

Face the Truth or Believe a Lie

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The Fox News website (2/18/10) recently featured an audio recording by Rosie O'Donnell on a radio program in which she interviewed Janeane Garofalo who ranted against Elisabeth Hasselbeck — a talk show host who is recognized as being politically conservative and a Christian. Janeane accused Elisabeth of being “anti-intellectual” and “not compassionate.” She noted Elisabeth’s “ridiculous take on religion” because she was “not about being inclusive” or “not about giving of oneself.” Instead, Janeane noted that Elisabeth “prefers a punishing God” and that “she is not a Christ-like person.” It is not uncommon, when someone has a difference of opinion or belief with another, for that person to attack the other person rather than to discuss the belief on its own merits. This type of argument is called an “ad hominem” argument, which is a Latin phrase that can be translated “toward the man” or “against the man.” Wikipedia discusses the basic form of the “ad hominem” arguments as follows: Person 1 makes claim X.

There is something objectionable about Person 1.

Therefore claim X is false.

Simply put, if one can discredit “the arguer,” then the ideas he argues for must also be discredited. On first appearance, it seems to make sense. But a closer examination may surprise you. Let’s consider the following example:

Jack says the bank is on fire.

Jack is a liar.

Therefore, the bank is not on fire.

The statement may be true that Jack is a liar (and that he has been proven to be so many times in the past). But the statement does not say that Jack is always a liar, so while it is possible that the bank is on not on fire, it is also possible that The Liar Jack could have told the truth and that, in fact, the bank is on fire. To know for sure, one would have to look not at Jack, but at the bank! **Truth stands outside of those who accept or deny it.**

Today an entirely different concept is widely embraced — the view that truth is within oneself; it’s in the eye of the beholder. It is often said, “That’s your interpretation,” or “That’s true for you.” But do we really live in that world? If a woman’s husband is literally and tragically killed in a car wreck, and she says to the doctor who informed her, “That’s your interpretation,” or “That’s true for you, but it’s not true for me.” Does her saying so, no matter how sincere or earnest she may be, make her husband any more alive? Is the literal reality any less true because of claims or beliefs or wishes to the contrary? If beliefs made something true, there would be no more disease or death; poverty and famine would be a thing of the past, beauty contestants would have to come up with a different answer than “world peace,” and everybody would live happily ever after.

Janeane prefers a non-punishing god and inclusiveness (except, of course, including “exclusive” religions). Elisabeth believes in a punishing God and an exclusive religion (meaning all will go to hell who do not receive Christ as their Savior). So Janeane can attack Elisabeth and vice versa all day, and at the end of the day, neither is any closer to the truth because of ad hominem arguments. Society would tell us that each has one’s own truth, yet if this is not true in the realm of objective physical reality (i.e., the bank is either burning or it isn’t), then why does belief in relativism, diversity, and inclusiveness make those views any more true than those who reject them, in the realm of objective ideological reality? The mantra goes, “Why can’t we all just get along?”

Logically, truth requires submissive response. If the bank is not burning, one can relax, submitting to fact. If the bank is burning, the responsible person takes action to extinguish the fire and to save lives, submitting to the truth and the corresponding needs of the moment. Such a submissive response may be easy regarding a bank — especially one’s own bank. In either case, the proper submissive response benefits the responder.

What about when an individual or group does not want to give a submissive response, especially when it comes to objective ideological reality? If there is no God, no external authority, then there is no inherent right or wrong, so an individual or group defaults to anarchy, just as the Israelites did in the days of the judges: every man did what was right in his own eyes (Judges 17:6; 21:25).

But if there is a sovereign, all-knowing, all-powerful, and everywhere-present God, and if He reveals Himself in various means, past and present (e.g., creation, dreams, visions, theophanies, prophetic

messages, the person of Jesus Christ, and in the pages of the 66 books of the Bible), then a submissive response is not optional. It may appear to be "optional" for a time in the permitted exercise of one's free will. However, a submissive response is essential and ultimately will be mandatory: "Every knee will bow ... and ... every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father" (Phil. 2:10-11).

There's the rub! If all beliefs are equally "true," then no submissive response is required, not even a change of opinion or belief; "live and let live!" But if one embraces a belief that is contrary to what is absolutely true, then to persist in believing that which is false is lunacy or a delusion. To insist that those who believe the truth need to be inclusive of beliefs that are absolutely false is foolishness. If there is a punishing God as the Bible most certainly asserts — then to fail to seek how to remove oneself from such punishment and how one finds favor with that God — is a calamity of the greatest proportions! To castigate those (who know that answer) for trying to convince others of imminent danger is at least short-sighted and ultimately eternally detrimental to the well-being of all who ignore their message.

Dr. Del Tackett in the Focus on the Family video series entitled, "The Truth Project," notes that we came either from God or from "goo" — the primordial ooze from which we supposedly evolved. So why do I believe in God? First, life has always come from someone living. Each of us came from our parents who came from theirs, and so on Eventually, a first Cause that is self-existent and living must exist. The alternative suggests that non-living "goo" became alive and evolved. I've never seen something non-living come to life. Second, personality has always come from something personal. "Goo" does not have personality. Third, every culture, educated or primitive, has a sense of morality. It may vary, but where does the common sense of right and wrong come from? The Bible says that humans are created in the image of God and that God decides what is right or wrong. How does "goo" have any morality? Fourth, the universe reflects design — look at an eyeball with an eyelid for protection, tear ducts to wash away impurities and to keep the surface of the eye moistened, a lens that focuses light, a pupil that widens and narrows to let in light, and rods and cones that translate light waves into a neurological signal that the brain can re-translate into an image — sight. Look at our many systems: digestive, skeletal, immune, circulatory — to name a few. "Goo" has no design and no intelligence. When I begin to see that the universe requires a self-existent, living, personal, moral, and intelligent being, I begin to see God (with a leap of faith to be sure) but a far less leap than I would have to make for self-existent, impersonal, amoral, unintelligent "goo" to explain the universe. As the Scripture says, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork" (Ps. 19:1).

When I begin to look at the Bible, it claims to be God's Word (but that could be argued to be simply circular reasoning). However, when I consider that 40 different authors, all of different backgrounds, education, social standing, and cultures, wrote over a period of 1500 years without contradiction, it is significant. (I grant that some apparent contradictions exist, but reasonable explanations that do justice to both texts and that resolve the apparent conflict can be provided.) Fulfilled prophecies also stand unique among other religious texts. For example, crucifixion was described in Isaiah 53 almost 700 years before the Romans even invented it.

Add to the text the impact of Jesus' life throughout history, the empty tomb, the changed lives of His disciples who ran when He was arrested yet 50 days later, in the same city, argued before the same crowd that had crucified Christ that He had been raised from the dead — and I begin to conclude that our God and His Word have to have merit. God exists. He reveals Himself, and He does so in the Scripture. We see the beginning of Creation, of family, of marriage, of the 7-day week, of Israel, of Messiah — all in the opening book of its pages. It's what society has practiced for millennia. Why would I then reject the Bible's teachings regarding a day of accountability — the punishing God? The next time you hear similar claims such as those brought against Elisabeth Hasselbeck, be assured that your faith is not a blind faith. It has a reasonable basis. It can be defended, and defended well, even to those who refuse to believe. Some simply do not want to face the truth and prefer to believe a lie. (II Peter 3:5)

Editor Notes: Larry Hoskins is a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary and has been the Senior Pastor of Grace Church Aurora for sixteen years. He also serves on the CMF Board of Directors.