

“Does truth exist? What is truth? Is there a God, and if so, who is He and what does He want?” These, and similar questions, were matters of concern to me as I was growing up. I had no idea what the answers were, nor did I know if anybody else did. Some folks said they knew absolutely that there was no absolute truth, nor any God. Others said they knew for sure that nothing could be known for sure, and many did not really seem to care but just wanted to do their own thing. However, in October 1995, during my freshman year at college, I discovered the One who is Truth, finding peace, joy, and the reason for life.

I had very hazy notions of God as a child. Since I grew up in an essentially non-religious home, I thought mankind was inherently good, and God (if He existed at all) would accept anyone who tried to do good or perhaps just forgive everybody. I was taught that the Bible, like other religious books, was a piece of literature filled with symbolic language, so I did not pay it much attention. Through the influence of friends and of the media, I vaguely associated the term *born-again Christian* with *weird fanatic*, but, not knowing any of these strange people personally, nor having ever been given any sort of literature by any of them, I just left it at that. Generally, God was mentioned only as a curse word.

When I was around twelve years old, I decided to start going to church. I began to walk every Sunday for about twenty minutes to get to St. Vincent de Paul’s, a Catholic church in my neighborhood. I continued going there faithfully until I went to college. While I enjoyed singing the songs, I still did not know if God existed. I wondered if atheism was correct, and I feared deeply that Christianity was merely a cultural tradition built upon a sweet, but false, illusion and that death ended everything. I saw, however, that life was unfair and utterly meaningless if there was no God. I wanted to find God’s presence and prayed that my quavering would disappear, replaced by true and firm knowledge of the truth.

I eventually noticed a Bible, with an intricately designed mother-of-pearl cover and gold-leafed pages, in my house; someone had given it to my mother as a present years earlier. I thought that the Bible would be a good place to find out about God, if He was there, so I wiped the dust off from it, put it by my bedside, and resolved to read one chapter every day before I went to bed.

I began in Genesis chapter one and kept on reading the Bible and praying through my years in high school – and the more I read, the more questions I had. I grew to see the nature of God’s Law, His just and universal judgment upon sin (which was any disobedience to His commands, not just doing “really bad” things), His absolute holiness, and His utter separation from anything not perfectly pure and righteous.

Some time later I concluded that, at one chapter a day, it would take me forever to get to the New Testament, so I started reading that as well. The words and works of Jesus Christ recorded there were amazing and self-evidently true. Some who had heard Him speak declared that **“never man spake like this Man”** (John 7:46), and I had to agree. I began to consider that the Bible might be more than just a book of nice stories, but exactly what it claimed—the perfect and error-free revelation of the one true God. My reaction to the Bible was the exact opposite of my feelings when I later read the Hindu holy book *The Bhagavad-Gita* and sections of the Islamic *Quran*. These did not even begin to compare with the Bible, and I rejected their claims to be revelation or truth.

As I began to consider the Bible as the Word of God, I was shocked and amazed by the stringency of some of the commandments it contained. I read the Sermon on the Mount, where Christ had preached, among many other things, that unjust anger in the heart was like murder (Matthew 5:21-22), and that **“whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart”** (Matthew 5:27-28). I heard Him say, **“Resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also... Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you”** (Matthew 5:39,44), and even **“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect”** (Matthew 5:48)! Furthermore, He declared that these commandments were not empty platitudes, but the standard by which God would judge me. He said, **“Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees [the most religious and moral people of His day], ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven”** (Matthew 5:20), and warned that

“if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell” (Matthew 5:30). Seeing the justice of these commands, I rejected the humanistic and atheistic indoctrination of my high school and grew increasingly religious.

This religiosity continued when I entered a university in 1995. I prayed before and after meals, read the Bible daily, strove to obey what I read, and never missed Sunday church services. Through discussions with others at college, my commitment to the Bible grew as I saw the inability of other religions and philosophies to make a coherent and decisive case for themselves. Having read that God demanded perfect righteousness to be saved, I also sought to keep the Law as best I could.

However, I grew increasingly disturbed by my utter failure to meet God’s standard. Those holy commandments in the Sermon on the Mount, for example, were ones which I had not kept, was not keeping, and really had no prospect of keeping in the future—but the penalty for disobedience was death and hell. I found that I had no ability within myself to keep the Law. I would confess my sins, but even while confessing them, I was disobeying the greatest command of all: **“Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind”** (Matthew 22:37), the second greatest command: **“Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself”** (Matthew 22:39), and numerous others. Even in my acts of contrition, I was disobedient. I began to see that, while others might think I was good, before God I was a great and horrible sinner, and I could neither atone for my sins by righteous acts nor change my inward bent towards evil. I looked at what God demanded, and at what I was, and realized that, if the Bible was the Word of God and I needed to keep its commandments to enter heaven, I had no hope whatsoever of being saved.

During this time, I started to attend meetings of the college Christian Fellowship, and was eventually invited to a multi-campus gathering. I decided to go, hoping I could get some of my questions answered. On the night of the meeting, I squeezed into the back seat of a car with two other people, and, during our ride, asked the driver what the relationship should be between the Christian and the Law. I was referred to Galatians 2:16—a verse God used to change my life and eternity! In the

dim light in the back of that car I read: **“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”** As I read this verse, God opened my eyes, and with all my being I believed in Jesus Christ, and was saved!

In that instant I understood God’s way of salvation from sin, trusted Jesus, who had died for me, and was forgiven of all my sins. There was joy in heaven (Luke 15:7, 10) and rejoicing in my heart, as I had at last found freedom from sin’s power and penalty. I now had peace with God, whom to know and serve is the meaning of life and the blessedness of eternity. My doubts about the truth of the Bible and its God immediately vanished, for He had saved my soul and made me a new creation in Him (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Before that moment I had known the fundamental facts: that the Bible was God’s Word; that there was one God in three Persons, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; that Jesus Christ, God the Son, became a Man, lived a sinless life, and then died on the cross, where the Father punished Him for the sins of the world, after which He had been buried, rose again, and ascended to heaven, soon to come again. Furthermore, I knew that I was a sinner and deserved Hell, and I desired to be saved from my iniquities and to know God – but I had not seen the way. I had thought acceptance before God came through good works and striving for perfection, although I saw I fell miserably short of His standard.

When I read Galatians 2:16, God brought me to understand the simple truth that a man is not saved by his own works, but by the work of Jesus Christ, whose death on the cross and shed blood were sufficient to satisfy forever God’s wrath against sin. Rather than continue my worthless attempts to earn heaven, I could stop working and simply trust in or rely on the perfect and completed work of Him who had died to satisfy the Law in my place. I did not need to trouble myself about being good enough to be saved, but now had peace, since Christ, my Substitute, was good enough. Although entirely devoid of any merit of my own, I stood perfect before God on the basis of Jesus’ righteousness.

The Bible says, **“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them”** (Ephesians 2:8-10). Now that I was saved by God’s grace, I not only had a real desire to serve God, and to thirst to know Him, but also a new and genuine ability to gain victory over sin. I read the Bible more than ever and could now understand what it said (1 Corinthians 2:6-16). Things I had before known were sin, but had no ability to overcome, I now could stop doing. The Holy Spirit gave me a new heart and conscience, so that things I had not earlier realized were wrong I now saw as unbiblical and avoided. My college companions saw the change in both action and attitude.

Best of all I now had Christ, and with Him, everything necessary for time and eternity. Through the Word of truth, and enlightened by the Spirit of truth, I had found Jesus Christ, who is the truth, and was immediately satisfied knowing Him. As time has passed, and I have been able to grow in Christ, find and join a Bible-believing and practicing church, and serve my Savior and Lord, He has grown all the sweeter. Friend, what is the case with you? Do you know the truth? Would you like to know it—Him? Have you been born again?

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My Journey from Unbelief to the Truth

My name is Thomas Ross, and
this is my story.