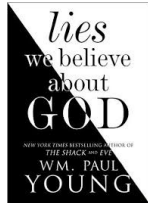
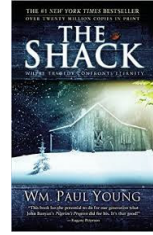


Do We Really Believe Lies About God?

William Paul Young, the author of *The Shack: Where Tragedy Confronts Eternity* (2007), became the most celebrated Christian fiction writer in the early twenty-first century. *The Shack* sold over 22-million copies and was adapted into a movie in 2017. Deeply controversial, it divided Christians of all persuasions; they either loved its emotional storyline or they despised it for its bad theology. The ten-year debate was renewed when Paul Young released his latest book, *Lies We Believe About God* (Atria Books, 2017) in conjunction with the movie. The book points a critical finger at the Christian Church and claims “we believe” 28 lies about God.



Challenging the Bible

Lies We Believe About God (hereafter, *Lies*) begins with Dr. C. Baxter Kruger’s foreword. He is a widely published Universalist who merges past New England liberal theology with today’s evangelical Christian Church. Universalism flourished in New England the mid-1700s and was hotly debated as a cancerous infection that divided Christianity. Its soteriology makes salvation applicable to most or possibly all of mankind. Universalists merged with the Unitarians in 1961, becoming the Unitarian Universalist Association. Young’s book is different by retaining Trinitarian language, but it still brings Universalism back to the debate platform along with addition liberal doctrines.

In *Lies*, Kruger targeted the trustworthiness of the Bible, “The gospels and letters that make up the New Testament are attempts to explore and express the meaning of Jesus’s presence and death” (10). Instead of “attempts” at Jesus’ meaning, the gospels are actually historical eyewitness accounts and inspired Scripture (Luke 1:1-3; John 15:27; 2 Tim. 3:16).

He then questioned how we read the Bible, “Very often the deepest question, and the most ignored, is *how* to read the Bible. What does it mean to read the Bible correctly?” (1-2). When a friend suggested the “plain” sense, he rejected it as biased. His task was to prepare the reader for Young’s new interpretative methods and Young approved the foreword as the “foundation” of his “Truth” (20).

What they fail to tell the reader is that the Historical-Grammatical hermeneutic is a discipline with centuries of tested and true input from the most gifted of Spirit-filled Christians. Evangelical doctrine did not simply pop up from nowhere. If you alter man’s sinful nature, Christ’s atonement, and salvation, then you have contaminated the gospel.

Lies is divided into 28 subjects, each devoted to a chapter where Young attempts to unravel the things that bother him most about Christianity. Some *lies* are so disproportionately exaggerated that mature Christians will find them weak, inane, or ludicrous. A few weightier ones will be examined, but let us first examine Young’s interpretation method.

New Interpretation Methods

Paul Young abandons the Historical-Grammatical method in favor of three liberal methods: 1. Allegorical interpretation, which claims to bring forth hidden meanings behind various people or events. 2. *Sensus Plenior*—Spiritualized interpretation, which denies literalness of specific passages by spiritualizing their meaning. 3. Esoteric interpretation, which is a mystical, special internal knowledge, or gnostic genre. He uses all three of these to make the Bible fit his preconceived notions.

No Hell

The heart of his message is that all creation is in “relationship” with God. Everything is therefore interpreted through the lens of his relationship motif. Evangelicals also understand a personal relationship with God and have always preached it, so how is this different from Young’s hypothesis? For him, God’s relationship is salvific with all humanity (Universalism). For

evangelical Christians, salvation is restricted to those whose names are in the “Lamb’s Book of Life,” (Rev. 20:12). Those whose names are not found are “cast into the lake of fire,” (Rev. 21:15).

Young does not like this, so he employs esoteric interpretations to eliminate hell. He reworked hell’s “fire” into God’s “fiery Love” and he puts God in hell. He wrote, “. . . 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 . . . This is a fire of Love that now and forever is ‘for’ us, not against us” (136). He is the only Christian author to make hell “for us [and] not against us.” Hell is a good thing. With this understanding, telling someone to “Go to hell” would not be hostile, but a blessing of God’s presence with His fiery Love! Hell is good for them! How is that for a liberal interpretation of the Bible?

A common Universalist error is pitting one attribute of God, like love, against His other attributes, like justice, holiness, and righteousness. God’s Great White Throne judgment of mankind, in Revelation 20, is His justice in action, and, remember it is “The revelation of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 1:1). Young tries to escape this with his esoteric interpretation that makes hell a good part of God’s own nature.

Lies is all about making the Bible conform to what Young believes instead of making his beliefs conform to the Bible. Mr. Young is not worried because he candidly confessed that he is not concerned about being right, “my life has been more about being open to a ‘thousand answers’ than it has been about being right” (16). Contrast that with the Bible, where right thinking is the highest priority, “My thoughts are not your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8). God wants us to think rightly—His way.

***Little-Christ*s**

Young has mastered the art of stretching, changing, and equivocating word-definitions without telling his reader that he has altered them. He does this on pages 53-54 with the word Christian, where he twisted its definition as “miniMessiahs” and “little-Christ^s.” As a “little-Christ,” he adds, “I would wholeheartedly accept and embrace such a categorization” (57). The Greek term for Christian, *Christianous*, in Acts 11:26, cannot be, and never has been, translated as “little-christs.” Its literal translation is “Christ-follower” or one who “belongs to Christ.” It is utterly false to teach that *Christianous* means “little Christ.”¹

Where did the “little Christ” definition originate? It was nonexistent until Madam Helena Blavatsky and the Theosophy cult introduced it in the 1890s. Theosophists popularized it in literature and it slowly crept into Christian books without warrant. It surged after 1980, but it has no historical usage and has no basis in New Testament Greek.

Jesus answered the question for us about other christs, saying, “Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There!’ do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Matt. 24:23-24, cf. Matt. 24:5; Mark 13:21). Any “christ,” whether little or any other size, is false by Jesus’ words. Jesus alone hold title to “Christ,” upon good biblical authority (Matt. 16:16).

God’s Bloodthirst, Abuse, and Sacrifice

Young sacrilegiously describes God, if He originated the crucifixion, as a “bloodthirsty” (115), “Cosmic abuser, . . . [and] a very cruel and monstrous god” (149). He also refers to the crucifixion as “child sacrifice” (169). This profanes and distorts what God accomplished in Jesus’ crucifixion. The book neglected to explain that Old Testament sacrifices are a shadow of the substance to come in Jesus Christ (Col. 2:17). The New Testament, especially the book of Hebrews, explains why the Old Testament sacrificial rituals took place. It was foreshadowing Christ’s “once for all” sacrifice on the cross (Rom. 6:10; Heb. 7:27; 9:12; 10:10).

Young’s despicable portrayal of a bloodthirsty, Cosmic abuser, monstrous god committing child sacrifice regrettably imitates modern atheists (Dawkins, Hitchens, Dennett, Harris) who use similar ill descriptions. Christians view the Old Testament blood atonement rituals as types of

Christ until the law was fulfilled in Christ's death (Hebrews 7-10). The "piercing" of Jesus' hands and feet were predicted in prophecy in BC 1,200 (Psalm 22:16) and BC 520 (Zechariah 12:10) and then were fulfilled in John 19:37 and Revelation 1:7. The pierced, crucified, "Lamb slain," was God's plan via prophecy (Rev. 13:8).

God Submits to Man

Submission is another word that Mr. Young equivocates. He boldly states that the almighty God submits to man, citing the cross as an example (147-153). The cross becomes the launching pad for his further claim that God regularly submits to man. This is a tricky word exchange and it is not the way we describe the passion of Christ. He rephrased the terms so that they say something entirely different from what the Bible says.

The apostle Paul stated it correctly in Philippians 2:6-8. It was Jesus, "in the likeness of men," as God incarnate, fully God and fully man, who submitted to the cross. By comparison, Young's description is "God submitted to man," but the Paul's expression is that Jesus, as God and man (incarnation), "humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." The biblical way is not a springboard to claim that God submits to man.

Universalist Salvation for Everyone

Young sold out to Universalism after ten years of denying it in numerous Christian media interviews.* In *Lies*, he wrote, "Are you suggesting that everyone is saved? That you believe in universal salvation? That is exactly what I am saying!" (118).

If salvation is altered, then the gospel is altered. Young's all-inclusive universalism denies the need for evangelism, because everyone already has it! We need only to celebrate that they have it: "We don't offer anyone what has already been given; we simply celebrate the Good News with each one: *We have all been included*" (120). This gives a false hope of a false salvation to an unbeliever. Rebellious people would love this message; no repentance, just live an ungodly life and salvation is yours anyway because you have "already been given" the "Good News."²

In response, the New Testament Greek noun for the Good News or gospel is *euangelion*. If the gospel has "already been given," then it renders the verb for spreading the gospel meaningless, *euangelizo*, "to proclaim the gospel." The Church office for an "evangelist" is also gutted.

Young's theory destroys everything touching the gospel. The four gospels should not have been written because there is nothing to say if everyone already has it. Acts through Revelation should not have been written, because if it has "already been given" to them, so why tell them anything? The fact that the early Church knew the Greek word for evangelism and they exemplified it in contrast to Young's book, tells us that his Universalism is wrong.

Second-Chance Salvation

Universalists often teach second-chance salvation for those who either refused to follow it or did not have the opportunity on earth, and Young's book is no exception. He wrote, "I mean that I don't think God would ever say that once you die, your fate is sealed and there is nothing that God can do for you" (182). The book of Hebrews quickly refutes this, "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). Young asked, ". . . why would we think that the event of death would have the power to take away our ability to say yes?" (186). Answer: because Hebrews 9:27 is true.

Man is Good

He does not believe that "Sin separates us from God," (225) or that "You have sinned, and you are separated from God" (231). Instead, he teaches that man is good; the same message as Humanism and the New Age. "Sin," according to Young, "is anything that negates or diminishes or misrepresents the truth of who you are . . ." (229). He teaches that you are a good being and your sin is not realizing your own goodness. He spoke of an atheist who, without any repentance, is "already is a child of God" (205). Being a "child of God" is now a human attribute.

Numerous Bible verses outright deny this, like the Psalmist, who said, “I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me” (Ps. 51:5). Also, “The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies” (Ps. 58:3). Still further, “There is none who does good” (Ps. 14:1) and “there is none who does good, no, not one” (Rom. 3:12). Man sins because he is a sinful being and his only hope is through Jesus’ atonement.

Atonement Not Substitutionary

On Christ’s atonement, he admitted in an interview, “I’m not a penal substitutionary guy . . . I don’t see the Father pouring out his wrath on the Son.” The clear biblical doctrine that Jesus Christ bore the punishment (penalty) for our sins by substitution on the cross was prophesied. He was “smitten by God” for our sins. Isaiah wrote, “Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities” (Isa. 53:4-5).

Peter, who witnessed the crucifixion, paraphrased Isaiah, “[Christ] Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness--by whose stripes you were healed” (1 Pet. 2:24). That Christ was substituted as “the just” in trade for us, “the unjust,” is clearly explained by Peter, “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit” (1 Pet. 3:18).

There was no question in Paul’s epistles that Jesus bore God’s wrath by becoming “our curse” (that is the wrath) on the cross, “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’)” (Gal. 3:13). He took our sin, “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (1 Cor. 5:21). See also Romans 3:25, 8:3; and Hebrews 9:26. By altering the atonement of Christ, its purpose, and accomplishment, we are in the most hopeless condition under Young’s new theology. If Jesus did not take God’s wrath for sin, then Young’s own sins have not been expiated and the wrath of God still stands against him and his personal sins.³

The Greatest Problem

A greater problem is that Young’s book makes Jesus a liar on these subjects. Jesus did not preach a broad, everybody’s in, Universalism. Instead, He said “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” (Matt. 7:13-14; Luke 13:24). Jesus preached about torment in hades and hell (Luke 16:23-25; Matt. 5:22; 9:43-48—where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched). Jesus preached the trustworthiness of the Bible, “Your word is truth,” (John 17:17). Jesus taught about His atonement, “For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26:28). He restricted this to those who enter by the narrow gate and not by the broad way. Young’s Universalism teaches the broad way, but he errs greatly, because Jesus and the Bible holds the truth on these subjects.

Kurt Van Gorden --“Contend earnestly for the faith” – Jude 3

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¹ A. T. Robertson’s *Word Pictures of the Greek New Testament* at Acts 11:26 and “Christian” in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*.

² Those who knew Young claim that he lied about not being a Universalist. He wrote papers on Universal Reconciliation in 1996 and 2004 and presented them to pastors. Copies survived and are quoted in James De Young’s book, *Burning Down the Shack* (Los Angeles: WND Books, 2010).

³ A good resource is *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution*, by Jeffrey, Ovey, and Sach, (Crossway, 2007).