye.

I am not claiming that I have it all figured out. I am the first to declare inadequacy in *that* regard; but I believe that God’s infinite wisdom and love will take into account the opportunity for every Created Being’s ability to be reconciled to Him. For Jesus said that

“... your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.” (Matthew 18:14 NIV)

And

The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:8-10 NIV)

We know that, from our limited perspective, history has shown that so many of God’s Created Beings have not had the slightest opportunity to be reconciled to Him, from the perspective of the doctrines of “Christianity,” while they lived on this earth. *To be sure, God is at work in the physical and in the spiritual realms!*

And just *what* might be *going on* in the spiritual realms?

[Jesus] was put to death in the body but was made alive by the Spirit, through whom also *He went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago* when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. (1 Peter 3:18-20 NIV; my emphasis)

For this reason the gospel was preached *even to those who are now dead*, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit. (1 Peter 4:6 NIV; my emphasis)

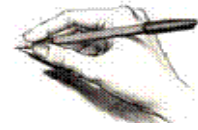
What do other Scriptural passages say? The account of Saul’s encounter with Samuel (I Samuel 28:3-25) who had died and was “brought up” from the spirit-world to meet Saul, suggests some kind of spiritual realm in which the dead inhabit. Saul’s dialogue with Samuel contains information that could not possibly be the result of a necromantic apocryphal conjuration by Saul or the woman who was the medium. Samuel’s predictions, spoken while in the conjured spirit, were based on what he told Saul while he was still living upon the earth; and his predictions were of a divinely-authorized prophetic nature, validated by the fact that these prophecies all proved true in subsequent events. Was this encounter no more than necromancy?

Or what about the account of the Transfiguration?

Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. (Matthew 17:3 NIV)

Does the after-life begin only at the resurrection? Jesus seems to be referring to both after-resurrection events, and other-than-after-resurrection events when He replies to the Sadducees about their probing of resurrection matters:

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“You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? *He is not the God of the dead but of the living.*” (Matthew 22:31, 32 NIV my emphasis)

Why are these accounts of after-life activity in the Bible?

The title of this document says, “What I believe *and hope for*”...

I am hoping that all men will be reconciled to God—whether this takes place in the earthly or spiritual realms; and my hopes can only be based on what Scripture confirms:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, Who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

That God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.

And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made Him Who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.
(2 Corinthians 5:17-21 NIV; my emphasis)

And again,

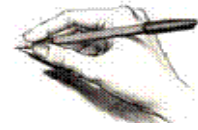
For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to *reconcile to Himself all things*, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross.
(Colossians 1:19 NIV; my emphasis)

To be sure, I am not...

A Relativist: I believe in the absolute authority of God—the God Who is revealed to us through the Bible, and what He has revealed to us concerning His laws;

A Universalist: I believe that Hell is the eternal destination for all who reject God's reconciliation; there *will be* unfortunate beings who will spend eternity in Hell;

A Pluralist: I believe in the One True God Who is known to us in the Three Persons (Father, Son, Holy Spirit); God is not a plurality of gods that represent the many interpretations of men's ideas of the divine. The only “plurality” in the God Head is the “plurality” of the Trinity.

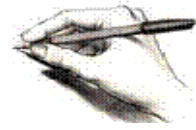


Therefore, as succinctly as I can put it...

I believe that...

- ❖ Jesus is God the Son, and He is The Way to God the Father and eternal life in God;
- ❖ God the Father created everything through and by His Son, Jesus, Who sustains everything as well;
- ❖ God the Father is reconciling the whole world to Himself; and that Human Beings and Angels will be reconciled to Him one way or the other (heaven or hell);
- ❖ Every spirit (human or angelic) that rejects Jesus as Lord and God will be separated from God forever in an eternal state of incomprehensible punishment;
- ❖ God has called a chosen number of Human Beings to serve Him in a sanctified way as priests or intermediates, both in the earthly and spiritual realms;
- ❖ Love, as defined and taught in the Bible, is the highest expression of obedience and godliness by and within Humanity;
- ❖ When love is demonstrated in truth, and when it is the highest priority between a Person and God, and between Persons, God is honoured, praised, and glorified, in a manner that is pleasing to Him;
- ❖ By loving God first, and then our fellow-beings in truth, we are being obedient to God; and His Will will be done in and through the lives of those who are living a life of love—and this includes any and all of God’s Created Beings, regardless of their system of faith. No one can determine another Person’s reconciliation status—only God can—and He will be honoured and praised by all of His Created Beings in whatever ways that He wills, persuades or permits;
- ❖ The books of the Bible (referred to herein as “the Bible”) were written under the inspiration of God and are fully reliable in their truth and authority; and that Scriptures of other faiths may very well be inspired by God, in whole or in part, if they do not negate or contradict any of the truths revealed in the Bible;
- ❖ Every Created Being will have a *divinely appointed opportunity*, either in the flesh or in the spirit, to choose or reject the gift of forgiveness and salvation that is provided by God the Father through Jesus Christ;

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- ❖ Eternal separation from God will be “passed over” every Soul that confesses the Name of Jesus as Lord and God, whether this confession is made while in the body (by the gift of faith) or in the spirit (by the gift of revelation), before the Judgement Day; and that every Soul that is redeemed will be judged and rewarded according to physical and mental acts and deeds done while in the body;
- ❖ If earthly Institutions of Religion have striven for unity with their Creator God, and if love in truth has been integral to any of their religious messages or causes, there will be a *divinely providential opportunity for those adherents to know and understand the complete and full truth about God and His reconciliation through Jesus*, whether this opportunity is afforded to them while during their earthly lifetimes or in their spiritual condition before the Final Judgement;
- ❖ A Christian’s faith and knowledge of God in all Three Persons *is a gift*; and it is a Heavenly Calling and a Blessed Condition to live on this earth with this spiritual gift of knowledge and intimate fellowship with God the Spirit; and under no circumstances should Christians pride themselves of this gift, or allow this sanctified condition to prevent them from loving and serving their fellow human beings as faithful and obedient Children and Servants of God.