

# Reflections by the Pond

THE WRITINGS OF DAVID S LAMPEL



## No Other God Before Us



For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!

*2 Corinthians 11:2-4 NKJV*

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# A Different God

When [Jesus] approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes."

*Luke 19:41-42*

**F**ROM AN INTERVIEW, published recently in the *New York Times*:

Nicholas Kristof: I've asked this of other interviewees in this religion series: For someone like myself who is drawn to Jesus' teaching but doesn't believe in the virgin birth or the physical resurrection, what am I? Am I a Christian?

Serene Jones: Well, you sound an awful lot like me, and I'm a Christian minister.



Who is the Rev. Serene Jones (ordained by the United Church of Christ and the Disciples of Christ)? She is the president of Union Theological Seminary (New York, NY) and Johnston Family Professor for Religion & Democracy. Her education includes a B.A., Summa Cum Laude, Phi Beta Kappa, University of Oklahoma, 1981; M. Div., Summa Cum Laude, Yale Divinity School, 1985; and Ph.D., Yale University, 1991.

Impressive credentials. But what does this "Christian minister" believe? From the same interview:

Crucifixion is not something that God is orchestrating from upstairs. The pervasive idea of an abusive God-father who sends his own kid to the cross so God could forgive people is nuts. For me, the cross is an enactment of our human hatred.

God is beyond our knowing, not a being or an essence or an object. But I don't worship an all-powerful, all-controlling omnipotent, omniscient being. That is a fabrication of Roman juridical theory and Greek mythology. That's not the God of Easter. The God of Easter is vulnerable and is connected to the world in profound ways that don't involve manipulating the world but constantly inviting us into

love, justice, mercy.

I find the virgin birth a bizarre claim. It has nothing to do with Jesus' message. The virgin birth only becomes important if you have a theology in which sexuality is considered sinful. It also promotes this notion that the pure, untouched female body is the best body, and that idea has led to centuries of oppressing women.

I don't believe in a God who, because of prayer, would decide to cure your mother's cancer but not cure the mother of your non-praying neighbor. We can't manipulate God like that.

*Question: What happens when we die?*

I don't know! There may be something, there may be nothing. My faith is not tied to some divine promise about the afterlife... And I'm absolutely certain that when we die, there is not a group of designated bad people sent to burn in hell. That does not exist. But hell has a symbolic reality: When we reject love, we create hell, and hell is what we see around us in this world today in so many forms.



Serene Jones is not a Christian. She is not a follower of Christ, but an adherent to a faith of her own device. She is a "minister" not of the God of the Bible, but of a god of her own invention. Whenever and wherever God's word is in conflict with her own position, her position wins. In her religion the God of the Bible is too stupid to know that He has no place in this "enlightened" world.

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Mas-

ter who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

*2 Peter 2:1-3*

## A Different Gospel

The false prophets in our time take a number of forms, but, like Serene Jones, what they have in common is that they preach a different gospel—and a different lord. They have removed Christ Jesus as Lord, and replaced him with themselves. Their theology is self-centered; their god is self.

It was well-known televangelist and senior pastor of New Destiny Christian Center in Apopka, Florida, Paula White, who has said, “Anyone who tells you to deny yourself is Satan.” This is a curious statement from a pastor claiming to preach the gospel of Christ. Apparently she has never read what Jesus said, as recorded in all three of the synoptic gospels.

Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”

*Matthew 16:24-26*

Has this world ever experienced a more climactic, pivotal event than the moment Christ Jesus

died upon the cross? In that moment the earth was shaken and the temple veil was torn in two from top to bottom. Just before He died, Jesus cried out, “It is finished!” Here is how Albert Mohler, president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, describes, from a solid biblical perspective, what Jesus meant by that dramatic statement:

When Jesus said, “It is finished,” of course, he was speaking of the completion of his atoning work on the cross of the absolute finality of his perfect sacrifice for sin. That’s why when he said, “It is finished,” the veil in the temple was torn all the way from the top to the bottom in such a way that it declared the end of the sacrificial system because the penalty for sin had been paid in full. That is the clear teaching in the gospels. That is the clear teaching of the apostles. That is what Christians have understood to be the very essence of the Gospel since Jesus established the church and set the apostles to preaching and told the Church to continue in the apostles’ teaching.

How does Joel Osteen, famous and fabulously wealthy pastor of the mega-church, Lakewood Church, and dedicated purveyor of today’s “prosperity gospel,” interpret Christ’s final words from the cross? Osteen answers, “The guilt is finished, the depression is finished, the low self-esteem is finished, the mediocrity is finished, it is all finished.”

That’s right: Christ died so that you could feel better about yourself.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

*2 Timothy 4:3-4*



# Changing What He Has Said

Rescue me, O LORD, from evil men; Preserve me from violent men  
Who devise evil things in their hearts; They continually stir up wars.  
They sharpen their tongues as a serpent; Poison of a viper is under their lips.  
Selah.

*Psalm 140:1-3*

**H**OW DO WE KNOW WHO GOD IS, His character, how He behaves, how He thinks? How do we know God's ideal plan for man? How do we know the person of Jesus, and His relationship to God? How do we know the story of His life on earth? How do we know who and what Jesus claims to be? How do we know what Jesus taught, and what He meant by His teachings? How do we know how to live as worshipers of God, as worshipers and followers of Christ?

There is only one reliable, inerrant source for these questions. We know all of this, and far more, only from God's written word, the Bible. If we claim to worship the God of this Bible, then we must worship only the God as defined and described in this Bible. If we claim to be a follower of the Christ Jesus of this Bible—if we claim the name of "Christ-ian"—then we must follow and obey only the Messiah of this Bible.

And if we make this claim, then we can have no other god before us.

Including ourselves.

## Believing the Lie

There is nothing new under the sun—only the flavors change. From the earliest days of man till now there have always been those who set out to redefine God.

The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die."

*Genesis 2:16-17*

But then someone came along to say, "No, no. That's not what God meant at all."

The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat;

but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'" The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

*Genesis 3:2-5*

And just as men and women have down through the centuries, Adam and Eve chose to believe the lie rather than believe God. They had been created by Him, in His image, His likeness. By His grace and gift, they would not know death. By obeying God they enjoyed sweet fellowship with Him in the garden. They had, from God's hand, everything they required for a "good" life—indeed, they had been created "very good."

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness..."

God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

*Genesis 1:26a, 31*

They already had a "good" life in the likeness of God, yet they chose to believe the lie that God was really not who He said He was. The serpent was right about one thing: once they disobeyed God, Adam and Eve's eyes were now opened to see the sin they had committed against God. What had once been good in the eyes of their Maker, and perfectly wholesome in their own, was now, in sin, something to hide: their eyes were now opened to their nakedness, and they were ashamed to be seen so by God. Whereas before they were good, now they could see the evil they had become.

All because they believed the lie that perverted their relationship with the Lord God. Instead of rejoicing in being made in His im-

age, they believed the lie that they could remake God in *their* image.

## Personally Responsible

“That’s the thing that I wish the Mike Pences of the world would understand,” Buttigieg said of the vice president, who has opposed same-sex marriage. “That if you have a problem with who I am, your problem is not with me. Your quarrel, sir, is with my creator.” (quoted in *USA Today*)

So we have it that one of the leading candidates for the Democrat presidential primary is claiming that the God of the Bible created someone—a homosexual—with a sexual orientation that His word explicitly forbids.

‘You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination.’  
‘If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them.’

*Leviticus 18:22; 20:13*

If we add this up, there can be only one conclusion. If Mayor Buttigieg is a homosexual (which he publicly claims to be), and if God’s word clearly states that the behavior of homosexuals is a sin, an “abomination” (which it does in both the Old and New Testaments), and if God cre-

ates individuals as homosexuals (as Buttigieg claims), then the conclusion is obvious: God makes people sin against Him. Yet the Bible is also clear that God does not do this.

Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

*James 1:13-15*

Thus those who claim to be Christians, yet hold to a more self-centered, self-profiting agenda—such as Serene Jones, Paula White, Joel Osteen, and Peter Buttigieg—are left with only one recourse: change what God has said—just as *their* teacher did back in the garden. And if they get away with this—some of them before congregations numbering in the thousands—it is to the shame of those believing their words. The Bible is no longer written only in Latin and chained to the pulpit; the Bible, in a dizzying array of translations and versions, is freely available to anyone in the western world. Anyone who has the ability to read can compare what these teachers are saying against God’s written word and see, right there in print, that their teachers are selling lies.

We all, as individuals, are responsible for what we believe.

Don’t believe everything you hear. Put it to the test. Check it out. Mull it over. Talk it through. Think it out. Check it with scripture. Be selective. Don’t be gullible. Just because a man wears a collar doesn’t mean he’s to be considered a “godly man.” Just because he speaks on radio or television or because he “seems so sincere” doesn’t mean that he should be trusted and have your support. Just because he writes religious books or has charisma and presents his material in a persuasive, intriguing, interesting manner doesn’t mean he is reputable. The new testament commands us to test the spirits!

*Charles R. Swindoll*



# “I Know Whom I Have Believed”

But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!

*2 Corinthians 11:3-4 NKJV*

**T**HIS WORLD WILL ALWAYS HAVE its charlatans and snake oil salesmen. The first century was filled with them, just as our century is today. The only difference today is that, with our global technologies and networks, they are no longer restricted to a relatively small locale, but enjoy literally world-wide influence. The lies of false prophets can now span the globe in seconds. So believers today have the same, but even more pervasive burden as the first followers of Jesus.

## Test the Spirits

Every individual who calls himself “Christian” has two personal responsibilities. Working backwards, the second is to test every teaching he hears or reads.

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.

*1 John 4:1-3*

Along with the poor, opportunists will always be with us. Not everyone who appears so evil, nor is everyone who appears so good. Flesh can just as easily mask bad intentions as righteousness, which is why only God can diagnose the true condition of any heart.

Every Christian radio station is capable of broadcasting heresy; every Christian bookstore can sell how-to and inspirational paperbacks that are doctrinally wrong; and every Christian pulpit in the land may be manned, if even for a moment, by someone espousing false teaching.

“There is a conspiracy of her prophets in her midst like a roaring lion tearing the prey. They have devoured lives; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows in the midst of her.”

*Ezekiel 22:25*

The Lord did not leave believers in a sharply delineated black and white world. Would that He had. But the truth is, we are left on our own to distinguish not just good from evil, but the myriad shades of gray covering the vast open plains between saintly good and the blatant works of Satan. And it is up to each of us to always be on guard against that which does not square with the truth of God.

## Know

How do we do this? How is common, fleshly man ever to be equipped to discern right from wrong, true from false? By knowing well the One who is truth. Our first responsibility—and precious grace—is to be so well-read of God’s word, so immersed in the true gospel of Christ Jesus, so familiar with who Jesus and His Father are that we know in a flash when something does not square with what They have said.

The more familiar the jeweler is with diamonds of quality, the better he is at recognizing glass and paste. The one accustomed to a diet of gourmet food has a palate too refined for Spam. The regular reader of classic literature has little patience with poorly written pulp fiction.

And the one familiar with God’s truth can spot a fake a mile away.

O send out Your light and Your truth, let them lead me;  
Let them bring me to Your holy hill  
And to Your dwelling places.

*Psalms 43:3*

The only way to recognize a false prophet is to

know that his words are a lie. The only way to know what God does *not* say is to know what He *does* say. And the only way to recognize an evil spirit is to be so imbued and controlled by the One who is holy that subterfuge and gloss have no appeal.

We do not learn God by osmosis or lineage. God is learned first through the atonement of His Son and the indwelling of His Spirit—but that is only the beginning. We know who and

what He is, we learn the sound of His voice, we recognize His mannerisms and ways by spending much time with Him.

Absent that intimate communion, we leave ourselves open to believing the lie. With it, we are not led astray.

[Jesus said,] “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.”

*John 10:27*

Say some,  
 “Tell us how to discern truth.” You may judge it by three things: by God, by Christ, and by man; that is, the truth which honors God, the truth which glorifies Christ, and the truth which humbles man.

*Charles Haddon Spurgeon*

**F**OR EVERY FOLLOWER OF CHRIST there is a responsibility beyond those already mentioned. It is possible that false prophets such as Serene Jones, Paula White, and Joel Osteen began as followers of the true Christ, but who, at some point began believing their own press releases and became so filled with themselves, instead of filled with Christ, that they veered off-course. If this is the case, so long as they draw breath there is time for them to repent and confess their sins. So long as they remain blind to those sins, they remain apostates.

But their sad, tragic tales reveal believers’ final responsibility: Stand firm. Remain true to Christ.



There are many in this world who *claim* to be

Christians, but are not. This means that they are either badly misinformed, or liars. One cannot call oneself a Christian and never have read what the Bible says about Him, or read what He preached. One cannot call oneself a Christian while, having read it, denigrating and opposing everything the Christ of the Bible said and did.

If you *are* a true Christian because you follow the Christ Jesus of God’s word, then stand firm. You live in a fallen world that wishes only to redefine God the Father and His Son by its own, twisted standards. Remain true. Know your Savior and Lord so well, to such a depth, that no charismatic speaker will ever be able to persuade you with a lie.

They are on their way to hell.

Do not follow them. ◆

