

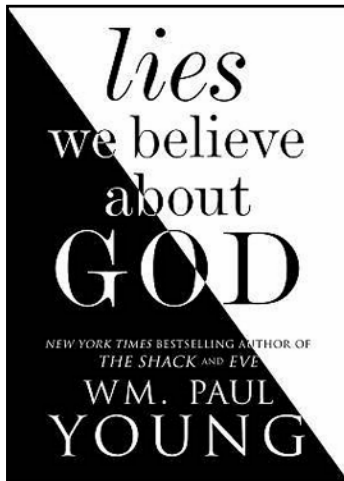
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A BIBLICAL ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS & SECULAR MEDIA



BOOK REVIEW

Lies We Believe About God

Author – William Paul Young
(*The Shack; Eve; Cross Roads*)

Review by Albert James Dager

WHAT DO WE know about God? What can be known about God? Due to the proliferation of religious fiction of late, many Christians have forgotten that anything man can know about God is found only in the Word of God—the writings of the ancient Hebrew prophets and the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ that comprise the Bible.

Nor can anything substantive be known about God by anyone other than those who are truly members of Christ's Body, simply because the Word of God cannot be understood by the natural mind:

But the natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness to him. Neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Corinthians 2:14)

Certainly “the heavens declare the glory of God and the earth reveals His handiwork.” The evidence of God's existence is clear to all mankind through the creation. But because men are born spiritually dead—separated from God because of their sin nature—they have no spiritual discernment unless they come into relationship with God through faith in His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

If this sounds dismissive or uncaring for those outside the Body of Christ, it isn't. But for this writing, considering that the author of this book under review purports to teach us about the true nature of God, and because he purposely challenges some

beliefs clearly taught in Scripture, this treatise is directed at all who call themselves Christians. Add to this that the author, William P. Young, has impacted, and continues to impact, tens of millions of people—believers in Jesus and otherwise—through his books and now a motion picture based on his most famous book, *The Shack*. Add further that many leaders within Christianity are singing high praises for his fantasy as if it were the Gospel truth, and it is obvious that we need to examine carefully what he has to say about God's nature and character. The only authoritative voice we have by which we may discern truth from error is the written Word of God.

If you find that the Bible and the author do not agree in certain critical areas, then you must choose which to follow—the Bible, or William P. Young.

I would preface our analysis by first stating that there is some truth to be found in Young's writings—both this treatise on God's nature and his fantasy. The question is whether or not his religious philosophy can stand up overall to the test of God's Word. An additional question is whether or not you are able to discern the truth as opposed to Young's religious philosophy.

As we examine this book, *Lies We Believe About God*, please keep in mind the words of Jesus: “A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (1 Corinthians 5:6).

Young's religious philosophy about the nature of God is based largely on seeing his own father as the exact opposite of how he sees God.

Young's father was a missionary to Papua New Guinea, working among a tribe of cannibals. But because, according to Young, his father was abused by his father, Young's father was also abusive. Sadly, Young's experiences in his early years under the harsh treatment of his father led him to seek solace from extra-biblical and unbiblical sources:

In the writings of theologians, philosophers, psychologists, and scientists, I have found both friends and adversaries; and I am better for listening and allowing their input to till up the ground of my heart and mind, to root out weeds, to plant seeds, and then to water those seeds—even bringing some to harvest. (p. 19)

Yet Young does affirm that, ultimately, the Holy Spirit is our true teacher. And he doesn't offer his words as complete or final answers.

That's fine, but considering the unscriptural premises of many of his ideas and questions he wishes us to ponder, we must consider that the Holy Spirit will indeed lead us into truth, provided we exercise discernment and do not receive anything as truth that is not clearly delineated in Scripture.

Young states, "Each chapter refers to a statement I once believed and from which I have transitioned."

In other words, he no longer believes the "lies" he once believed about God. So let us look at some of those "lies." (The "lies" we address are not lies. It isn't necessary to address the actual lies that many believe and which Young addresses.)

"Lie" No. 2 – "God is good. I am not."

In this chapter, Young asserts that men are good by nature—that the idea that God is good but we are not is a "huge" lie, and is devastating. But in order to justify this claim, he offers an extreme view held by some:

Many of us believe that God sees us all as failures, wretches who are utterly depraved. We've written songs to reinforce our assumptions, penning lyrics about our own ugliness and separation. We think, *When I hate myself, am I not simply agreeing with God?* [emphasis Young's] (p. 29)

Young focuses on how people disparage one another, particularly how some parents denigrate their children with phrases such as "You are worthless," "You are stupid," "You are not valuable," "You are just dumb," "I hate you," etc.

Most parents would never say these things to their children. Yet Young gives the impression that this is endemic to parenthood, thus justifying his psycho-spiritual solutions.

The problem, according to Young, is that people transfer what they experience from others to God—especially what they hear from their father. He then channels Joel Osteen with this:

We then turned these messages into self-declarations, "I am not...followed by a litany of our failures as human beings: "I am not smart enough, or skinny or tall or colored enough. I am not a boy; I am not

strong; I am not..." We forget that every "I am not" began with an "I am": "I am worthy; I am smart; I am loved; I am..." But we even turn "I am" against ourselves, and follow it with another list of shames: "I am...a loser, a loner, bad, ugly, overweight, alone, dumb, worthless."

Is this how God sees me? Is this how God sees you? Does God agree with how I see myself and what others have told me about who I am at the core of my being? [ellipses Young's] (p. 30)

How does God see us? Well, it depends on how we see Jesus. If we love Jesus, if we truly believe in Him and affirm that belief through obedience to His commands, then the Father receives us as His children, adopted into His family (Ephesians 1:5). But those who reject His Son He sees as His enemies (Philippians 3:17-19), and consequently candidates for judgment.

A major flaw in Young's hypothesis is that he never differentiates between those who are in Christ and those who are not in Christ—even those who are enemies of Christ.

How the Father sees even His children, if they are disobedient and have left their first love, is reflected in Jesus' words to the assembly at Laodicea:

"Because you say, 'I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing,' and do not know that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, I counsel you to buy from Me gold tried in the fire so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may be clothed and that the shame of your nakedness does not show. And anoint your eyes with eye salve so that you may see." (Revelation 3:16-18)

Contrary to Young's assertion that he is "fundamentally good," because he is "created in Christ," God sees mankind just as mankind is; He doesn't paste happy faces over our sins and declare us "good" simply because He wants us to feel a sense of self-worth. Jesus did not entrust Himself to men because He knew what was in men (John 2:23-25).

This major flaw in Young's philosophy is that he believes all people are intrinsically good:

Yes, we have crippled eyes, but not a core of ungoodness. We are true and right, but often ignorant and stupid, acting out the pain of our wrongheadedness, hurting ourselves, others, and even all creation. Blind, not depraved, is our condition. Remember, God cannot become anything that is evil or inherently bad...and God became human. (p. 35)

There are a number of erroneous assumptions in this statement. First, Jesus did not have a human father; His Father is God. His physical nature was inherited from Adam through Mary. Thus He was subject to temptation and to death. So is death good? Of course not. It is the end product

of sin in the flesh. Yet although Jesus' earthly body contained the seeds of death, and therefore the seeds of sin, still He never sinned, though He was tempted in every way we are (Hebrews 4:15). If He could not sin, then temptation means nothing. But if in His flesh He was made sin (not sinful), then temptation has meaning. This is what is meant by 2 Corinthians 5:21: "For He [the Father] has made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that we may be made the righteousness of God in Him." As for dying, "He died unto sin once, but in that He lives, He lives unto God" (Romans 6:10). So although he died unto sin, no one took His life; He laid down His life willingly.

Ignoring this essential truth of Christ's nature, Young says:

I am fundamentally good because I am created "in Christ" as an expression of God, an image bearer, *imago dei* (see Ephesians 2:10). This identity and goodness is truer about us than any of the damage that was done to us or by us." (p. 35)

Again, Young doesn't differentiate between believers in Jesus and all others, even the truly depraved. And he sees our faults (sins) as the result of being damaged by others.

Unwittingly, Young has fallen victim to a false religious concept. Although he is right that man is not utterly depraved as defined in theological systems such as Calvinism (even Jesus spoke of people with good hearts [Luke 8:15; Matthew 12:35]), he errs in thinking that man is intrinsically good.

As it is written, "There is no one righteous—no, not one. There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks for God. They have all gone out of the way; they have become unprofitable together; there is no one who does good—no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulcher; they have used deceit with their tongues. The poison of asps is under their lips, whose mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their paths, and they have not known the way of peace. There is no fear of God before their eyes." (Romans 3:10-18)

This may seem extreme, but this is the general condition of all men prior to receiving Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

"Lie" No. 3 – "God is in control."

Young believes that God is not alone in control, but that we are in control with Him. At first glance one might rightly assume that he is correct in the sense that we control our own actions and make our own choices in life (contrary to Calvinistic determinism). But that's not what Young means:

Does God have a wonderful plan for our lives? Does God sit and draw up a perfect will for you and me on some cosmic drafting table, a perfect plan that requires a perfect response? Is God then left to react to our stupidity or deafness or blindness or inability,

as we constantly violate perfection through our own presumption? What if this is about a God who has greater respect for you than for "the plan"? What if there is no "plan" for your life but rather a relationship in which God constantly invites us to co-create, respectfully submitting to the choices we bring to the table? And what if this God, who is Love, will never be satisfied until only that which is of Love's kind remains in us? (p. 39)

Does Scripture reveal whether or not God has a plan for our lives? As far as believers in Jesus go, yes:

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, so that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. (Romans 8:29; cf. Ephesians 2:10)

This is not predestination to salvation as erroneously interpreted by Calvinists; it is predestination to conformity to the image of Jesus for those whom the Father foreknew. He foreknows all mankind, but in this case those addressed are believers in His Son (the few who are chosen from out of the many called).

There are those who are specifically destined by God for service to Him—who are part of a "plan." Speaking to Jeremiah, Yahweh said:

Before I formed you in the belly I knew you, and before you came forth out of the womb I sanctified you, and I ordained you a prophet to the nations. (Jeremiah 1:5)

Actually, our Father has a plan for all of us; He plans for us to be salt in the earth and a light to the world in emulation of His Son. By denying God's plan and putting man in control, Young makes God submissive to man:

God submits rather than controls and joins us in the resulting mess of relationship, to participate in co-creating the possibility of life, even in the face of death. (p. 43)

Because God allows mankind to mess things up doesn't mean He is submissive and joining us in the mess. Ultimately, all mankind will be judged by how they measured up to God's plan.

"Lie" No. 4 – "God does not submit."

Young begins this chapter with some startling words that hint at his belief in universalism (which we will address later):

I was sitting with my friend Andrew at a conference listening to an excellent exchange between Christians and Muslims, Israelis and Palestinians—you get the picture, people who almost by categorical imperative are required to be antagonistic to each other. But this particular gathering was different; the focus was on how the spirit of Jesus might cross all boundaries—

ethnic, racial, political, etc.—and call us to something greater and grander than our divisions and disputes.

There is a common appeal, whether in the New Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures, the Koran, the Bhagavad Gita, the Analects of Confucius, etc., to what many of us would recognize as the Golden Rule. It is present in all of scripture and wisdom literature. Jesus stated it this way: “In everything you do, treat people the way you want them to treat you” (Matthew 7:12).

I leaned over to Andrew and whispered, “Do you think the Golden Rule applies to God?” (p. 45-46)

Not all “wisdom literature” agrees on this. But what Young implies is that God treats men just as He wants men to treat Him.

That sounds reasonable. Except for an important distinction. God is God; man is a being created for the pleasure of God.

But that doesn’t suit Young. Rather, he prefers to see God and man involved in a “dynamic dance of mutual submission.”

It may give one a sense of “empowerment” to think of God as mutually submissive to us by allowing us to mess up our lives. But that isn’t submission; it is allowing the consequences of our own actions, whether for good or for bad.

The idea that God is in submission to mankind—especially without distinguishing between those who are His children through faith in Jesus—brings Him down to the level of man. It is demeaning toward Him, and reveals a lack of genuine awe and respect, let alone fear.

But then, Young doesn’t believe men should fear God.

Lie No. 5 – “God is a Christian.”

Notice I didn’t put quote marks around the word “Lie” for this chapter of his book. That’s because Young is essentially correct. God is not a Christian. Christians are people who claim to believe in Christ. But Young uses this phrase to suggest that true believers are nothing more in God’s sight than members of *any* religion.

Although God is not a “Christian,” God does insist that we adhere to His truth as found only in His written Word. Yet even though Young is technically correct in saying “God is not a Christian,” his explanation reveals something far more sinister. He asks, “Why do we insist on creating ways to define ourselves in opposition to someone else?”

Within the Body of Christ, that is a legitimate question. But in relation to all others, it is a foolish question. Of course we in Christ must define ourselves in opposition to all others simply because God’s Word tells us not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14-16).

For those who come out from among unbelievers and make themselves separate He promises to be a Father. But that is only for believers in Jesus.

This separation does not refer to normal mundane affairs except inasmuch as those affairs may affect our spiritual lives.

It refers specifically to our spiritual fellowship with brethren in Christ and with God as our Father.

But, again, suggesting that Christians are the same in God’s eyes as adherents to any other religion, Young consistently applies God’s Fatherhood to all mankind without regard to whether or not they are in Christ:

If we take Jesus seriously then we are not dealing with insiders and outsiders; we are dealing with those who are seeing and those who are not seeing, trusting and not trusting.

So is God a Christian? If you are asking if God is about separation and treats people of different denominations, faiths, and ways of thinking as outsiders until they pray a special prayer to “get in”...then, of course not. If you are asking, does God relate to all of us as beloved insiders who are completely ignorant and miserable, does God love us and incessantly find ways to lead us to discover Jesus as our only way, truth, and life...then, of course....

Believing (trusting) is an activity, not a category. The truth is that every human being is somewhere on the journey between belief and unbelief; even so, we perpetuate the categories of believer and unbeliever. [ellipses Young’s except paragraph end] (pp. 55, 57)

Do you see the subtle deception in these words? Young is saying we should not consider believers in Jesus as different from unbelievers. We’re all at varying stages of the same faith, even if in total unbelief. This is yet another clue to Young’s Universalist beliefs that all mankind will be saved.

“Lie” No. 7 – “God is more he than she.”

Young states that many people are put off by his portrayal of God as a woman in *The Shack*. Even his mother was put off by it until she got “unstuck” by talking over her concerns with a friend:

As Harold pointed out, do any of us truly think that God is more masculine, more male, more paternal than feminine, female, and maternal? All of maternity, as all of paternity, originates in the very nature of God. The image of God in us (*imago dei*) is not less feminine than masculine. The feminine/masculine nature of God is a circle of relationship, a spectrum, not a polarity. (p. 73)

Young then points to places in Scripture where feminine and animal qualities are used to describe God (Mother Bear, Eagle, Lioness, etc.), as well as inanimate qualities (Rock, Fortress, Strong Tower, Mountain, Shield, etc.).

Logically, I must ask then, “Is God also an animal, as well as an inanimate object?”

Of course not.

Nor is He a woman.

Does He exhibit feminine traits?

Only if we limit any traits to women to the exclusion of men.

It is not God or His Word that assigns “traits” to men and women; it is the world, corrupted by man’s sin.

Here is the truth: God always refers to Himself in masculine terms; His Word always refers to Him as “He” and “Him.” Never is God referred to as “She” or “Her.”

That in itself should be sufficient for Young to realize that at the least, “God is ‘more’ He than she.”

Yet I would go further to say that “God is He **rather than she**” for several reasons which are borne out in Scripture.

First, God made Adam (*Aw-dawm*; “man”) in His image and likeness. It was sometime later that He took from Adam’s body and made a woman (Genesis 1:27). God does not have two images and likenesses. Scripture tells us, “So God created man (*aw-dawm*) in His own image; He created him in the image of God. He created them male and female.”

Scripture does not say, “So God created man and woman in His own image.” If that were the case, would He not have stated it clearly in His Word?

He does say that He created them (mankind) both male and female. And whenever mankind is spoken of generically the masculine terms are always used—“man,” “men,” etc. That is not a construct of male chauvinistic domination over women; it is the inspired Word of God.

Additionally, the apostle Paul says that the man “is the image and glory of God, but the woman is the glory of the man” (1 Corinthians 11:7).

Why does Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, not say, “the man and the woman are the image and glory of God”?

Because that isn’t true.

Those infected by the satanically inspired feminism of today will shriek and howl in protest.

But God’s Word is true, even if some men as well as women refuse to accept it.

Scripture also tells us that God is not a man that He should lie. But that doesn’t mean He isn’t masculine.

Why is this important to the “gender” of God? Because God wasn’t created in the image and likeness of man; man was created in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, whatever God is, He was prior to the creation of the man, Adam. So Adam, created in the image (physical) and likeness (all encompassing) of Elohiym, is the full representation of Elohiym in mankind. We must not go beyond what is written in God’s Word. To do so is rebellion.

The reason Young portrayed his god as a woman in *The Shack* is because he doesn’t believe God as represented by a man is capable of the so-called feminine traits of compassion, love, tenderness, etc. But men *are* capable of those traits; those traits aren’t exclusive to women.

When men are truly submitted to the leading of the Holy Spirit they manifest the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, humility, self-control.

These are not traits of women, but traits of the Holy Spirit. They are stunted in both men and women who are not led by the Holy Spirit.

This is evidenced by the fact that women are becoming more like men in every way because feminism has corrupted their thinking to believe that they can and should attain the same place as men in every aspect of society. So they began acting like men around the turn of the 20th century; they began to smoke, cuss, wear men’s clothing, and intrude upon the jobs and industries built by men.

World War II cemented women in the role of men by conscripting them to take over men’s jobs so the men could fight. After the war many women resented having to leave those jobs to make way for the men returning from the fronts. So they began to press legislators to grant to them the same status in the workforce and in society. They succeeded because men displayed the “feminine” trait of submission, surrendering their place as leaders at home and in society. As women have gained more and more control, the result is that they are suffering from the same diseases that decimate men—cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure, strokes, etc.

But not content to suffer these debilitating diseases, they pushed to be included in combat with men. Now the nation is seriously considering the drafting of women to solidify their guarantee of “equal rights.”

Because of feminized men like William Paul Young women are enjoying this new-found “freedom” to die and/or be maimed. This is because too many men are cowards, unable or unwilling to take their rightful place.

“Lie” No. 13 – “You need to get saved.”

This, among all the “lies” that Young challenges, reveals more about his theology and his soteriology than any others.

Young doesn’t believe we must come to Jesus to be saved. We merely need to realize that we are already saved:

The Good News is *not* that Jesus has opened up the possibility of salvation and you have been invited to receive Jesus into your life. The Gospel is that Jesus has already included you into His life, into His relationship with God the Father, and into His anointing in the Holy Spirit. The Good News is that Jesus did this without your vote, and whether you believe it or not won’t make it any less true. (p. 118)

So Young doesn’t believe that we must believe; to him salvation is a done deal for everyone. But what says Scripture?

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. (Romans 10:4)

All the prophets give witness of Him [Jesus], that through His name, whoever believes in Him shall receive remission of sins. (Acts 10:43)

When the jailer who was holding Paul and Silas asked the question, “What must I do to be saved?” neither answered,

“You don’t need to do anything; you’re already saved.”
Rather, they said:

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved—and your household. (Acts 16:27-31)

Paul’s heart was for his Israelite brethren to be saved:

Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved. (Romans 10:1)

According to Young, the Israelites (and all men) are already saved. He attempts to give a defense of his position:

What or who saves me? Either God did in Jesus, or I save myself. If, in any way, I participate in the completed act of salvation accomplished in Jesus, then my part is what actually saves me. Saving faith is not our faith, but the faith of Jesus.

God does not wait for my choice and then “save me.” God has acted decisively and universally for all humankind. Now our daily choice is to either grow and participate in that reality or continue to live in the blindness of our own independence. (p. 118)

Does that sound like Calvinism? So far, yes. But there is a serious departure:

Are you suggesting that everyone is saved? That you believe in universal salvation?

That is exactly what I am saying!

This is real good news! It has been blowing people’s minds for centuries now. So much so that we often overcomplicate it and get it wrong. Here’s the truth: every person who has ever been conceived was included in the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. When Jesus was lifted up, God “dragged” all human beings to Himself (John 12:32). Jesus is the Savior of all humankind, especially believers (1 Timothy 4:10). (pp. 118-119)

1 Timothy 4:10 does say that God “is the savior of all men, particularly [Gr., *malista*] those who believe.” Young takes this to mean that all men are saved, period. But there is a difference between “especially” and “particularly.” Especially indicates that the special one is included among others; particularly means one is apart from others. Taking the whole counsel of God into consideration—much of which clearly shows that the lake of fire awaits the unrighteous (Revelation 20:15)—it is clear that 1 Timothy 4:10 means that God’s provision of salvation is for all, but is particular to those who believe. Young further convolutes Scripture with these words:

Further, every single human being is in Christ (John 1:3), and Christ is in them, and Christ is in the Father (John 14:20). (p. 119)

Wait a minute! John 1:3 says, “All things were made by Him [the Word of God], and nothing that was made was made without Him.” Where does it say that “every single human being is in Christ”?

If there had been any question up to this point that Young is not purposely attempting to deceive us, this obvious corruption of Scripture should at the least give us a warning. But most will just read through it and not check it out. Deceivers count on the laziness of people so they may put things over on them.

Young further convolutes Scripture by saying:

When Christ—the Creator in whom the cosmos was created—died, we all died. When Christ rose, we rose (2 Corinthians 5). (p. 119)

Young’s citing of 2 Corinthians 5 is also dishonest. 2 Corinthians 4:13 places all that follows in the context of believers in Christ, not all men. 2 Corinthians 5 speaks of our walking by faith, and our confidence in being willing to die and be present with our Lord (which excludes unbelievers). It speaks of our labor in Christ, and of our one day appearing before the judgment seat of Christ (which is exclusively for believers; the Great White Throne judgment at the end of the Millennium is for the rest of mankind).

Young takes one verse (2 Corinthians 5:14) out of context and applies it to all of mankind, saying:

For the love of Christ constrains us, because we judge thus: if one died for all, then all were dead... (vs. 14).

He ignores the *context* of verse 14 as well as the following verse 15:

...and that He died for all, so that they who live should not henceforth live for themselves, but for Him who died for them, and rose again.

Is Paul addressing all mankind? Of course not. He is saying that Jesus died for all, but he qualifies it by saying, “so that they who live should live for Christ.” Unbelievers don’t live for Christ. His death is for all who would believe in Him.

When Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5, “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation,” he wasn’t saying it was a done deal for the whole world. He follows with “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God beseeched you by us. In Christ’s place, we ask you to be reconciled to God” (vs. 19-20).

If the whole world is already reconciled to God, why is it necessary to plead with the lost to be reconciled to Him?

And if all mankind will be saved regardless of whether or not they have faith in Jesus, or how they live their lives in obedience or disobedience to Christ, why was it really necessary for Christ to die? There would be no reason for the shedding of His blood, by which believers are saved.

Well, one might say, it was necessary because otherwise no one would be saved. But now everyone is saved.

To show the fallacy of such an argument all we need do is ask the Universalist (read Young), “So the god you don’t believe would condemn anyone because his/her/its nature doesn’t allow for it already had condemned everyone before Jesus came?” If it’s not in the nature of the Universalist’s god to condemn anyone, then it wasn’t necessary to send a savior. They would already be saved.

“Lie No. 15 – “Hell is separation from God.”

Young reinforces his Universalist beliefs by denying the existence of “hell,” (or more properly, the lake of fire). He laments his early religious instruction that terrified him:

I grew up in religious environments that were steeped in the dread and specter of eternal conscious torment. My deepest motivation for right living was not the reality of love or trusting in the life of Jesus; it was the fear of hellfire and damnation. (p. 131)

Young seems not to understand that fear of judgment works hand-in-hand with God’s grace. Scripture is replete with accounts of eternal damnation for the enemies of God. But that is tempered by God’s offer of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

The apostle Paul prayed for the saints at Ephesus, that they would know “what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places...” (Ephesians 1:19-20).

This is for “us who believe,” not for all mankind, even though Christ’s sacrifice was efficacious for all mankind.

Young’s problem is that he cannot believe in “an eternally Good God, whose very nature is love, allowing human beings to be in conscious torment and pain for infinite time, as if that were somehow just.”

But God challenges Young:

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says YHWH. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9)

The audacity of men like Young to reject God’s Word on God’s nature and character in favor of their own musings.

Like all false teachers, Young insists that he knows better than God how God should be and act. He can’t take God’s Word at face value because:

The thought is so disheartening that, for many, it becomes an insurmountable obstacle. I regularly receive emails that say, “I am terrified to take the risk and trust that God is as Good as you have written, and then find out you are wrong.” Doesn’t it seem intuitively wrong

to be desperately afraid of a torture-devising God and yet hope to spend eternity with this God? (p. 132)

Young is asking the wrong question. Rather, he should ask, “Doesn’t it seem intuitively wrong to be desperately afraid of the consequences of rejecting God’s grace and love offered through Christ, and yet not receive that grace?”

But that wouldn’t fit Young’s Universalist beliefs. For him there is no place for fear—only a “feelings-oriented” coziness that refuses to look at the consequences of willful rejection of God’s grace. But what does Scripture say?

And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation. (Luke 1:50)

Paul says about the wicked, “There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Romans 3:18).

Jude puts an end to Young’s posturing against God’s Word:

Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And have compassion for some, making a difference. And others *save with fear*, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. (Jude 21-23)

It is argued by detractors from God’s Word that the word “fear” should be translated “awe” or “reverence.” But the Greek word in Jude 23 is *phobos*: alarm or fright.

That word is most often used when referring to fear of God, not only for unbelievers, but for disobedient believers.

Yet Young cannot comprehend that his idea of a “loving” god would or should instill fear in people.

But Young doesn’t stop there. His convoluted thinking posits that there is no such place as “hell,” or, if there is, then “hell” is God Himself:

Consider this simple line of reasoning: Either hell is a created place or thing or it is not. If it is not created, then it must by definition be God, who alone is uncreated. In this sense, hell would be God, who is a consuming fire. Your destiny would not be apart from God but directly into God, who is Love, Light, Goodness.

The other alternative is that hell is a created place or thing. Consider this passage: “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities nor things present, *nor things to come*, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, *nor any other created thing*, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

This is a list of all the realities that *cannot* separate you from the love of God. What isn’t in the list, keeping in mind that it includes “any created thing” or any “thing to come”?

Nothing. There is nothing absent from the list.

You are a “created thing,” so therefore you do not have the power to separate yourself from the love of

God. And whatever hell is, if it is a created thing, it cannot separate you from the love of God.

Please keep in mind, saying that we cannot ever be *separated* from the love of God is not the same thing as saying we cannot *reject or ignore* the love of God. What we choose to believe, even if a lie, becomes our experience. [emphasis Young's] (pp. 134-135)

Remember that Young's Universalist beliefs place all mankind in this milieu. He doesn't make any distinction between believers and unbelievers.

Young compounds his error with these words:

So if we continue this thought...perhaps hell is hell not because of the absence of God, but because of the *presence* of God, the continuous and confrontational presence of fiery Love and Goodness and Freedom that intends to destroy every vestige of evil and darkness that prevents us from being fully free and fully alive. This is a fire of Love that now and forever is "for" us, not against us. Only if we posit that we have existence apart from Jesus can we believe that hell is a form of punishment that comes to us in our separation from Jesus. I propose the possibility that hell is not separation from Jesus but that it is the pain of resisting our salvation in Jesus while not being able to escape Him who is True Love. (emphasis and ellipses Young's) (pp. 136-137)

So now we are to entertain Young's "possibility" rather than the clear Word of God concerning eternal damnation—that is, that "hell" is really unity with God or even God Himself! As well, we're not to "posit" that anyone has existence apart from Jesus.

CONCLUSION

Young's fantasy is not just in his novels. This book, *Lies We Believe About God*, while masquerading as a work of deep spiritual and theological insight, is more fiction than fact, and certainly more fiction than biblical truth. Young's convoluted thinking should suffice in cautioning believers not to have anything to do with his writings. Pray for him if you feel so led, but do not allow yourself to be seduced by his "nice guy" pious attitude and platitudes.

His Universalist beliefs are sprinkled throughout his books, as well as is his denial of eternal judgment. His feminist mindset is revealed in his use of terms such as "humankind" in place of "mankind," as well as his placing the feminine pronoun before the masculine noun or pronoun ("women and men," etc.).

To add insult to injury of our Lord, he posits that Jesus must have made mistakes, not only in his carpentry work, but in his understanding. He assumes this based on Luke 2:52 which says Jesus "grew in wisdom and stature."

According to Young, if Jesus had to grow in wisdom, then He must have made mistakes along the way.

Why does Young feel it necessary to even think like this? This serves only to bring Christ down to the level of man.

Yet in spite of all these glaring, ungodly errors in Young's thinking, he is being touted by major Christian leaders as some sort of new prophet bringing a fresh word of wisdom and enlightenment to the Body of Christ. His fantasy, *The Shack*, is treated as spiritual reality, just as has been done with Frank Peretti's fantasy writing *This Present Darkness*.

Sadly, many believers are being seduced to accept Young's beliefs because his fantasy has stirred their hearts to heights of euphoria they seldom if ever reached by reading the Bible. The Scriptures aren't enough for them; they have to have fantasy to set their thinking right. For such, they should ask, "What is wrong with me, that I could not bring myself to forgive those who have hurt me after seeing in Scripture the Lord's admonition to forgive? I had to have my emotions stirred through fantasy. And not just any fantasy, but a fantasy that misrepresents God and His plan of salvation."

GOOD GRIEF, PEOPLE! GET IT THROUGH YOUR HEADS! THIS STUFF IS JUST THE OUTWORKING OF A MAN'S IMAGINATION! IT ISN'T REAL! IT ISN'T TRUTH!

You'll find similar comfort in mind science. If you want your emotions stirred, watch a classic tear jerker like *Old Yeller* or *The Glenn Miller Story*. Too many Christians think that just because they are stirred in their emotions by some movie, the Holy Spirit must be in it. Yes, the Holy Spirit may use anything to get our muddled minds to finally grasp a truth, but that doesn't justify the "anything" He uses, especially when it demeans God's character and Word.

AND PLEASE, STOP FOLLOWING THE FOOLISH PRATTLING OF CHRISTIAN TALKING HEADS WHO TOUT SUCH BILGE. STOP THE FOOLISH PERUSING OF CHRISTIAN BOOKSTORES, LOOKING FOR THE LATEST MIND-TICKLING FANTASY MASQUERADING AS GOD'S TRUTH! STUDY GOD'S WORD!

Forgive me for shouting, but after forty years of dealing with this garbage, I felt I have to get some people's attention somehow. ❖

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