

Does Absolute Truth Exist?

Dr. Michael Brown Responds to Latest Christian Leader Renouncing His Faith

As reported by Josh Shepherd on the Roys Report, “Brady ‘Phanatik’ Goodwin, founding member of Grammy-nominated Christian hip-hop group, The Cross Movement, and in recent years an apologetics teacher, stated Monday in a video posted online that he has renounced his Christian faith.”

As he stated in Goodwin’s Facebook video, “I sent a letter to my church withdrawing my membership and saying that I am denouncing the Christian faith that I have believed, professed, proclaimed and defended for the last 30 years of my life.”

In his video, which is delivered with candor and pain and graciousness, Goodwin explains how his doubts began to develop when studying at Lancaster Bible College, only to deepen in 2014 when he began studying at Westminster Theological Seminary.

As Shepherd writes, “Specifically, he said learning how scholars use preexisting ‘theological commitments’ to arrive at translation and interpretation of the biblical text raised questions for him.

“He compared Christian theology to a Rubik’s cube. ‘I began to look at the faith and say, ‘Man you could turn this Rubik’s cube any particular way and end up with a different understanding.’ And who can say that understanding is right or that understanding is wrong?’ asked Goodwin.”

I was unfamiliar with Goodwin and his work until reading this

announcement. But since then, I've heard good things about him, and I have no reason not to take him at his word when he explains his reasons for leaving his faith, and it's clear from his video that he is not gloating or mocking.

It's also clear he doesn't want to hurt the faith of others. And so, at least at this point, he is not aggressively attacking what he once believed.

Hopefully, this is not the last chapter in his faith journey, and he would not be the first leader to fall away and then, with God's help and true repentance, turn back to the Lord.

But what about the points he makes in his video? What about the feeling that we can basically make the Bible say whatever we want it to say? Or that it's our prior theological commitments that determine how we understand Scripture?

Put another way, is there no objective truth when it comes to God and the Bible? Does it come down to, "You have your truth and I have my truth, but there is no absolute truth"?

Speaking candidly, I know all too well what it is to struggle with the faith.

That's because as a Jewish believer in Jesus, from my first moments in the faith, I was challenged over my beliefs. As my dad said to me shortly after my life was transformed in late 1971, "Michael, I'm glad you're off drugs. But we're Jews. We don't believe this."

That led to immediate, intensive interaction with learned rabbis (which has continued for 50 years), along with serious academic study, culminating with a Ph.D. in Near Eastern Languages and Literatures from New York University.

And in all my college and graduate studies, not one of my professors was a Bible-believing Christian. Some were even hostile to the faith, taking every opportunity to ridicule

conservative Bible beliefs.

But the whole reason I earned the degrees that I did (all of which were in ancient languages) was so that I could read the original biblical text in its original cultural and linguistic context, not having to rely on other dictionaries or commentaries to understand what I was reading (although, to be sure, there can be great value in many of those dictionaries, commentaries and other books).

Over the years, the more I studied and the more I wrestled with objections to my faith, the stronger my faith became. My mind was now in complete harmony with my heart; my intellect now matching my experience.

Others, sadly, have had different experiences and have ended up leaving the faith rather than growing in the faith. And Goodwin is careful to say, "Hey, don't blame seminaries or put this on intellectualism, since others in my class were strengthened in their faith through their studies" (my paraphrase of his words).

But here's the thing: Just because there are different opinions as to how to translate a biblical verse doesn't mean that the original author was ambiguous in his writing, even if we debate the meaning today.

And just because Jewish translators of the Bible render certain key words one way and Christian translators render those same words another way doesn't mean that one translation is not ultimately better than the other.

In the same way, just because Hindus conceive of the Godhead in a polytheistic way while Jews, Christians and Muslims conceive of the Godhead in different monotheistic ways doesn't mean that all these competing ideologies are equally true. God is who He is, regardless of what we think or believe.

Just look at our political views today. Or our views on moral

and cultural and social issues.

The fact that we are deeply divided doesn't mean all sides are equally right. And the fact that our presuppositions color our worldview doesn't mean all presuppositions are equally valid (or invalid).

When it comes to the Bible, we do not read it in a vacuum nor did the authors of the Scripture write it in a vacuum.

To give one example, the disciples of Jesus knew that His interpretation of the Bible was true because they saw it with their own eyes. They heard Him say that He would be rejected and crucified. They heard Him say that He would rise from the dead. And they heard Him say, "It is all written in our Bible in advance!"

Then, after His crucifixion and resurrection, when He pointed back to the Hebrew Bible and said, "It's all predicted here!" their eyes were opened. There it was, in black and white, written centuries in advance by the prophets (see Luke 24:13-49). That settled things forever. Who could possibly convince them otherwise?

In my case, my life was undeniably transformed by Jesus the Messiah. And, over the last 50 years, I could point to countless examples of God's reality in my life (and the lives of those I'm close with). In fact, I would have to shut off my mind to deny my faith. In the words of the bestselling book by Norman Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*.

But that doesn't mean I didn't wrestle with intellectual arguments and questions of biblical interpretation. To the contrary, I wrestled deeply and, to this day, I'm engaging these questions and challenges.

Yet what I can say is this: My studies confirmed my beliefs. And should I have a question about which theological system is

correct, my experience in God tells me which theology is right.

So, there is a beautiful, continuous loop, one in which the truth of Scripture is confirmed through experience, and as that truth is shared with others, they too experience God for themselves. And as we dig deeper in study, we find answers to our deepest questions.

Again, to be clear, I do not sit in judgment of "Phanatik." To the contrary, my heart goes out to him.

But I will say this to everyone struggling with his or her faith: G.K. Chesterton once wrote, "The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried."

And for many, that is the key. The Scriptures say repeatedly that God rewards those who diligently seek Him, who search for Him and His truth more than a miner searches for gold and silver (see, for example, Deut. 4:29; Jer. 29:13; Prov. 3:13-18; Luke 18:1-8; Heb. 11:6). We are to seek Him with heart and mind, spirit and intellect.

Yet the fact is that very few of us really seek God and His truth this earnestly—by which I do not mean simply studying but rather seeking Him in prayer and fasting day and night until we encounter Him. I mean crying out to Him for reality and truth and encounter as if our very lives depended on it.

If we will do that, refusing to quit or give up until a breakthrough comes, He will reveal Himself, and He will confirm the truth of His Word. He cannot deny Himself.

(For those struggling with your faith, I invited you to call my radio show or to contact us at . You might also find my recent book helpful: *Has God Failed You? Finding Faith When You're Not Even Sure God Is Real.*) {eoa}

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