

A Christian View of Conspiracy Theories

While some believers hardly come into contact with conspiracy theories, others make them their primary source of understanding the world. Some truths that are important to Christianity have been called conspiracy theories, while other theories are nothing more than hearsay and rumour, but are vigorously defended by Christians.

What is a Conspiracy Theory?

A basic definition might be unorthodox, or alternative explanations of reality. Whatever the mainstream, or commonly accepted, explanations of history, biology, science, medicine might be, what is considered to be a conspiracy theory is often a radically different explanation. Some of these have turned out to be true, many are false, and some are simply unprovable.

Conspiracy theories often include:

- 1) An evil force that has a vested interest in your believing the mainstream theory (government, military, big business, the Vatican, the Illuminati, secret organisation).
- 2) Usually the goal is sinister: mind-control, world domination, one-world government, poisoning the population, surveillance of your private life, maintaining lavish wealth for themselves.
- 3) The truth is suppressed, while the evil force makes sure the mainstream theory is believed by all. Only Truthers are willing to know the truth.

Examples:

- Assassinations/ Deaths and Disappearances
- 9/11 Cover-Up
- Area 51 and the Aliens
- Suppressed Technologies
- Secret Weapons and Secret Programs
- Medicine & Food – Vaccination vs anti-vaccination; fluoridation, HIV & AIDS, Food modification or poisoning
- Secret Societies Control the World
- The Moon Landings Were Faked
- The Earth is Flat
- Jesus and Mary Magdalene
- Holocaust Revisionism

- The Reptilian Elite

Why are Conspiracy Theories attractive?

1. They offer a grand, overarching narrative to explain life. It is far more satisfying mentally to classify life into events controlled by a big evil entity, than it is to imagine billions of apparently unconnected events.
2. They reduce life to a great battlefield between good and evil, with sinister bad guys orchestrating modern life, with the good side at least having the truth. It adds a certain drama to the hum-drum of life to view everything as part of the great war.
3. They give one a sense of being in the know. A conspiracy theory claims secret knowledge unknown or unappreciated by others. "For conspiracy theorists, the masses are a brainwashed herd, while the conspiracy theorists in the know can congratulate themselves on penetrating the plotters' deceptions."
4. They give coherence during a time of confusion. We are experiencing a widespread breakdown of consensus. The Internet has reduced what used to be a Great Conversation contained in books, poems, plays, music, paintings, into a cacophony of billions of monologues speaking over one another. When a consensus dissolves, people begin looking for new explanations, and the Internet now offers thousands of possible explanations of religion, history, science, the market, technology, anatomy, medicine etc.

Why is this a concern to Christians?

1. Some of what we believe would be classified as Conspiracy Theory by unbelievers. This means that we will be tarred with the same brush as real extremists. This affects our testimony of those who walk in wisdom to those who are outside (Col 4:6). We have to be able to make clear distinctions between our beliefs and the world of the bizarre. Creationism is not a conspiracy theory. But simply because you are going to go against mainstream science on this point, does not mean you should do so on nearly every point.

2. Christians are warned off knowledge that is speculative and contentious.

1 Tim. 1:4 nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith.

1 Tim. 4:7 But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness.

1Ti 6:20 O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge -

2Ti 2:16 But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness.

2Ti 2:23 But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife.

2Ti 4:4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

Tit 1:14 not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth.

Tit 3:9 But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless.

The reasons are clear: they cause strife, they increase ungodliness, they turn people from truth, they are unprofitable and useless. They eat up time that could be used to meditate on certainties.

3. Embedding oneself in the conspiratorial mind-set can undermine faith in authority, and in the stability of human knowledge itself. To embrace some theories means a radical rejection of established ideas, recorded history, eyewitness testimony, laws of science. Once everything is open to question, there is no longer such a thing as accumulated knowledge. We in essence deny that God has granted human culture the common grace of accumulated learning and education. Now each of us becomes able to sniff out the real Reality, armed with our unbiased minds and our Internet Connection. There's a subtle arrogance embedded here: I am able to know without fault what most people don't, I am not afflicted by gullibility like others are, I can question everything, believe no one, and yet arrive at the truth. I don't need to depend upon tradition, or accepted ideas. In reality, he is as dependent on others as anyone else. It is simply that he is changing his sources from reliable to unreliable, from concrete to speculative, from known to rumoured. But Christians are to be people who have faith in God's Word, and faith in the accumulated knowledge of God's people: 2 Tm 1:13-14, 2:1-2.
4. A conspiracist holds a deep belief in the hypercompetence of evildoers to run the world, suppress knowledge, silence witnesses, and succeed. Unwittingly, he really believes in the sovereignty of evil rather than the sovereignty of God. The only person able to control a world with billions of people and events is God Himself. This is not to deny that genuine conspiracies exist. Of course they exist. Many things that were formerly denied turned out to be true. The real problem is that the person embedded in conspiracy theories grants evil and evildoers far more control and competence (in order to keep his theory coherent) than the Bible grants them. Psalm 2 tells us how God views the genuine conspiracies to overthrow His rule. He holds them in derision, and it is His Grand Plan alone that will be established.

How do we differentiate between speculative rumour, and possibly helpful alternative theories?

1. Choose your sources carefully. Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a bad tooth and a foot out of joint. (Prov. 25:19)
 1. While there are good reasons for anonymity on the web, an anonymous source does not deserve your trust. Biblically, a teacher is only as trustworthy as his life demonstrates. If you cannot determine someone's life, background, education, or sources, you don't have much reason to trust him. This is true of Youtube videos, Wikipedia pages, or even Internet pastors whose personal life goes unscrutinised.
 2. Does the person you are listening to himself submit to a tradition? In the case of the Bible teacher, he must be able to defend his position using Scripture, sound reason, and a proven theological method. Something similar holds for a teacher in any other domain, be it science, history, economics, or human behaviour. Can you evaluate his teaching against anything in the past? Does he seem to translate and pass on what has been tried

and tested in the past, or is he boasting in his novelty and creativity? The saying is mostly valid: *what's entirely new is seldom entirely true, and what's entirely true is seldom entirely new*. Similarly, what sources does he use? The development of the scholarly approach grew up in Christian soil, where the pursuit of truth and knowledge insisted that you be able to identify the source of every assertion, claim, or statement. A man's sources should be as credible as himself, or he should not use them. Without this, a man is simply spreading rumours, hearsay. Beware of "some say that" "it's been said" "some believe that" "it's been long recognised" "Experts believe"

3. Does the person you trust exemplify right thinking? Does he display good reason, sound judgement, unprejudiced evaluations and fair-minded attitudes?

Some of the logical errors one often sees in conspiracy theories:

- a. Argument from silence – arguing from what hasn't been stated or proved. "Laser technology developed after 1947, proving it was alien technology".
- b. Begging the question – assuming what you are required to prove, using a conclusion as a premise. "Since Big Pharma wants us sick, it's obvious they're happy for us to take medicine that poisons us!"
- c. Illegitimate appeal to authority – authorities not relevant to the claim "Most Christians feel that chem-trails are an attempt to change the climate"
- d. *Post hoc ergo propter hoc* – chronological priority assumed as cause. "Stocks went up before 9/11, so we know it was planned"
- e. *Non Causa Pro Causa* – taking a false cause of an event for the real cause "wherever the CIA went, HIV followed"
- f. *Non Sequitur* – the conclusion does not logically follow the premises: "NASA was cash-strapped, Stanley Kubrick had made movies about people on the Moon, so the Moon-landing was faked."
- g. Slippery Slope – because one action is taken, other actions must be taken.
- h. False dilemma – insisting on a choice between one or two sets of situations, when others exist. "It was either terrorists, or an inside-job!"
- i. Fallacy of Accident – applying general rule to specific circumstances when accidental circumstances render the general rule inapplicable. "Buildings fall from the the top down, not from the bottom-up. 9/11 was therefore a staged implosion."
- j. Misleading Statistic – using statistics to give an impression other than what they prove. "Cancer statistics are highest in those countries where fluoride is in the water"
- k. Argument from the Negative – since one position is wrong, the opposite position must be true.
- m. Appeal to a Lack of Evidence - Something is true because it hasn't been proved false. "Has anyone succeeded in getting his free-energy device patented? No, because they always suppress them!"

4. Recognise the difference between what is possible, what is plausible, and what is probable. All kinds of things are possible, all it takes is a bit of imagination. Far fewer things are plausible, that is, they could actually take place in the world that is. Evaluating if something is plausible requires that we suspend judgement on whether we want the theory to be true, and consider if it is likely that such a thing could have been achieved, based on the previous three points. Once we have whittled down to what is actually plausible, we must decide if something is probable: fairly likely. Again, the previous three points will help us to do so. Only those things which seem fairly likely, are the ones we should give attention to. Out of those, only those verified by Scripture, or sound reason can give certainty. The rest we must

hold very loosely. Christians have far too many certainties revealed by Scripture, too many truths about history, nature, and culture to learn, to spend our time puzzling over rumour and speculation.

5. The Biblical standard for accepting a claim includes multiple testimonies, internal consistency and falsifiability. Many conspiracy theories fail on all three points.