

SERIOUSFAITH.COM ~ SERIOUS ANSWERS ABOUT THE BIBLE & CHRISTIAN LIVING

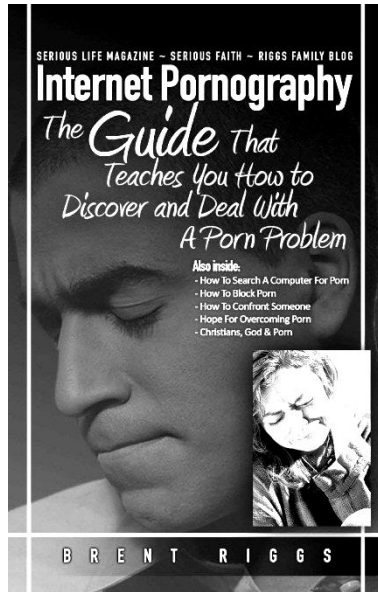
Questions & Answers

*The Guide Full Of
Christian Common Sense,
Bible No Nonsense
& My Scriptural Two Cents*

Just A Few Of the Topics You'll Find Inside:

- Difficult Bible Verses
- Divorce & Remarriage
- Heaven & Hell
- Gambling & Drinking
- Evil & Sin
- Business & Lawsuits
- Christian Controversies
- Creation & End Times
- Salvation & Condemnation
- Psychology & Culture

B R E N T R I G G S

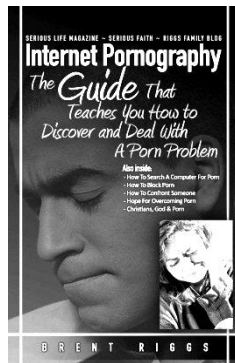
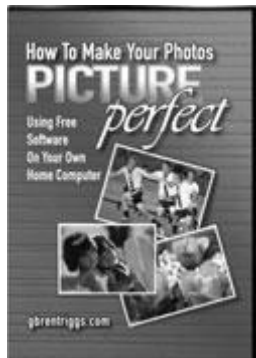
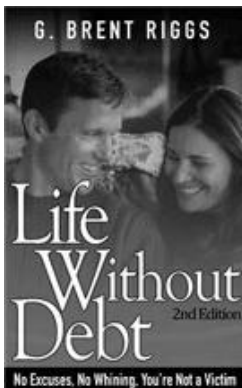
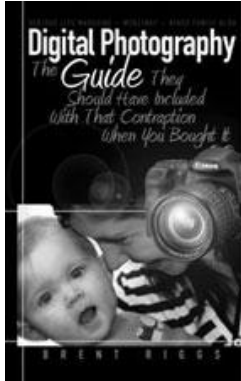
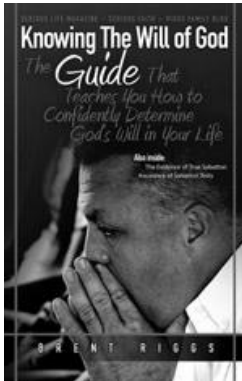


If you have received this book or eBook for free
and would like to make a donation to help my
writing ministry, I would appreciate it.

I want as many people as possible to have my books and benefit from them,
so I offer ways to get them for free. It's still a way I feed my family though;
any gift of support is appreciated.

To give a support gift:
www.brentriggs.com/donate

To see my other stuff: www.brentriggs.com/stuff



seriouslifemagazine.com | brentriggsblog.com | seriousfaith.com
linkytools.com | riggsfamilyblog.com | linkytoolsblog.com

© Copyright 2011 Brent Riggs

SeriousFaith Bible Questions & Answers

First Edition April 2011

Cover photography & design, page layout by Brent Riggs – brentriggs.com

All rights reserved. No part of the publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the written permission of Author G. Brent Riggs. Permission is granted to use this material for teaching others providing proper credit is given to its source and it is not sold for profit.

Printed in the United States of America

Brent Riggs | www.brentriggs.com

- www.twitter.com/brent_riggs
- www.twitter.com/seriousfaith
- www.brentriggsblog.com
- www.seriousfaith.com
- www.seriouslifemagazine.com
- www.themindofbrent.com
- www.riggsfamilyblog.com

This book can be purchased at: www.brentriggs.com/stuff

**The purchase of this e-book version
does not come with right to
distribute.**

Serious Questions & Answers

Dear Reader,

This is a self-published compilation of answers I've written to questions submitted by online readers, friends and people who know me.

I don't have the resources or an army of editors to go through half million words to proof, correct and check for proper credits. Given that, I trust you'll be gracious about any errors in grammar, spelling or innocent (I assure you) failures to credit a source correctly or accurately. There is NO attempt to copy, plagiarize or take credit for any thought or writing that belongs to someone else. If you find a portion in this book that is not properly attributed or attributed at all to another source and it should be, contact me and I will correct it immediately.

I do not write answers to support or adhere to any specific denomination, creed, doctrinal tradition or group. My only goal in answering questions is to 1) find out what the Bible says and explain it as best as I can; 2) give the best advice I can give, and 3) present honest opinion, being clear about what is opinion and what is explaining God's Word.

Given that, there is no doubt plenty in this book to "offend" just about every different denomination and church organization. Despite our deepest conviction, no single Christian, group or organization has perfect and complete knowledge of Scripture and Truth... including me. By the time this is printed, I WILL PROBABLY DISAGREE with some things I've written!

That does not mean we are not to have unwavering convictions on the essentials of faith that God has made very clear. However, we err when we dogmatically proclaim one of our convictions or opinions on matters of liberty such as how we worship, social issues of Christian living, denominational preference and tradition.

The essential Truths of salvation and faith are what divide Christians from non-Christians or false Christianity. In these things we must have or tolerate no different "truth". The rest of our convictions about Christian living and faith are matters of liberty and should not divide true Christians.

I doubt there is a single reader who will walk away from this book without some disagreement concerning some of my answers. That's okay. My goal is to "sharpen iron"... in other words, to get people to THINK and really STUDY and KNOW what they believe because THEY have searched God's Word for Truth. If you disagree with me, at least know WHY you disagree based on your own study, prayer and contemplation.

Blessings,
Brent

Table of Contents

Accommodation and Christian Living	11
Adam and Incest.....	13
Adult Children and Sin	14
Adultery - should you come clean?16	
Adultery - emotional adultery	17
Anger and sin not.....	20
Annihilationism	21
Answering Questions directly.....	23
Apostle Paul.....	24
Appropriate Behavior	25
Assurance of salvation.....	26
Atheism.....	27
Attributes of God	28
Authority of God and government29	
Authority of Scripture.....	33
Baptism - should I be rebaptized? 34	
Baptism - does the act of baptism save a person?	36
Baptism and dedications	40
Baptism - is it a requirement of salvation?.....	42
Baptism - is re-baptism necessary?45	
Belief – Struggling to Believe in God48	
Bible - the difference between the law and the word	50
Bible - what does Matthew 5:18 mean?.....	51
Bible - who decided which books would be in the Bible?	52
Bible - is it really true?.....	53
Bible - which Bible is the real Bible?55	
Bible Authenticity and inconsistencies.....	58
Bible Characters - Eli.....	60
Bible Characters - Mary	61
Bible Study - thoughts on serious teaching.....	61
Bible Translations.....	63
Binding and Loosing.....	63
Birth - is God responsible for birth defects?	66
Birth Control	67
Boldness	68
Books - what books do you recommend for Christians?.....	69
Business - should we be in business with unbelievers?.....	70
Business - should I do a deal with an unbeliever?.....	73
Calvinism-Arminianism.....	73
Cannibalism.....	76
Causality - everything came from something.....	77
Children in ministry	79
Children of Divorce.....	80
Christian Living - the gospel of peace.....	82
Christian Living - how worldly is to worldly?	82
Christian Vocabulary	84
Church - is it really important?.....	84
Church - biblical leadership and structure	87
Church - planting a new church.....	88
Church - selling products and books89	
Church - modern practices.....	90
Church - biblical illiteracy	92
Church Leadership.....	92
Church Organization.....	95
Civic Duty	97
Clothing - women wearing pants..	98
Communion - are we picking and choosing?.....	99
Communion – Miming It?	100
Communion - every Sunday?	102
Communion - should it be given to nonmembers?.....	104
Compassion for those who are hurting	106
Compassion for those we don't like107	
Compassion for what Jesus did for us	109
Confession of sin to others?.....	111
Conscience - should I enlist in the military?	112
Conscience - should I give if my spouse does not want me to?.....	113
Counseling - is a Christian counselor the answer?	114
Covenant - are we to follow the Old Testament law?	116
Creation - was Adam a caveman?117	
Creation - can you believe in an uncreated Creator?.....	120
Creation -the purpose of man.....	122
Creation - explaining to children about the creator	123

Creation - is the earth billions of years old?.....	124	Evolution - why are you so dogmatic?	186
Creation - was the earth created in six days?	129	Faith - how do you get it?	188
Cremation - is it biblical?	131	False Religion - what constitutes a false religion?	189
Criticism - why do Christians criticize others?	133	False Teaching - the secret	190
Curse - is there a generational curse?.....	137	Family Problems - disrespectful and hurtful family members	192
Dating - proper boundaries before marriage.....	139	Fasting	193
Dating - marrying into another religion.....	140	Finances - bankruptcy.....	194
Death - what happens when we die?144		Food - prohibited foods.....	195
Death - Organ donation.....	145	Forgiveness - making amends.....	196
Difficult Verses - you are God's...146		Forgiveness - forgiving terrorists197	
Dinosaurs in the Bible	146	Forgiveness - does it require repentance?.....	198
Dinosaurs on the ark.....	148	Forgiveness - does the offender have to repent?.....	199
Discernment - God's voice or mind tricks	149	Forgiveness - does God still punish us after forgiveness?	201
Divine Judgment - are catastrophes God's judgment?	150	Forgiveness - forgiving terrible wrongs.....	207
Divine Revelation - people visiting heaven or hell.....	151	Gambling - is it a sin?.....	208
Divorce - will God forgive me?	154	Genesis - Cain's wife.....	211
Divorce - biblical reasons	156	Genesis - creating day and night	211
Divorce - legal issues.....	157	Genesis - where did all the people come from?.....	213
Divorce - physical and mental abuse158		Genesis - did it rain before Noah?214	
Divorce - will God allow me to remarry?	160	Genesis - what are the Nephilim?215	
Doctrine - are there apostles today?164		Giving - should you give if you don't tithe?.....	215
Doctrine - replacement theology167		Giving - are Christians commanded to tithe?	217
Doing Good - covering up sin for my friend	169	Giving - am I responsible for my spouse?.....	218
Drinking - is it wrong to have a drink?.....	170	God - do Christians and Jews worship the same God?	219
Drinking - is it ever okay?	171	God - a crutch or fire insurance..	220
Elders - accusations against elders173		God - why create evil humans knowing they will be evil?.....	222
Elders - requirements and divorce173		Guilt - should a Christian ever feel guilty?.....	224
Employment - working for unbelievers	178	Guilt - the difference between guilt and conviction.....	226
Eternal Life.....	178	Hair - men with long hair	226
Eternal Security	179	Hard Verses - Acts 16:31	227
Eternity - can we see those we've left behind?	182	Hard Verses - John 14:13	228
Evangelism - what is too pushy? 184		Hard Verses - John 20:21.....	229
Evil - why does God allow it to exist?	185	Hard Verses - baptism for the dead230	

Hard Verses - the body of Moses	231	Judgment – God’s Judgment	304
Hard Verses - dead people walking around	232	Justice – Why Did Jesus Die?	305
Hard Verses - saved by childbearing	233	Killing – Is War Wrong?	306
Healing - modern-day healers	235	Knowledge – What does	
Healing -is sickness a lack of faith?	235	1Corinthians 13:12 mean?	308
Healing - are we healed by his stripes?	237	Language – Which one in heaven?	308
Heaven - is it going to disappear?	243	Lawsuit – Should I take this	
Heaven - will there be sex?	243	Christian to court?	309
Heaven - are there really gates?	244	Leadership – Four Scriptural principles	310
Heaven - will we have special relationships?	245	Legal – Suing Christians	311
Heaven - will we recognize people?	247	Life – When is someone really alive?	312
Heaven - will we miss those who are not there?	249	Love – Types of love	313
Heaven - giving account of our life?	251	Magic – right or wrong?	313
Salvation - age of accountability	252	Marriage – Is my husband really a Christian?	314
Heaven - what about aborted or miscarried babies?	254	Marriage – Repenting of Divorce	316
Heaven - is that where we started?	256	Marriage – Leaving father and mother	317
Heaven - will there be more people created?	258	Marriage – When Does God recognize it?	318
Heaven - animals in heaven	261	Marriage – Divorce Because of Pornography	318
Heaven - marriage in heaven	262	Marriage – Domestic Discipline	319
Heaven - is my pet in heaven?	265	Marriage – Compassion for a Widow	320
Heaven - what is the new heaven and new earth?	266	Marriage – Always Fighting and Annoyed	322
Hell - are Catholics going to hell?	268	Marriage – Interracial Okay?	324
Hell - trading places	269	Marriage – Is sex okay if you are engaged?	326
Hell - is it a real place or just hard times?	271	Miracles – Our great miracles?	326
Hell - do we really want a God of wrath?	273	Money – Money changers	329
Homosexuality - can you be gay and saved?	274	Moral Responsibility – confronting sin in others	331
Homosexuality - does the Bible call it a sin?	276	Morality – purity in marriage and parenting	333
Homosexuals - will they enter heaven?	279	Morality – Should I let my adult children share a bedroom with his live-in?	334
Honor - call no one father	281	Morality – is admiration of beauty the same as lust?	336
Humility - washing each other's feet	282	Movies – Harry Potter & Lord of the Rings	337
Jesus - did he go to hell?	285	Movies – Da Vinci Code	337
Jesus - why was he not received?	286	Music – Instruments in Worship?	340
Jesus - was he a Jew?	287	New Age – Harmless in schools?	342
Jesus – I AM	288	Obedience – is it necessary?	343
Jesus – Why Did God Kill Him?	289	Obedience – surrendering to God	344
Jesus - born again?	292	Obedience in Marriage	345
Jesus Christ - beat up on by Satan?	297	Occultism – a harmless interest?	347
Judging - are Christians supposed to judge?	302	Pagan Rituals - Cremation	349

Parenting – Children questioning your faith	350	Responsibility – overcoming past sin.....	391
Parenting – counseling adult children about who they date.....	351	Restitution – does the Bible require it?.....	394
Parenting – your children’s friends.....	354	Revelations – who are the 144,000?.....	395
Parenting – Godly parenting.....	355	Roles – women in ministry	395
Parenting – Boys fighting.....	356	Salvation – is repentance a requirement?.....	397
Parenting – over protective?.....	359	Salvation – can you appear to be saved but really you aren’t?	402
Parents – honoring them when it is hard	361	Salvation – if God has forgiven everyone... ..	403
Peace – will there ever be world peace?.....	363	Salvation – Can I be sure?.....	404
Persecution – modern persecution of Christians	365	Salvation – Is fornication a ticket to hell?	405
Piercings – right or wrong?.....	365	Salvation – what is grace?	407
Prayer – What is praying for the dead?.....	367	Salvation – “Jesus loves you” or “You’re going to hell!”?	408
Prayer – does God listen to non-Christians?.....	367	Salvation – Can a practicing roman Catholic be a Biblically saved Christian?	409
Prayer – why doesn’t god answer?.....	368	Salvation – How young is too young?.....	411
Prayer – should we pray for ourselves?.....	369	Salvation – unBiblical traditions	412
Prayer – can we pray directly to god?	369	Salvation – can you lose your salvation?.....	414
Prayer – can prayer really change things?.....	370	Salvation – are we supposed to know for sure?.....	414
Prayer – praying for “favor”	372	Salvation – will a person who has never heard about Jesus go to hell?.....	416
Promises – how do we know when the Bible “promises” something?.....	372	Salvation – if God is good, why does he send people to hell?	418
Prophecy – Is America in the Bible?.....	373	Salvation of Babies.....	420
Psychology – What about Rick Warren?.....	374	Sanctification – does my life testify to my salvation?	421
Purity – How can you get rid of sexual impurity?.....	380	Satan – Can God save Satan?	424
Race – Is interracial marriage wrong?	382	Satan – can he read our minds?..	424
Races – where did all the skin colors come from?	382	Satan – can we “bind” him?	425
Regeneration – the difference between born again and regenerated	382	Satan – can demons know our thoughts?	429
Reincarnation - true or not?.....	385	Science – does it have priority when it disproves the Bible?.....	430
Relationships – dealing with difficult people	386	Scriptural Terms – “Anointed”	431
Relationships – hurtful family members.....	388	Second Coming – Predictions by Christians	432
Religion – Plymouth brethren	389	Security – Will you go to hell if you sin and don’t realize it?.....	435
Religion – Just be sincere, right?	389		

Self – Is God against anything that focuses on “me” instead of “him”?	437
Self Esteem – Scriptures About It	438
Sin – Are we really evil and deceitful? Or good?	440
Sin – what was the sin of Adam and Eve?	441
Sin – How could Satan sin if he was perfect and lived with god?	442
Sin – does accidental sin mean I’m really not saved?	444
Sin – struggling with the same sin over and over	446
Sin – persistent sin that won’t go away	447
Sin – what is the sin that “leads to death”?	448
Sin – confronting sin in other Christians	451
Sin – can you be a Christian lesbian?	453
Sin – where did it come from?	454
Sin – are children and babies sinful?	455
Sin – is plastic surgery wrong?	458
Sin – if there is no sin in heaven, where did it come from?	460
Sin – what is “living in sin”?	461
Sin – how can we go to God in pray when we are sinful?	463
Sin Nature – how am I God’s child if I am full of sin?	465
Sin Nature – is a person “born gay”?	465
Skepticism – is the bible full of errors?	467
Spiritual Warfare – should “putting on armor” be a daily ritual?	468
Suffering – caused by God because of your sin?	469
Suffering – ministering to those who are hurting	470
Sufficiency – is the Bible really all we need?	473
Suicide – living an unbearable life or not	474
Suicide - will you go to hell if you kill yourself?	476
Supernatural – UFO’s	478
Tattoos – A sin?	480
Teaching – seems like a popularity contest doesn’t it?	482
Teaching – should spouses both be “called”?	484

Teaching Materials – can I use SeriousFaith stuff?	484
Temptation – does god tempt us?	485
Theology – what does “Christology” mean?	486
Tithing – when to give, should we tithe?	486
Tithing – is it Biblical?	488
Tongues – still for today?	491
Tongues – are you really saved if you don’t?	492
Transformation – the purpose of hard times	494
Trinity – can you deny the Trinity and be saved?	495
Truth – foundational issues	496
Twitter – what’s the purpose?	497
Witnessing – is every Christian required to evangelize?	497
Witnessing – what is it, really?	499
Witnessing to Muslims	503
Women Pastors and Leaders	504

Accommodation And Christian Living

My husband and I have had a conviction about not drinking alcohol since we were children. We don't allow it in our home. We do care a lot for other unchurched friends and do not condemn others if they choose to drink. However, our church is now saying "We should have a BBQ and give out beer to friends in order to relate to unchurched people." They also want to have retreats and serve cocktails to show unchurched people we are not weird. My question is...Will alcohol, served by the church; really win unsaved or unchurched souls? Am I missing a bigger picture? I am sure alcohol is already a problem they are trying to escape. They need Jesus, not another drink? What do you think about churches serving alcohol?

Getting drunk is a sin. Drinking alcohol (but not getting drunk) is a matter of personal conscience. Read more about that issue here.

- <http://www.seriousfaith2.com/asr/question.asp?questionid=1676>
- <http://www.seriousfaith2.com/asr/question.asp?questionid=592>

Churches offering beer and cocktails to attract the world... How is that any

different than offering a feel-good, positive "Jesus will improve your life" Gospel? How is that any different than the sugary, success-vocabulary presentation of Osteen that is devoid of any mention of sin or guilt and physical indications of Christianity?

This is the natural progression of what is occurring in the Church over the last couple of decades:

- Entertainment to attract the world to hear about Jesus
- Anecdotal, story-telling sermons to attract the world to hear about Jesus
- Worldly events, seminars, workshops and support groups to attract the world to hear about Jesus
- Remove all Christian symbols and vocabulary to attract the world to hear about Jesus
- Create a rock concert atmosphere to attract the world to hear about Jesus
- Expand programs, resources and facilities to attract the world to hear about Jesus
- End all negative teaching about sin, hell and condemnation to attract the world to hear about Jesus
- Offer a comfortable, appealing, success-oriented, self-improvement message to attract the world to hear about Jesus

That's just off the top of my head. Basically, we have decided that the simple preaching of God's Word, ALL OF GOD'S WORD, is not sufficient... not sufficient for bringing people to Christ, or for equipping people to live

a fulfilling, emotionally healthy and spiritually victorious life.

If rock concert music, lattes, support groups, beer and cocktails attract people to "hear about Jesus," then why not:

- Free drugs for drug addicts; that will get lots of people in the door.
- Perhaps the Apostle Paul should have arranged orgies or prostitutes for the Corinthians who would have come in droves for that
- Let's create an MTV music video New Testament so the youth will be interested
- Let's write a book where God and Jesus are worldly, crude humans that we can relate to (oh wait, that's been done - "The Shack")
- Poker is all the rage... I say we conduct a "World Church Series of Poker" tournament, sell a televangelist's airplane, and use the proceeds as prize money. Given the popularity, that will draw thousands to "hear about Jesus." We could have poker cards with Bible verses on the back and preach sermons about the "river card of life" and "mucking" the Gospel invitation.
- I know, let's just PAY PEOPLE to come hear about Jesus... the megachurches could get hundreds of thousands in the door doing that.

If the end justifies the means, then NOTHING that attracts people and helps them feel comfortable around us, and hear about Jesus, should be off

limits. If ANYTHING is off limits, there has to be a reason why... and if there is a reason why, then we have to determine that reason and figure out if it applies to offering beer, teaching positive-thinking sermons, or delivering entertainment instead of worship and preaching.

The alcohol being served (in the question above) is just a symptom. The disease is that we have turned to MAN'S MACHINATIONS in some futile and absurd attempt to improve on God's presentation of the Gospel in Scripture.

Listen folks, there is no difference between offering beer and avoiding sermons about sin. There is no difference between giving out drugs or creating a "positive, comfortable, unoffending" church environment. It all comes from the same mindset: man's tricks, or the presenting the simple truth of God without manipulation or gimmicks.

Study the following list about "The Gospel" and tell me if a beer would make it more appealing to the world. The Gospel:

- Is good tidings of great joy for all people. Lu 2:10,11,31,32
- Exhibits the grace of God. Ac 14:3; 20:32
- The knowledge of the glory of God is by. 2Co 4:4,6
- Life and immortality are brought to light by Jesus through. 2Ti 1:10
- Is the power of God to salvation. Ro 1:16; 1Co 1:18; 1Th 1:5.
- Is glorious. 2Co 4:4
- Is everlasting. 1Pe 1:25; Re 14:6

- Preached by Christ. Mt 4:23; Mr 1:14
- Must be believed. Mr 1:15; Heb 4:2
- Brings peace. Lu 2:10,14; Eph 6:15
- Produces hope. Col 1:23
- There is fullness of blessing in. Ro 15:29
- Awful consequences of not obeying. 2Th 1:8,9
- Gospel of peace. Eph 6:15
- Gospel of God. Ro 1:1; 1Th 2:8; 1Pe 4:17
- Gospel of Christ. Ro 1:9,16; 2Co 2:12; 1Th 3:2
- Gospel of the grace of God. Ac 20:2
- Gospel of the kingdom. Mt 24:14
- Gospel of salvation. Eph 1:13
- Glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. 2Co 4:4
- Word of salvation. Ac 13:26
- Word of truth. Eph 1:13; Jas 1:18
- Word of life. Php 2:16

Torrey, R. (1995, c1897). The new topical text book: A scriptural text book for the use of ministers, teachers, and all Christian workers. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos research Systems, Inc.

~~~~~

## Adam And Incest

### How could Adam and Eve's family populate the world without committing incest?

To violate a law (incest), you have to first have a law.

In Adam's day, humans lived by their conscience. God had not given laws yet. Additionally, there was no medical reason at that point that would have prohibited close relations from marrying and reproducing. The degeneration of the human gene pool had only just begun shortly before with Adam's first sin and the resulting curse.

Only the first generation would have needed to inter-marry. After that it would have been cousins, and successive generations would widen the family gap. Still, until God gave the Law, there was no prohibition forbidding inter-family marriage, and for many generations, no medical risks.

Incest only became a sin once God pronounced it a sin later on after the world was populated. Because of the innate sense of discomfort about reproducing with a family member, it's doubtful that it was a common practice anyway (my opinion).

Either way, there would have been no medical consequence like there is today with retardation, a probability in incest due to genetic degradation.

We make the mistake of thinking that everything in history has always been the same as it is now. When sin entered the human race, it began a corruption and degradation that continues to intensify with every generation.

This question is often proposed as a "trick question" meant to "stump" a Christian and make the Bible seem flawed. But like all "trick questions" concerning the Bible, there is no trick at all.



Adam and Eve's children could intermarry and reproduce without breaking any law or commandment, and without fear of genetic problems.

~~~~~

Adult Children And Sin

My 19 year old Christian daughter lives at home. She is going to college and we are supporting her while in school. We suspect she is having sex with her boyfriend. Do you have any advice on how to handle this?

Tell her that she is an adult and she can make her own decisions but that SHE will also have to accept the ADULT consequences of her decisions.

That is a truth that BOTH parent and adult child has to face. As parents, we have to accept the fact that our children grow up, and can CHOOSE SIN. You did. I did. They will. It's part of life.

As parents of adult children (by this I mean about 18-21 year old), we have to balance between allowing them to grow up, make mistakes, sin, and face the consequences with NOT enabling them to sin by financing it.

What do I mean by that? If we have adult children who are choosing willful and unrepentant sin that is out of line with our Christian faith (such as routine drunkenness, fornication or drug use), then we cannot enable that lifestyle passively by continuing to bear responsibilities for them such as

room and board, health care, tuition, auto expenses, etc.

They have to learn (and some parents do too) that with adult choices, come adult responsibilities.

Relating to our question today, part of those consequences are that you have a minimum set of rules and standards she must adhere to if she wants your continued financial support...

"Christian lifestyle" rules... no drinking, drugs or promiscuity... a decent respect for letting you know where she is at, and when she'll be home... come in at reasonable hours at night....

I might say something like this, "If, as an adult, you don't want to live by those rules, you are, as an adult, free to move out and totally support yourself."

Again, you must be ready and willing to let her "go it alone," and no matter how difficult it becomes (like dropping out of school, or losing her car, or getting kicked out of an apartment... anything that happens to her financially), you can't run in and rescue her. Just tell her, "Work hard, live frugally, you're an adult, you'll do fine."

She'll survive. In the end, she'll love you and respect you for having moral courage and upholding your Christian standards.

If you waffle and fret and worry that "your child can't make it on their own," she'll not only NOT respect you, she'll grow up, have kids and treat them the same way (good or bad, our kids repeat what we've done about 99% of the time).

Also, and I've done this, I would have a VERY frank conversation with the young man she is seeing. Is he a Christian? Show NO nervousness or hesitation when you speak to him. I would say something like this:

"I'm sure you're a fine man. You seem to work hard and appear to be a decent guy. However, my daughter is a Christian which means that any sexual activity before marriage is a sin. If you are being promiscuous with her, you are causing her to violate everything she believes in which leaves only two options: either she is nothing but a piece of meat that you don't care about except to have sex with... or you are showing her great disrespect and leading her to sin proving that you care the MOST about your own sexual gratification and not the emotions, health and spiritual welfare of the woman you say you care for."

And, if he is a Christian:

"And, God will hold you accountable for your actions. The Bible says we are to protect and honor women, and you are doing neither. You are playing on her emotions and need for love in order to satisfy your own immoral need for sexual gratification. Don't be deceived. God is not mocked. Whatever seeds you plant now, you will grow up and harvest later. If you have ANY desire for a good marriage and healthy sex life in that marriage, you better quit mocking God with fornication now."

Your daughter needs to be reminded of the consequences of her sexual sin as well that will come back most likely in the form of marriage problems, infidelity, a poor love life in marriage and the repeat of the sin in her own

kids. These are the VERY probable results of her promiscuity.

Don't sugar coat, don't talk to them like "kids." Lay it on the line, make them fully aware of their choices and the consequences.

Then, you have to accept that they are adults and may choose the wrong course anyway. If so, trust God to deal with them just as He deals with us.

Remember, your adult children are adults in the sense that they can make their own choices, pursue them, and there is nothing you can do about it. The only responsibility we have is to make sure our support (financial, room and board, expenses) comes with a reasonable level of lifestyle conditions, that will give them some reason and constraint to help them retain a Christian lifestyle through a time of life (young adulthood) when their immaturity conspires with their hormones, impulses and emotions.

We have to be ready to let them "go it alone," however, if they choose a lifestyle in conflict with their (or our) Christian testimony. You don't quit loving them. You don't reject them. You don't shun them. But neither do you support them, directly or passively, if they choose a lifestyle contrary to your faith.

I've had to say something similar to one of my adult children. "I love you and always will. I'll never stop being your father. However, make no mistake, I will do NOTHING to help you live this lifestyle; I will not accept it or allow it in my home or around the rest of the family. I will not help you financially, nor will I pretend to

accept this around your friends who are part of this bad choice."

It's NOT easy, but we do our kids NO favors by being spineless, weak, fretful or indecisive when they choose to exercise their "adulthood" in a manner that is destructive to their faith, emotions and future welfare. This whole idea today of "you just have to love them through it" without actually allowing any hard consequences to come into play is just an excuse for a lack of moral and parental fortitude.

I've told my own children often: "You may go ahead and decide to [do this bad behavior or sin], but don't ever look back and say 'no one warned me, I didn't know it was wrong.'"

This is important for them to know because when they finally have to reap the consequences for their sin, they have to face it without excuse, which helps them grow and learn faster.

Parenting children who are transitioning into adulthood is a tough balancing act. You have a time where in some ways they are mature, and other ways they are still immature or inexperienced. For us as parents, it's a balancing act between protecting them, and letting them grow up.

Be tough. Be loving. Be compassionate. Be strong in the upholding of your faith and Christian testimony. In the end, children respect loving strength and compassionate firmness, not hand-wringing and giving in to manipulation or acceptance of sin.

~~~~~

## Adultery - Should You Come Clean?

**In a widely recommended Christian "pre-marital handbook" a question is asked..."If a spouse were to be unfaithful, should they "come clean" to their partner?" The answer given caught me off guard, but I can see some validity to it. The answer was that if the adulterous spouse were to cut off all contact with the extra-marital affair and ask forgiveness, then there was no reason to hurt the offended spouse by telling them the truth. I can understand that to a point, but should we not be held accountable? Does the spouse have a "right" to know?**

This is going to be an answer strictly based on my personal opinion because it is very subjective in nature.

If we are talking about adultery, assuming the physical act has occurred (versus something less like just a kiss), I would disagree with the conclusion you stated.

Even if the offending party has "cut off all contact and asked forgiveness" for the adultery, they cannot deny the spouse the right to know it has occurred, and exercise their right to respond emotionally and Biblically.

Adultery severely disrupts, if not destroys the "oneness" of a marriage. To hold that in secret out of some sort of "I'll save them from the pain" is TOO LITTLE TOO LATE in my opinion.

Even though technically and spiritually it can be argued to be the same thing, I would more agree with the possibility of sparing your spouse the pain if the "unfaithfulness" were in the form of flirting, intimate conversation or even kissing (though that is a VERY subjective and personal decision to be carefully made with a clear, Holy Spirit led conscience).

I think at some time in most people's life they have had an inappropriate thought, communication or contact with the opposite sex. As Christians we are not immune to those temptations. To run home and say "Honey, I saw this beautiful woman today and for a few minutes I lusted after her," is both counterproductive to the marriage and needlessly cruel. Those are the types of sin that we can ask God's forgiveness for, make the necessary emotional and physical changes to keep it from happening again, and move on. In typical circumstances, it would be more something you would confess to a mentor, pastor, or accountability partner, not burden your spouse with.

If the physical act has occurred (you know what I'm talking about; don't want to be graphic in this family-friendly environment), then I don't think the offender has the RIGHT to deny that knowledge to the victimized spouse. It's too serious, too life changing, too damaging... and they deserve the right to know, respond and make decisions based on the truth.

To hide it from them by some misguided effort to save them from "the pain".... that concern should have been present BEFORE the adultery.

The only exception I could see to this POSSIBLY is in the event that the adultery occurred many years ago, and the couple have now become Christians, or have grown in their faith. With much counsel from other mature Christians, I could see the POSSIBLE benefit to leaving that in the past for the sake of the future.

But a current situation? I would have to say from my experience with many situations like this, that it IS THE RIGHT of the offended spouse to know about any adultery that has occurred. It represents the ultimate betrayal and destruction of the marriage covenant, and the victimized partner should be able to consider all their Biblical options.

~~~~~

Adultery – Emotional Adultery

Could you clarify adultery according to scripture? Several sources now define emotional affairs as adultery as well. Is this correct?

Adultery is defined as "voluntary sexual intercourse between a married man and someone other than his wife or between a married woman and someone other than her husband."

The Hebrew word is "na'aph" which means to have sexual intercourse with other than a spouse.

However, Jesus said:

Matthew 5:27-28 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to

you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (NKJV)

So, does adultery only occur when sexual intercourse is involved, or every time a person lusts? Yes, and yes. Depends on the perspective, eternal or temporal; judgment or relationship.

Jesus goes on to say about divorce:

Matthew 5:32 But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery. (NKJV)

Here, "sexual immorality" is "porneia" which is most normally translated as "fornication" meaning illicit sexual intercourse, but does incorporate a broader sense of gross sexual immorality too (terms too graphic to list in this answer). However, it does not take into account a kind of a casual "emotional affair" type issue we hear about so much today (i.e. "you had feelings for some other person").

What can Jesus mean by saying that "lust is adultery in the heart" in one verse and then "divorce is permitted for adultery" in another? Is Jesus saying that every time a person lusts, their spouse can now divorce them Biblically? Obviously this is not the meaning or divorce would be an option for 99.99% of all marriages clearly going against God's stated opinion of divorce (Mal 2:16).

In Matt 5:28, Jesus is pointing out a higher standard whereby thoughts and motives are as real as actual acts. From an eternal perspective, lusting is

just like adultery because in your heart you "virtually" committed the act. This becomes a real sin of adultery as it relates to God judging heart of man.

However, only God can judge the heart. We are left with judging the external actions. Therefore we start with a clear and tangible standard, and beyond that it becomes the domain of the conscience, discernment and wisdom.

So am I waffling? Are "emotional affairs" the same as adultery and grounds for Biblical divorce? Again, I believe, on a case by case basis, this takes wisdom, discernment and spiritual maturity to determine. Consider this:

A legalistic husband, knowing that only "sexual intercourse" constitutes grounds for "adultery" in the Bible, engages freely in pornography, filthy sexual talk, inappropriate conversation with other females and all manners of emotional and mental sexual immorality.

A legalistic spouse, believing the soft views of today's Christian counseling community, and incorrectly applying Jesus' words about lust and adultery, seeks a "Biblical" divorce because their partner had dinner with a co-worker of another sex and shared intimate details with them.

Like all things, we humans can take the letter of the law, or grace, and use it for our own selfish agenda. We can be legalistic in either direction: strict or loose. I can say these things definitively:

- Jesus did not mean that every time someone lusts, that is grounds for divorce. He was speaking of purity of heart and thought, that the "inside" is as important as the "outside"... not laying down a loophole by which every marriage could be dissolved.
- Adultery in Scripture is primarily and routinely defined as the physical act of sexual intercourse with someone other than a spouse.
- God hates divorce.
- Divorce should be a last resort even when adultery has occurred.

However, that leaves us with some tough situations to consider:

What about the husband knee deep in pornography who won't repent or stop and claims he's "not guilty of adultery" because he has not "done the deed?"

What about the spouse who has done EVERYTHING EXCEPT the final act of intercourse, and like a certain former President of the United States, claims innocence because the actual act of intercourse did not occur?

What about the spouse who carries on long emotional and intimate relationships with other people of the opposite sex while neglecting their own marital relationship?

What about the spouse who lives in chat rooms and message forums who engages in every manner of sexual acts through words, but never meets the other person physically?

Are any of these "adultery" as in "Biblical grounds to divorce?" I have to say for myself that I HAVE seen cases like this where the physical act had not occurred, but I had no hesitation in stating my belief that Biblical grounds for divorce were applicable (adultery, in the spirit of Biblical principle had occurred).

I state that with MUCH caution and apprehension though. There are many Christians who are just waiting for some Bible teacher or person in Christian authority to make such a statement so they can say "Brent Riggs says you don't have to commit the physical act in order for it to be Biblical grounds for divorce."

(I once knew a woman who asked a self-proclaimed Christian marriage counselor, "Should I stay married just because it's the right thing to do?"

The counselor replied, "God does not want you to be unhappy. Even if it's the 'right' thing, that's not the only reason to consider."

REALLY?????????!!!!!!! I thought doing "the right thing" was THE reason to do anything! Or at least the primary, overriding, most important one.)

Likewise, I hesitate to say, "If the physical act has not occurred, tough luck." For the same reason, people will use those words to egregiously violate their marriage covenant stopping short of "adultery" by never actually engaging in sexual intercourse outside of marriage while ignoring their own gross sexual immorality, infidelity, emotional betrayal, and flagrant neglect.

Having said all that, I'll stick my neck out and close with this summary:

Generally speaking, the physical act of illicit sexual intercourse is required to constitute adultery Biblically, related to the option of divorce. However, even then, divorce is not automatic or a given, but only a careful option available to the victims.

Cautiously, and with great consternation, I will propose that there are times that "adultery" has occurred (giving Biblical grounds for divorce), even when the final definitive physical act of sexual intercourse has not occurred, based on the choice and behavior of the offending spouse who has so violated and destroyed the marriage covenant through gross immorality, emotional infidelity and neglect, that every consequence and result of "adultery" is manifested unmistakably. However, I will temper that by saying this has become an all too convenient and easily reached conclusion in today's world of relativistic thinking.

This conclusion (adultery in the absence of sexual intercourse) should not be reached casually and only with the counsel and agreement of spiritually mature, and Biblically sound shepherds on a case-by-case basis. There is no "one size fits all" or checklist that covers every (or even most) situations.

~~~~~

## Anger And Sin Not

**Be angry, but do not sin. Had a discussion at a Bible study. I said**

**anger is good and is natural. Another guy said we are to love everyone regardless and have to get over anger immediately. I disagreed. He is fairly knowledgeable and truly believed what he was saying. If someone kills your wife and kids, or cheats you at work, we can forgive them (as is the Christian thing to do), but our anger is still present. Any thoughts?**

I would say that you are both part right and both part wrong.

Anger is an emotion given to us by God. Like any emotion, it depends on our motives and how we display that anger that makes it "good" or "bad."

Anger that stems from righteousness is good. Jesus clearly demonstrated that:

John 2:13-17 - Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up." (NKJV)

There are some who say that Jesus did this "matter-of-factly" without anger but I think that is seriously begging

the point. Jesus was fully human and able to express all emotions that can be expressed without sin.

Jesus whipped them, drove them out and made exclamatory remarks while doing it. Sure sounds like He was angry at them for desecrating God's house.

Now, your friend is right in with respect to "get over it" and "we have to love everyone." Paul states it clearly for us:

Ephesians 4:25-27 - Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another. "Be angry, and do not sin:" do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. (NKJV)

And of course we are to love even our enemies (Luke 6:27).

As Christians, we can be angry at things that God would be angry about, but we are to deal with that anger quickly in a way that honors God, and we are to always love those who anger us.

Those are my thoughts.

~~~~~

Annihilationism

Do you believe that Hell is eternal and that people there will be punished forever? This does not seem to be in keeping with God's mercy.

The belief in and teaching that Hell is not eternal and that those who reject Christ will be punished for a short time and then simply cease to exist is known as "annihilation." This teaching is becoming more and more popular as we resort to determining doctrine based more on our feelings than on plain Scripture.

The common thinking goes something like this, "God is merciful, infinitely more merciful than us, and we would not torture someone for all eternity. To eternally torment someone would make God unmerciful and a master torturer, therefore hell cannot be eternal punishment." This is often accompanied with a lot of interpretive gymnastics and \$12 Greek vocabulary explanations, but in my experience very important questions are ignored.

Besides the fact that the Bible simply, plainly and clearly teaches repeatedly that Hell is forever, eternal and unending, here are some considerations that any honest person must grapple with before accepting the doctrine of annihilation: is God's mercy still in play after judgment? Does the doctrine of annihilation represent a third option to the Gospel? If eternal punishment is not eternal using complex explanations of Greek language, then why are the very same words that describe eternal life taken to literally mean eternal? Does the doctrine of annihilation represent a grave insult and degradation of God's sacrifice of his only Son which resulted in the offer of eternal life for every human?

God has shown, and continues to show every human, ULTIMATE MERCY NOW, and yet they reject it willingly.

To deny the plain teaching and choice of eternal life versus eternal condemnation, is to say that God's mercy NOW is not enough, Christ's sacrifice is not ENOUGH mercy (more is needed later through annihilation) and undeniably gives humans a third unBiblical choice: a little punishment, then you disappear from existence. If that is not a third option to the Gospel, then I don't know what is. It is nothing more than purgatory with a different ending.

Yes, God is infinitely more merciful than you and I, which is exactly why He died on the cross for us, paid our penalty, and extends to every human the gift of eternal life. To reject that, is to KNOWINGLY ACCEPT ETERNAL CONDEMNATION AND PUNISHMENT, willingly insult Jesus' death on the cross, and spit in God's face WHILE HIS MERCY IS STILL ON THE TABLE presently.

Rejecting the offer of eternal life moves you FROM God's mercy, to His perfect and eternal divine wrath which is just as real and just and pure as His holiness and mercy. We cannot deny it, water it down, and change the Truth about eternal condemnation simply because WE cannot grasp it.

God's mercy is in play NOW for ALL men... if you reject God, you reject His mercy, and become subject to His wrath and judgment. Mercy is no longer in play for those in hell who have rejected Jesus Christ and His ultimate sacrifice. To say that God should extend mercy PAST where HE has said mercy ends, is to inflict OUR will on God's plan.

Many believers in annihilation will say, "We don't disagree that all who

reject Christ will be punished, but the Bible does not say what the length of that punishment is."

Yes, we DO know the length of God's judgment... it is eternal, everlasting, forever and undying as the Bible clearly states over and over and over. This is only unclear when our personal qualms and inability to comprehend eternity muddies the water. This is only unclear when we do not want to believe it.

Another argument from those who believe in annihilation: "If I could stop someone from being tormented, I would. If I, being human, can show that level of mercy, then how can we deny that God would allow someone to be tormented for all eternity?"

Again, this ignores the plain teaching of Scripture and the truth that God's mercy is available to all while they are living. Once that mercy is rejected, that person willingly chooses eternal condemnation. God is not allowing them to be tortured, got his meeting out perfect and holy justice that is rightly deserved by those who reject the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

It does not matter that we as humans can or cannot comprehend eternal punishment. God has proclaimed it to be so, and it is so.

I have not included a lot of Scripture verses in this answer, because I have taught and written on hell numerous times, and you can search this site for those messages. In this answer I simply wanted to refute the logic of those who support the doctrine of annihilation.

~~~~~

## Answering Questions Directly

**Why don't you directly answer questions like, 'Is it okay to drink?' or 'Is gambling a sin?' Aren't you being a little wishy-washy? Are you afraid to take a stand?**

I'm assuming what you mean by "directly answer" is saying "don't do it" or "it's okay," There are two primary reasons. First, the Bible frequently doesn't give a direct, simple answer. When it does, I do. Second, I can give readers my personal belief or opinion, but that doesn't teach people to be discerning and self-evaluating.

We have an awful lot of Biblically and spiritual lazy Christians nowadays who simply follow what their "Pastor" or church says and do not take the time to learn "why" themselves. They don't learn the principles, concept, study habits and critical thinking that result in what is called DISCERNMENT.

Discernment is the ability to determine what is right, and what is wrong. The lack of discernment in Christianity today is alarming.

When people simply follow what someone else tells them without learning and understanding why, it leaves us with churches full of people who are legalistic, not because their opinion/choice is wrong ("don't drink, don't gamble") but because they are simply following a checklist given to them and cannot DISCERN the matters themselves based on knowing the principles and commands of God's Word.

That is the reason why I often give out "considerations" rather than "answers," because I feel like God has called me to motivate people to learn, think and discern for themselves so that they can then in turn teach others effectively "why" something is right or wrong.

I believe my primarily ministry calling is to "teach people to learn for themselves." not to simply tell people what they ought to believe.

I get called "wishy-washy" a lot for taking that approach, but it's the same principle as "give a man a fish... teach a man to fish," I'm trying to teach Christians how to study the Word and learn the principles and commands so they can then discern for themselves what is right and what is wrong... rather than spoon-feeding pre-determined answers.

Most Christians can tell you WHAT they believe but cannot defend why they believe, EVEN WHEN THOSE BELIEFS ARE WRONG. For example, one Christian might say, "I believe God created the earth in six days" but be totally unable to support that belief with anything more than "God says it, I believe it" (which is sufficient when a logical answer is outside of man's ability, i.e. "God is totally sovereign, and man has free will").

Another Christian might say, "I believe God created the earth but used evolution to get us to this point," They may proclaim that simply because they have been brainwashed about this "fact" or fooled by the deceptive propaganda.

Either way, it is far too common that Christians simply parrot what they've

heard, read, been taught or what their church believes.

~~~~~

Apostle Paul

When and how did Paul receive so much knowledge of the revelation and sayings of Christ; as He stated in Galatians 1:12, "I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ." Galatians 1:16, "to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man." And in Galatians 1:18, "Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter.." Could he have spent this three years with the risen Christ to have attained so much knowledge? Much like the apostles spent three years with Christ before he was crucified. The use of numbers (three years in this case) are very significant in the Bible. Could he have learned this much from the one dramatic encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus, or do you think he had other encounters with the risen Christ...i.e. during the three years before he went up to Jerusalem?

An excellent question. Remember first that Paul was an expert in all things Jewish.

Philippians 3:4-6, "though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." (NKJV)

So many of his insights have their foundation in his training but, as you point out, he himself claimed inspiration and revelation from Christ. His encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9.5) qualified him to be an Apostle. It does seem like a brief event, so did Paul have other personal encounters with Jesus? We find the answer in 2 Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 12:2-4, "I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." (NKJV)

It is evident, though Paul doesn't specifically say, that he is talking about himself. He tells us of an event where "a man" was caught up to the "third heaven." In that time, men spoke of different levels of heaven, anywhere from 3 to 7 different ones. The first heaven would be the clouds and sky; the second would be out in "space."

The third heaven was beyond this, so undoubtedly Paul was speaking of a place that was not of this world or within our "dimension." He was caught up into Heaven which is confirmed by describing it as "Paradise." No doubt while he was there Paul was in the presence of God and Jesus. Then we find the answer to your question:

2 Corinthians 12:7, "And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure." (NKJV)

Paul had received an "abundance of revelations," and for this, God gave him a "thorn in the flesh" to keep him humble. In other words, Paul had seen, heard and learned such wonderful things that God felt it necessary to inflict him with some sort of physical ailment or demonic oppression in order to keep him from being boastful or prideful - a natural tendency for someone who was the recipient of such an honor.

It would seem that the "trip to heaven" was necessary to instill the courage and conviction that Paul would need for arguably the most difficult task in Church history (second to Christ's crucifixion obviously). Having been to heaven and seen the "truth" first-hand, Paul would not be deterred from taking the Gospel to the world.

During that event, he received an "abundance of revelations" which allowed him to write many of the books of our New Testament, including the verses you allude to.

~~~~~

## Appropriate Behavior

**How appropriate is it for a male Christian boss to witness to a female employee and invite her to his church, pick her up on Sunday morning, then invite her to his home expecting his wife to understand that he is doing God's work?**

I answer this in light of TODAY's world and the issues we face today in Christianity and society.

It is appropriate for a male boss to witness to a female employee as long as the employer is not being robbed of their time by people engaging in personal religious discussions while they are supposed to be performing their duties. Now, I understand that certain companies and certain work environments are more or less constrained concerning personal time to converse, so as a Christian you must follow your conscience on when and how much.

It is not appropriate for the male boss to witness privately to a female at work because of the obvious bad image ("boy, the boss is all alone with her") that can send out to the others in the office. There is also the very real possibility of "witnessing" in private becoming emotional and leading to temptation and sin. Don't fool yourself... many affairs began "innocently" by talking about God which leads to sharing private feelings which leads to a relationship.



If you witness to someone of the opposite sex (especially if one or both are married), my opinion is that you should do so out in an open public place, where your conversation could be overheard easily. If you find that more extensive and private discussions are asked for, then turn it into a group discussion with other Christians or your spouse outside of work.

If the person you are witnessing to insists on private talks with just you, then I would start to be concerned about possible temptations in their mind. Remember, it is hard enough for a Christian to be on guard and protect themselves from sin. How much easier is it for an unbeliever to become emotionally attached to you because of your "care" for them? Be alert, be careful, be wise.

As for picking up the opposite sex employee for church, of course this is a good deed, but it should be done as a married couple together. This guards against any chance of sending the wrong message, encouraging inappropriate behavior AND sets a good example for the unbeliever or new Christian about how a Godly marriage behaves.

Same thing for the invitation home. This should be a mutual event involving husband and wife. As a general rule, a male should do his best to avoid being alone with other women for any reason (and vice versa of course). This is simply prudent and respectful to your spouse and guards your marriage.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-8, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual

immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit." (NKJV)

Just from the sound of your question, it appears this "boss" is acting foolishly and suspiciously in several ways... which affirms the points I'm making here.

Many a man has started an illicit relationship under what appeared to be wholesome motives. This use to be almost the sole domain of males, but in recent times, women seem to be just as guilty.

Christians! Be careful, be wise, be prudent. Witness all you can. But beware of the Devil's ways which can even turn witnessing into sin!

~~~~~

Assurance Of Salvation

What is the key to knowing if you are truly saved?

The key is comparing your beliefs and life to what the Bible says. For the sake of this answer, I'm going to assume that you were "saved" with the orthodox Biblical knowledge of the Gospel, and that your question

pertains more to assurance of salvation as part of living the Christian life.

While there are plenty of Scriptures, tests and measurements we could point to such as "do you bear Christian fruit?" (an apple tree grows apples; a "Christian tree" has Christian fruit; Luke 6:43), God has graciously given us a little book in the Bible that has several ways to measure the authenticity of your salvation: 1st John.

In fact, there is a verse that specifically says that God has written to us so that we may KNOW that we are saved:

1 John 5:13, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God." (NKJV).

What are some things God wrote:

You can know you are saved if you keep God's commandments. 1 John 2:3

You can know you are saved if you love your fellow Christians. 1 John 3:14

You can know you are saved if the truth is in you. 1 John 3:19

You can know you are saved if you confess Christ. 1 John 4:2

You can know you are saved if you abide Him. 1 John 4:13

And that's just a few of the verses. I would encourage you to read 1st John and examine your life against its descriptions of authentic Christianity.

For further study consider: Are you convicted when you sin? Do you have compassion for the lost? Do you have a heart of charity? Do you serve others? Do you long to know God through prayer and His Word? Do you love and seek the things of God?

~~~~~

## Atheism

**I was asked by a friend of mine who claims to be an atheist that if the most influential person in George Bush's life is Jesus Christ, how could GB okay capital punishment during his time as Governor of Texas since as he (the atheist) understands it, Jesus Christ would not be for capital punishment. How could I answer this person?**

I always find it humorous that atheists use the Bible they don't believe in, don't obey and don't hold as authoritative as their source of condemning the behavior of someone who does try to follow it.

It's also fairly humorous that an atheist would purport to know what Jesus "would not be for."

That aside, the question sets up a "straw man" and then knocks it down. First, the assumption is made that the Bible and Jesus Christ condemn the death penalty which it clearly does not. (That's different from stating the Bible condones or commands the death penalty; but that's a question for another time.)

The question assumes the atheist is right about Jesus' opinion of the death penalty then extrapolates that to President Bush's declaration of faith and his "apparent" hypocrisy.

The entire premise is built on false assumption and hypocritical standards on your "friend's" part. Set'em up... knock'em down; a typical technique of the skeptic. Unfortunately it's very effective on most Christians given the general LACK of Biblical understanding that is typical today.

How should you answer your friend? I can only tell you how I would, and that would be with questions:

Do you agree with and obey every single thing the "most influential person in your life" teaches or holds as an opinion?

If no, then why would you hold President Bush to a different standard, especially regarding a person you don't even believe in?

You claim it is your "understanding" that Jesus is "against" the death penalty (which makes President Bush an apparent hypocrite); can you provide the evidence to support your understanding?

Why is the death penalty wrong? Who says? By whose authority? Why is your opinion, or any authority of any greater worth than someone else who supports the death penalty? Jesus' opinion is not worth any more than mine or yours or President Bush's according to your atheistic views, so why do you care if Jesus is supposedly against the death penalty?

So who cares, even if Jesus was against the death penalty, why does it matter if President Bush disagrees? According to your atheism, isn't President Bush much more powerful, influential and successful than some nutcase carpenter from a hick town in the Middle East?

Atheism is just plain stupid. (Is that too blunt?) They want to have opinions on right and wrong, but base it on nothing more than personal opinion or societal consensus. Ask the Nazi's if societal consensus is a good anchor for morality.

Atheists have no right or business claiming any standards or making any declarations about the "morality", "right and wrong" or value of ONE SINGLE THING... because they do not recognize an authority higher than man.

And Man changes to fit his current desire. God never changes. That is why He is our Anchor.

~~~~~

Attributes Of God

Does God "hate"?

Yes, Scripture shows that God "hates"... it's not the kind of hate that we think of generally because whatever God does is pure, good and right. So His hatred of something is of pure motivation while typically our hatred originates in self-interest MOST of the time.

God hates the way pagans worship their false gods - Deut 12:31

God hates religious idols and edifices that become the object of worship - Deut 16:22

God hates evil - Amos 5:15

God hates human pride - Amos 6:8

God hates divorce Malachi 2:16

I think it can be generally stated with certainty that God hates anything that is counter to Him: anything that is not good, pure, loving and holy. Why? Because how can God have ANY OTHER feeling towards something that is less than His holy nature?

Granted, all creation is now less than perfect and God hates that so much that He gave His only Son to restore it all back to perfection. It's not done PHYSICALLY, yet from our perspective, but from an eternal perspective, it's already done.

While it is a very worn out and abused cliché, it is true that God hates sin but never hates the sinner. It grieves God that anyone would reject His free gift of eternal life. God takes no pleasure in the fact that one single person will spend an eternity in hell.

So yes, God does hate... but His hate is perfect and just unlike ours, which is typically self-indulgent.

~~~~~

## Authority Of God And Government

**Yesterday you wrote: "where God's Commandments differ from the government..." You said that we are to obey God rather than the government. Can you give me an example? The Scripture clearly says to obey the law of the land and God NEVER will lead us to go against His Word. I am having a problem with your comments. This would pretty well negate His Word in that anyone can say God "told them to do such and such" and truly be sincere, and it completely violate His Word. Can you explain?**

The question is based on:

Romans 13:1-7, "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor." (NKJV)



It's a question of authority. There are higher authorities, even in man-made entities. Whenever two authorities conflict, the higher authority, well, has authority. That is a simple fact that is true and easily understood.

The quick answer is: God is the highest authority, and when lower authorities contradict Him, God's authority reigns. Otherwise, in the absence of clear contradiction of the Written Word, we are to obey the authorities over us, whether we agree with them or not.

I personally, am not a higher authority than my government. My government is not a higher authority than God.

Now, looking at the question, the standard is not "God told me to..." unless by that someone means that clear Scripture was what "told them." God gave us His finished written Word as the baseline and measurement of all things we are "told" by God. Yes, God leads and directs us on a personal level (Eze 36:27), and you are correct, He will never lead us to contradict His own Written Word. It would go against His very nature.

SINCERITY is not the standard by which we judge what God has commanded. Sincerity is certainly necessary or else we are hypocrites, but God's Word is the final measure. If I sincerely believe God told me to cheat on my taxes because the politicians deserve it, I would be sincerely wrong because it contradicts God's written Word in several cases.

However, if I were to say, in sincerity, that God told me to refuse to

pay lawfully ordered union dues that I knew were going straight to Planned Parenthood to encourage abortion, I would have pretty good Biblical grounds to stand on.

If I were to refuse to abort or murder my children because the government passed a "one child" law, then I would have irrefutable Biblical grounds to disobey the laws of the land.

I don't really even need a Scriptural example to prove the point, but I'll give you one in a minute anyway. First, think about the simplicity of the statement "when God's commands differ from the government..."

God is God. Government is human and we don't have to look very far too see the extreme corruption in government. Wherever "governments" (men) tell us to do something (law) that goes against God's clear commandments (Bible) we are to exercise dissent.

Pick a government: Communist, Islamic, Fascist, pagan - and loyal Christians have died for refusing to obey unGodly laws.

In China, you are required to abort, murder, kill, extinguish all but one child. God's commands about life and murder certainly are "higher" than the Chinese government.

In America, we don't yet have any blatant laws that attempt to force Christians to go against God, but we're getting close. "Hate crimes" (crimes of thought and opinion) are on the precipice of forcing Bible teachers to avoid any teaching from Scripture on homosexuality and abortion (just the start, wait and see). People in Canada

and Europe are already going to jail for that. Just a matter of time in the US.

Abortion and infanticide; silence about certain sins found in Scripture.... would you tell Christians they must follow those "human authority" commands because God's Word says to obey the laws of the land? Does it not also say to follow all of God's commandments? Where there is conflict, what is the higher priority?

It is simply Christian common sense.

Scripture interprets Scripture. Yes, God's Word says obey the laws of the land because God has ordained the government authorities. The Bible also says to follow all the commandments of God, and clearly those commandments are higher in authority than any of man's commandments. It's a question of authority.

In addition, there is very clear Scripture to support the idea of dissent in both the New and the Old Testaments (in the old: Daniel, Shadrach, Meschach, Obednego, Joseph, and Moses among others) of people who refused to obey man's authority when it went against God's.

The Early Church throughout their persecution and refusing to bow in worship to the Roman Emperor gives us thousands upon thousands of living examples of the principle obeying God rather than man.

The Reformation period also gives us countless other examples of Godly men and women who were tortured and slaughtered for refusing to conform to church-state authority

which would have them disobeying clear teaching in Scripture.

So the history of the authentic Church is replete with examples for us, starting with the early church in Acts (here's your example from Scripture; one of many I could have chosen):

Acts 5:12-42 ( my comments in brackets)

"And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch. Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly. And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

Then the high priest [human authority] rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison [human authority exercising force].

But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, 'Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.' [God commanded them to do something that against what the authorities were allowing.]

And when they heard that, they

entered the temple early in the morning and taught. But the high priest and those with him came and called the council together, with all the elders of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported, saying, 'Indeed we found the prison shut securely, and the guards standing outside before the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside!' Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be.

So one came and told them, saying, 'Look, the men whom you put in prison [human authority] are standing in the temple and teaching the people!' Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, saying, 'Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? [human authority] And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!'

But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: 'We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.'

When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them. Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while. And he said to them: 'Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed. And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God.'

And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them [human authority exercising punishment], they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go [human authority]. So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ [God's higher authority]." (NKJV)

So you see, both in common sense, principle, example, and plain Scripture, it is the duty of Christians to obey the government (even if we don't

like it or agree with it) UNTIL it violates God's commandments, at which point we are not only free to refuse obedience, but have a duty to refuse and rather obey God despite the consequences.

We are to obey. God has placed men in authority over us, but when (not if) they contradict God, God is the Highest Authority.

~~~~~

Authority Of Scripture

I often hear that we "are silent where the Bible is silent, and speak only where the Bible speaks," and also "we do nothing that we don't have Bible authority for." We shouldn't practice anything without a "thus saith the Lord." Thoughts?

My thoughts? Hogwash.

This SOUNDS great, and is a useful (but hypocritical) weapon against those who do something we disagree with.

For those who claim "Scriptural authority" for EVERYTHING they do (and do NOTHING without it) I have a request...

For the sake of consistency and spiritual integrity, could we publish the Scriptural reference list of "thus saith's" and Biblical authority for large, expensive, technology-current facilities; paid ministry staffs; professional full-time, church financed ministers; social programs, youth

events, youth ministers; Sunday schools; support groups and much of what we do as a "church"...

Or, do we not REALLY have to have a "thus saith"? Or is Scriptural authority only necessary when it's something we (either personally or as a church group) don't agree with?

In other words, YOU need Scriptural authority or I can say you are doing something God doesn't approve of. But I can do something without "Scriptural authority" and call it a "means to an end" or an "implied directive" based on a direct command. How convenient.

"We don't do anything without Scriptural authority" sounds very "Christian," but I don't find this to be the simple truth as we actually PRACTICE it.

It sounds good as a talking point for doctrinal traditional, but I find that many groups of Christians say this on one hand, then make an exception for just about anything THEY decide is okay to do... while invoking "no Scriptural authority" as a prohibition against any other group that does something they don't agree with.

The Bible cannot, and does not, cover every aspect of our Christian life or worship. It is impossible to honestly state, "We do nothing without Scriptural authority," nor is THAT even a Scriptural mandate. We have commands, principles, and the leading of the Holy Spirit that allows us the liberty to do things in good conscience that do not have "Scriptural authority."

The Truth is, we must be dogmatic where Scriptural says "thus saith"

(dogmatic) and must be gracious and sensitive to God's leading in all else, rather than making broad stroke religious sounding declarations that we don't actually follow anyway (otherwise known as hypocrisy).

~~~~~

## Baptism - Should I Be Rebaptized?

**Do you have to have a certain understanding about Baptism, or the Trinity, or other church beliefs at the moment of salvation? The reason I ask, is that I've been asked to be RE-baptized because I was in a different church who teaches some doctrinal points of baptism differently... should a person be re-baptized if a church requires it for membership?**

First, let me tell you when I would answer that question **YES**:

When a person was baptized as an infant. Infant baptism is not only unscriptural, it doesn't even make sense. Salvation is between a human (mature enough to understand the Gospel message) and God. Babies can't even say "Gospel" much less understand it.

When a person was baptized in a church that does not teach a Biblical, saving Gospel message such as occurs in the quasi-Christian cult-type groups.

When a person was baptized in a church that clearly and specifically teaches a salvation-by-works-of-man (including baptism) as the way to be saved.

When a person was coerced to be baptized and was not sincere in participating.

When a person feels led by the Holy Spirit to do so because **THEY PERSONALLY** believe their original baptism was not a true act of repentance and obedience.

Now let me tell you when I would answer the re-baptism question with **NO**:

For "church membership" which is a man-made requirement. Baptism is about **KINGDOM** membership, not membership to a certain identifiable church group.

If you were baptized by immersion into water as an obedient response to God's command, repenting of your sin, believing in Christ Jesus, and placing your faith in God... you have **NO** obligation Scripturally to be re-baptized regardless of what any church, preacher, Pastor, leader or denomination says. (I was once told it was a matter of submission... hogwash)

It doesn't matter who the person was who baptized you.

It doesn't matter what that church group teaches about baptism\*\*\*... what matters is what **YOU** believed at the time. (\*\*\*)Be reasonable folks; we're talking about things like "a minister has to baptize you" or "you have to be in a church;" not something

outrageous like baptism has to be done in a secret temple wearing special underwear.)

As for baptism, the only Biblical imperative is that a person hears God's command to repent, believe and be baptized, and sincerely obeys God in faith (regardless of their lack of understanding when regeneration occurs). As for the ACT of baptism, the only Biblically explicit condition is IMMERSION in water. I don't have space here to communicate that whole lesson, but it's not a genuinely disputable point. There is no Biblical command that a person reach a certain depth of theological understanding before they can be saved. Every example in Scripture is "hearing the Gospel, believing, repenting and immediately being baptized." We have violated that by requiring "baptism training" classes, "church doctrine training" classes and lackadaisically allowing weeks or months to go by before having a "baptismal service" (thus undermining the importance and prominence of baptism that Scripture clearly communicates).

Churches have split into two groups:

Under emphasize (less emphasis than Scripture) baptism so you won't be accused of teaching that baptism is "essential to salvation"

Over emphasize (more emphasis than Scripture) so that there will be no doubt you believe baptism to be essential to salvation

Both positions do damage to simply letting the Bible declare the proper emphasis on baptism, and that is (no matter what theology you place

behind it): immediately following genuine belief and repentance, a person is baptized.

A Baptist church we attended for a time (even though we were not "Baptists"; we are just CHRISTIANS), said we must be rebaptized because our "Church of Christ" baptism was believed under a "works" mentality even though I explained to them that I was baptized simply because the Bible told me to. Plain and simple. I was 10 years old, knew I was a sinner and the Bible said, "repent and be baptized"... so I did.

I didn't ask about the moment of regeneration; I didn't know anything about "coming into contact with the blood"... I didn't wonder about a specific pinpoint of time where I was lost one second, and saved the next. I didn't know about being in a "baptism class" to learn all the right doctrines first. I didn't know anything about Calvinism, Arminianism or the Trinity. I didn't know any theology terms. I just knew the Bible said "repent and be baptized," and I knew I was a sinner, and I knew I believed in Jesus. And I knew I wanted to go to heaven not hell.

How much more "correct" can one be than that concerning salvation?

Then a Church of Christ we attended wanted a rebaptism because we weren't always part of the "Lord's Church" because we chose a Baptist church to fellowship with over the local Church of Christ which was so legalistic as to want to drive you from Christianity completely. You may consider that absurd, but how many of Church of Christ folks out there require the re-baptism of any Baptist

or Methodist even if they have already obeyed the Lord in baptism? "Yeah, but they didn't believe the right thing about baptism..." Sound familiar?

I know, the other guys are wrong, and we are not. Of course. What madness...

Any person who has responded in obedient faith to the Gospel owes no man a "re-baptism." The only person who needs to be SURE is YOU! Someone else being satisfied you were "baptized right" means NOTHING! NOTHING! Are man's requirements more important than God's?

There is no Biblical requirement to understand theology, the Trinity, soteriology, eschatology, hermeneutics, creationism, church organization or anything else before they can respond in obedience to the Gospel. There is no Biblical requirement to be re-baptized for "membership" purposes, or because another man doesn't think you had the right understanding (his understanding).

The only person that needs to be convinced of that... is you.

(Note: Where are the Scripture references in this answer? There are no Scriptures about re-baptism, church membership or baptism classes. It's not meant to be a Gospel presentation so I haven't listed those types of verses here.)

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Baptism - Does The Act Of Baptism Save A Person?

**Brent, in reading through your questions, I found the following in a question about baptism: "Does the Bible teach that Baptism saves you? Absolutely NOT. And I don't know many people who claim that BAPTISM saves." If this is not what Peter says in 1 Pet. 3:20&21, what is he saying?**

You quote only one portion of my answer which takes the quote out of context. When you read the entire answer, you will find that I was talking about "sacramentalism." My statement was saying that the physical water and the physical act of being immersed... in and of themselves don't save.

In other words, the actual water has no saving power, nor does it somehow physically transmit God's saving power. As well, the act of going underwater does not somehow have saving power, nor transmit "salvation" in some way.

To believe this is called "sacramentalism"... which is the idea that physical items or acts somehow have "grace" transmitted or conveyed to the participant through the physical act or properties.

The water itself does not save. The act of going under water does not save. If that was true, all you would have to do is take a swim to be saved.

As you will find in the rest of my answer that you quote, I was saying that baptism IS NOT optional, and both sides of the argument agree that we are COMMANDED to be baptized.



What people argue about is WHEN a person is saved. Some believe that salvation occurs at the moment of true belief and repentance; others believe that salvation occurs that moment one rises from the baptismal waters. One side believes that baptism is for the already regenerated heart; the other side believes baptism produces the regenerated heart.

But only a few mainline denominations and the Roman Catholic Church believe that the physical elements somehow transmit "grace" or salvation to the participant (much in the same way the Roman Catholic Church believes that a portion of "grace" is conveyed through the partaking of Communion).

Remember, the Bible is the best interpreter of itself. The Bible does not teach nor support Sacramentalism. So in light of that, what is Peter saying?

1 Pet. 3:20-21, "Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:"

He is saying that baptism is symbolic ("like figure") of the same way God saved Noah by water; that "water" has been involved in salvation both physically and spiritually. Water is symbolic of the Holy Spirit. Water represents life.

So is "water" in this verse physical water? Or symbolic of something spiritual? Did water save Noah, or did God in response to Noah's obedience? Does water save us, or does God in response to our obedience?

I'm not going to answer the real question behind this question, "Do you have to be baptized to be saved?" I have addressed that many times, and great and Godly men have written volumes about it. I do not profess to have a definitive answer because the Bible does not give us one (regardless of how each side claims It does).

The Bible commands us to believe, repent and obey; part of the obedience is to be baptized. The real question is, "WHEN is a person actually saved?" That is a matter of personal conclusion that each Believer will have to struggle with and decide for himself. And if God did not see fit to make this black and white in His Word, then I don't see the necessity to call my conclusion black and white.

If the answer was as PLAIN as each side claims, then we wouldn't be having the never- ending debate about it.

Follow-ups based on reader responses to this answer:

Reader: So my question would be what does John 3:1-21 mean? What does it say in Acts 2:38?

BR Response:

Those verses you cite mean what they say. Again, I am not attempting to answer, "Do you have to be baptized to be saved?"... that question has been

argued to death, and rarely are people open to the points made by the opposing belief. To each side it is "clear" and "black and white" - all you have to do is read a handful of verses that prove without a doubt their position. And yet the debate continues despite how "plain" the "truth" is.....

Here we are, still having two sides, completely convinced of the dogmatic nature of their convictions. I see the logic, and understand the conclusions of both sides. I think that both sides honestly and with clear consciences believe what they believe.

And I believe that both sides trust in the fact that the foundation of salvation is the fact that Jesus Christ shed His blood to pay the penalty that we owe God. It is that trust in Jesus Christ alone, through obedience, repentance, and faith, that is the essence of salvation.

The exact point (WHEN) at which salvation occurs (baptism or true belief) is a question that rages on and is not answered explicitly in Scripture (it is a CONCLUSION that we draw; no matter how logically, or how "plain" we think it is, it's STILL a CONCLUSION). God didn't explicitly answer it, but men insist on answering it for Him. We insist that something is "black and white" when the very nature that the argument exists proves that it is not.

Either way, we should be united in the fact that we believe in the one and only way to be saved: faith and obedience to Jesus Christ alone. That unity alone sets us against the entire

rest of the world. We should not "persecute our own".... the world can do a good enough job of that.

Further comments based on reader responses to my answer:

Reader comment:

"Doesn't Acts 22:16 teach that baptism washes away sin, and if yes, isn't that WHEN a person is saved?"

Acts 22:16, "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (NKJV)

BR response:

Baptism is a reference point that we can understand and "touch" as physical beings. The actual regeneration of the heart is a mystery which cannot be seen or sensed by our physical being.

To explain the relationship between a mental/spiritual reality and it's corresponding physical reference, consider this analogy:

If I said to you, "I have a million dollars and it is yours as a gift. All you have to do is take it."

Then I said, "Arise, and take the money and become a millionaire".... were you a millionaire at the point of taking the money? Or at the point in which you believed my declaration that I had given you the money if only you would accept it?

It is logical to conclude "YES" to either question. Since I did not say, "You will become a millionaire the moment you

take the money," then you are left to logically conclude either option: 1) you were a millionaire the moment you believed what I said was true and reaching out to take the money the physical manifestation of what had already occurred; or 2) you could rightly assume that you are not ACTUALLY a millionaire until the money was in your possession which occurs when you reach out and take it.

Either position is logical and rightly concluded. It would be unreasonable to claim one argument as DEFINITIVE over the other. And yet that is what we do constantly with the issue of baptism.

Acts 22:16 (and similar verses about baptism) has the view from OUR perspective. Baptism is a physical reference to the spiritual process of salvation. God has already offered the gift of eternal life. It is already available for all. When a person comes to truly believe God's promise (which obviously must happen before genuine baptism occurs), then as in the "millionaire" analogy, haven't they already in a very real and logical sense, for all practical purposes been saved? It's a done deal at that point, only to be followed by the physical manifestation of what has spiritually occurred.

To defend the other view, it's just as reasonable then to say, "Yes, but until they have obeyed God's command to be baptized, then they have not 'reached out taken the gift.'" So they are not actually saved until the commanded acts of obedience have happened. That is NOT an illogical position.

My continued point is, God has not declared (or more accurately, "revealed to us") a definitive MOMENT in time when the supernatural act of regeneration occurs, because salvation is twofold in perspective: it is a spiritual event of supernatural regeneration originating from God, done when He appoints it to be done to each individual; and it is manifested physically on earth in our lives through our obedience to God's commands (repentance, confession, baptism, etc.).

It's been said that "salvation is not something that takes place in the heart of man, but in the mind of God." We are saved when God says we are. We are saved because God pronounces us as such. We are saved because God declares us as saved based on His will, His pleasure, His rules and only His way. We are saved at the moment God genuinely knows we have accepted His gift.

This twofold perspective continues to be manifested after salvation. When Satan comes and says, "You have to obey your flesh, you are sinful," then I can say, "No, I don't. My flesh is dead. I was at the funeral." If I do sin, then asking for forgiveness becomes the earthly physical manifestation of the spiritual reality that my sins are forever washed away at the moment of salvation.

Salvation began in eternity past when God ordained how His Elect would be saved. God draws men to Christ and the gift of salvation is already extended. It's free. It's available. It's there for the taking for anyone who will but simply believe and obey.

So in a very real sense, a person is "saved" at the moment he believes because true belief will of course be followed by obedience to God's commands. But in a real sense to us physically, this occurs at baptism.

The physical reference point to salvation is baptism which symbolizes and represents everything about killing the old sinful man, washing away the sins and resurrecting the new regenerated person. So it is not unreasonable to conclude that regeneration occurs at baptism; nor is it Biblically inaccurate to say that regeneration occurs at the moment of true belief. The Bible does not definitively say, and no matter how strong our logical convictions, they remain conclusions, not Scripture.

And I will be roundly condemned by both sides for not taking a side publicly.

~~~~~

Baptism And Dedications

Would you mind giving me your thoughts on baptism vs. dedication? We are thinking of dedicating our new son instead of baptizing him. Also, his sister who is 16 mos. old has already been baptized and our pastor told us we could dedicate her with her brother. But then people have told us we should not dedicate her when she was already baptized. We're really confused.

You'll have a lot of opinions flying around at you on this, and you're simply going to have to decide who/what to trust, make the decision, and go with it. I have no agenda or personal stake in this, I'm simply going to tell you the Biblical principles, and you decide. But make the decision YOURSELF, not based on the expectations of friends, family and "religious" tradition.

First, Dedications and Baptism are neither the same thing, nor interchangeable. So doing one or the other in order to forego the alternative is NOT a question you should even struggle with.

Second, Dedications are pure tradition held over from the Old Testament and denominational practice. We have examples in the Old Testament of babies that were dedicated and consecrated to the Lord's service, but there is NO New Testament directive for the practice. As I point out often, we often practice a tradition so long without the accompanying substantive Biblical teaching, that the tradition becomes some sort of Biblical fact, Church practice or quasi-doctrine that is rarely questioned or examined.

"Dedication" is a voluntary and traditional act of simply stating publicly that you are dedicating that your child will be raised in a Christian household to love the Lord. Period. That's all. Many people who do it, do it out of tradition and never actually follow up on that public statement... multitudes of people who don't practice the tradition of "Dedication" still raise their children dedicated to God. Tradition. Voluntary. Nothing

more.

Baptism on the other hand is a direct command of Scripture. Every BELIEVER should be baptized. (Note: to all my friends on both sides of the fence, don't start splitting hairs about whether someone is a "Believer" before or after baptism. All I'm saying here is that someone must be old enough to hear, understand and believe the Gospel before they can make the decision to obey and be baptized.)

Back to my point... Baptism is commanded in Scripture of all those who hear and positively respond to the Gospel. It is not tradition. It is one of the foundational events in the life of a Christian (Acts 22:16; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21; Titus 3:5).

So, it cannot be replaced, or skipped over because we "did the dedication" instead. But more importantly, is the topic of infant baptism.

INFANT baptism is not, and cannot be Scriptural or worthwhile in any way because it is meaningless to the baby. Baptism, in the Bible, is always a commanded response following the hearing and believing of the Gospel, hardly an act that a baby is capable of. Infant baptism is a tradition at best, and in reality, a false practice that can lead to a false sense of "salvation security." A baby cannot understand the Gospel. A baby is not capable "taking up their cross" and following Jesus. A baby is not capable of declaring "having mercy on me, a sinner" and falling to their knees crying out to be rescued by the Savior. A baby doesn't even have the slightest

concept of what a Savior is, much less the need for one.

So your first decision is to decide whether or not you reject the false and useless practice of infant baptism. Think about it... if the ACT of baptism had some sort of saving power, why don't we forcibly drag every adult in and baptize them? Because we know that baptism is useless for someone who doesn't believe or understand... unless it's our babies, then adults get some warm feeling that we "saved" our children by having some religious cleric pour a cup of water on their forehead. Biblically speaking, it is an empty ritual, and as parents, if we truly love our children, we will be concerned about what GOD says, not what the local pastor, reverend, father, pries, or self-proclaimed religious authority says.

Now, I'm not stupid. I know this is really going to rile up a lot of folks, and once you go ask your "Reverend" or your "Father" or your parents who are 15th generation [put your denomination here], you are going to be pressured and bombarded with how you are endangering your baby's salvation, and probably yours, and how they cannot be part of the "the church" unless you follow these religious traditions. So get ready for the howling, peer pressure and accusations that you're becoming a religious nut if you choose to believe only the Bible and not "religion."

In summary... infant baptism is not Scriptural and not even a useful or meaningful tradition. To the contrary, it is a dangerously deceptive practice that allows parents and children to grow up with a false illusion that

salvation has already occurred because of infant baptism. You should reject the practice. Baby dedication is a nice tradition IF celebrated and actually followed up on by raising the child in a home dedicated to the Lord.

~~~~~

## Baptism – Is It A Requirement Of Salvation?

**Do you have to be baptized to be saved? Is baptism a requirement of salvation? How come when you teach salvation, you don't always include that baptism is necessary?**

This question primarily comes from Church of Christ (non-instrumental) members, so my answer assumes that fact.

-----

I was an active member for over 20 years in the Church of Christ and served in various leadership positions. I frequently made the same argument you have made (the act of baptism being absolutely required for salvation and constitutes the moment of salvation).

What I hadn't learned (because the only interpretative method I was ever taught was "command/example/inference" - fairly unique to the Church of Christ), is that you don't build entire doctrines from individual verses pulled from both local context and overall Biblical context while ignoring how the rest of the Bible affects the doctrine in

question. The number of verses coupling salvation and baptism are relatively few in relation to ALL the verses on salvation. Do we ignore these other verses as if they have no relevance? Or strive to know how these other verses illuminate the entire issue?

A cursory study of "believe" will result in many verses stating that "belief in Christ" saves you, with no mention of Baptism (1John 1.5; 5.13; 1Pet 2.6; James 2.23; 1Thess 4.14; Eph 1.13; Rom 10.11; 4.24; 4.5; John 20.31; 6.47; 3.15-16; to list a few). These verses cannot be ignored any more than can the typical "baptism" verses (Acts 2.38; 1Pet 3.21, etc). They ALL have to be considered together when concluding salvific doctrine.

Baptism is a commanded part of the process of becoming/being a Christian. To draw an arbitrary line and make salvation chronologically instantaneous at the moment of rising from the Baptismal waters is to ignore many other principles of salvation and Scripture. Is it logical? Yes. Is this conclusion plainly stated in Scripture, or is it simply that... a conclusion?

Then there's the other question that accompanies this issue: is Baptism essential (non-optional)? Absolutely. Is it commanded? Absolutely. Would I doubt the salvation of anyone who refused Baptism? Absolutely, though only God knows for sure of their eternal condition. Does the Bible teach that Baptism saves you? Absolutely NOT. And I don't know many people who claim that BAPTISM saves. Even 1Peter 3.21, which uses this phrase, clearly does not teach that the ACT of being immersed in water is what

saves a person but is speaking of the spiritual issues involved.

Does the Bible teach plainly and specifically that the **MOMENT** of salvation is equal to moment of baptism? No. The verse doesn't exist. It is a conclusion. Right or wrong, it is a conclusion.

Some in the Church of Christ add to Baptism a sacramental (grace or salvation is imparted at or through the act) aspect that is not in Scripture. Other Churches of Christ make Baptism the chronological point of salvation based on what it symbolizes, but not on plain Scripture that states that fact. It's NOT illogical, but neither is it plainly stated in the Bible. Baptism is **OVER**-emphasized past clearly stated Biblical emphasis. That doesn't mean it's a wrong conclusion, but it cannot be a dogmatic, salvific stance.

A great many non-Church of Christ, fundamental churches **UNDER**-emphasize the necessity of Baptism because they fear being labeled "sacramental", works-oriented or legalists simply by boldly teaching Baptism is essential and commanded in the Christian experience. The Bible is plain and clear on the necessity of baptism. So to proclaim otherwise is to ignore plain Scripture.

Both positions (over/under emphasis) are wrong and based on inserted meaning (eisegesis), conclusion, opinions or traditions... and not specific, plain, and clear Scripture.

I know. It's says it right there in Acts 2:38, 1Pet 3:21 and Mark 16:16 you have to be baptized... again, you don't

build doctrine on a few verses... you build doctrine on the **ENTIRE** message of the Bible. Those verses clearly make Baptism mandatory and commanded. But nothing in those verses says the chronological point of salvation is the moment of Baptism. That is **ASSUMED** because of the mandatory nature of the instruction to be baptized.

It's very natural to draw that conclusion, "The Bible commands Baptism, therefore if you are NOT Baptized you're not obeying God and you aren't saved, therefore Baptism must be a requirement for salvation, therefore Baptism is the point at which you are saved."

The other argument is that Baptism is when you "contact the blood of Christ." Again, an understandable conclusion based on the obvious symbolism of Baptism, but not plainly stated in Scripture.

I understand the logic, but the fact is, it remains a **CONCLUSION**, not clear Scripture. That doesn't necessarily make it the **WRONG** conclusion, but it has to be weighed against **ALL** Scripture. You're forced to explain away numerous other verses which clearly teach that authentic belief in Christ is the effective requirement of salvation. Some verses add repentance to the equation (Act 2:38; Lk 13:3). Another verse proclaims faith without works is dead, leading you to believe that salvation has not occurred (James 2:26). Still other verses show love in various forms is "required" to be saved (1st John; in the sense that without this love salvation is not authentic).

So how do we reconcile all these “requirements” for salvation without turning salvation in to something that man EARNs through his own effort? By understanding that NOTHING MAN does, including belief, repentance or baptism, actually saves him. These things ARE required, but only the regenerating power of the atoning blood of Jesus Christ applied to the helpless begging sinner (Matt 5) who knows there is NO OTHER WAY TO SALVATION results in salvation.

It is a great paradox that salvation requires effort (or action) on our part, but nothing we can do (NOTHING!) adds one speck to our salvation. Salvation is a process, a series of moments, not a single moment. Consider with me:

Salvation begins when you are drawn by God (John 6.44) to hear the truth (Rom 10.17), believe that truth, repent of sin (2Cor 7.10) and turn in faith to God (1Pet 1.9).

At the point of man’s spirit being renewed (Tit 3.5), the Holy Spirit now enables us to righteousness (Eph 5.9), when previously we were slaves of sin (Rom 6.6) incapable of any act of righteousness. Whether regeneration occurs at the time of belief, or the time of baptism, is a conclusion that must be drawn, but is not declared plainly in Scripture.

Baptism is commanded and essential (non-optional). Anyone who would refuse to do it is directly defying God. So in that aspect, you might say the baptism is required for salvation, but Baptism is NOT what saves you, which I’m sure you agree with.

Our disagreement ends up being in regards to “CHRONOLOGY” not “necessity.” We disagree on the chronological point of salvation, not the necessity of Baptism. Does the regeneration of the spirit (salvation) occur under the baptismal water? I believe it occurs previously, at the moment of genuine belief in Christ, repentance of sin and turning in faith to God. Baptism is the first act of obedience identifying the new Believer (an act of righteousness) and outwardly testifying to the inward change that has occurred.

I am very thoroughly aware of the Church of Christ teaching and the verses involved just so you will know that I have come to my opinion in light of the Church of Christ teaching, not in ignorance of it.

I didn’t come to my interpretation lightly. For me, having been a long time member of the Church of Christ, I faced the issue of whether I was willing to challenge my long held belief that was totally unquestioned simply because it was pronounced from the pulpit. No deviation was tolerated, none; not even a discussion of it in any of the many Churches of Christ I have attended or been a member of. I accepted the same handful of verses that are always cited (Acts 2.38; 1Pet 3.21, etc.), and the Church of Christ doctrine built around them, without scrutiny or serious contemplation.

In summary, is Baptism essential? Yes. Does the act of Baptism save you? No, and you probably agree with that. What we disagree on in essence is the chronological point of the regeneration of the human spirit



(salvation).

It is beyond the scope of this answer to outline all the concepts, principles and verses that are involved. I trust this short answer will be enough to 1) give the reason for my belief (even though you may not agree); and 2) encourage you to analyze your beliefs. You will only strengthen your ability to defend your faith regardless of the final conclusion.

We do hopefully agree on the most crucial issue of all: that the atoning blood of Jesus Christ is the effective ingredient of salvation and accepting Jesus Christ as the ONLY way to salvation IS a requirement of genuine salvation. That is clearly stated in Scripture and is what I put my hope and trust in.

~~~~~

Baptism – Is Re-Baptism Necessary?

Our new pastor has insisted that my husband and I get re-baptized. Shouldn't my pastor just accept both of our previous baptisms?

Here's the whole question:

Our new pastor has insisted that my husband and I get re-baptized. I was baptized in a Baptist church at 12, my husband at a non-denominational church. My pastor (a very conservative Independent Baptist) says that he would accept MY baptism because it was in a church with the same beliefs, but not my husband's.

He has also requested that I get re-baptized just so my husband would feel more secure about going through it a second time. Is all of this really necessary or Scriptural? Shouldn't my pastor just accept both of our previous baptisms?

There are a lot of issues in this question that point to the problems of denominationalism and "churchianity."

Before we discuss the notion of "re-baptism," let's talk about the Pastor's scriptural duty and authority.

The Pastor, Shepherd, Elder, Bishop (all the same meaning and position in Scripture) are responsible for the spiritual oversight and teaching of the flock as well as protecting the purity of the church. They must not fall short of their God-given role, but neither should it be surpassed.

Is a Pastor responsible to evaluate and judge the baptism of all who come under his/their care? No... and yes.

If a person comes in from a true non-Christian cult or religion, then it is certainly an issue, but it starts with the same question that should be asked of anyone coming from another flavor of orthodox Christianity too.

When you were baptized, did you believe that you were a sinner condemned eternally and that Jesus Christ the Son of God shed His blood to pay the penalty that you owed God?

Were you baptized in obedience to God's command to do so?

If the answer to both of those are "yes" then the Shepherd's reasonable duty to make sure that those who come into the flock are professing belief in accordance to Scripture is complete.

To go past that is to simply start applying conditions and judging factors that have NO Scriptural basis or authority.

What church did you attend? Sorry, wrong denomination, we have some differences with them.

How old were you? Sorry, I don't think you were old enough.

Why did you respond? Sorry, I don't think that is a sincere reason.

You believed correctly about sin and Jesus, but what was your belief about _____ (pick one: baptism, Bible versions, the Trinity, the Sabbath, original sin, Calvinism, eternal security...)? Sorry, I don't think you really understood what true Christianity is.

How has your life been since then? Sorry, I don't think you were really saved because you haven't lived the way we think a Christian should.

"I, THE PASTOR/PREACHER/ELDER HAVE DECIDED YOU MUST BE BAPTIZED ALTHOUGH THERE IS NO SCRIPTURAL COMMAND, PRECEDENT, EXAMPLE OR PRINCIPLE THAT GIVES ME THIS AUTHORITY (but I can make some great sounding logical and authoritative arguments for it anyway)."

I'm going to get an earful from my Pastor/Elder friends for going after this sacred cow because the "power" to declare someone's need for re-baptism based on things other than "were you baptized in a genuine cult/non-Christian setting?" has been wielded with impunity for as long as denominations have existed. Memberships (a WHOLE other issue) are denied; fellowship is denied; leadership is denied; the ability to teach or counsel has been denied.

I was once told by a Pastor that I needed to be rebaptized at a new church where they wanted me to lead despite NO question about my salvation. However, I was baptized in a different church that some people, including the Pastor, would have disagreements with.

When I questioned the authority or Scripturalness of such a requirement (and there was no doubt in their mind I was an authentic Christian), he simply said it would help me "fit in" and like Paul, be "all things to all men."

Hmmm... sounds good, but that fact remains that it is simply not Biblical. And isn't the point of Shepherding and teaching to be faithful to Scripture?

Not to be too hard on their motives, I understand that most Pastors are simply trying to protect the unity of belief and teaching in their flock. But are we accomplishing that by going BEYOND what the very same Bible beliefs we are trying to preserve actually teaches? Think about the actual logic of this:

"We want to preserve the unity and purity of this group of people who follow the Bible by applying a test and standard that is not even in the very Bible we are trying to make sure everyone is following."

The Bible makes no mention of or even acknowledges "re-baptism." It is a by-product and phenomenon of denominationalism and religious schisms.

Think about this: no matter how logically it is presented, the unavoidable conclusion must be that a person wasn't saved if re-baptism is necessary. Why?

In churches that believe baptism is essential to salvation, then it is obvious. If you have to be re-baptized, the person requiring the re-baptism MUST believe you are not truly saved or else being rebaptized is utterly meaningless.

For churches that believe baptism is a public act of obedience following repentance and saving faith, what possible reason could there be for requesting re-baptism? If the person's beliefs about the Gospel were so askew as to disqualify their act of baptism as acceptable to God, then you can conclude nothing else but that they did not having a true saving knowledge of Christ to begin with. If it was acceptable to God, does any human have the power to say it should be repeated?

Think... what is so doctrinally complex about obeying the command to be baptized? We're simply commanded to do it. Scripture doesn't say "Repent

and be baptized, understanding the doctrines of election and the Trinity, accurately stating the theological principles of original sin and eternal security, and above all else, make sure the name across the door of your church is the right one."

No, the Bible says "repent and be baptized" (Acts 2.38). It doesn't qualify age, church affiliation, understanding or Biblical knowledge. The qualifying factors are belief in Jesus and repentance. The essential ingredient is obedience.

Entire households, single individuals and groups of people were simply baptized immediately upon believing the Gospel message. There were no classes, initiations, membership requirements or programs to attend. They believe the gospel and then obeyed the command to be baptized. Plain and simple with no denominational confusion or complexity.

All that to say this: my personal opinion is that this whole idea of a spiritual leader evaluating everyone's baptism (beyond whether or not you were baptized OUTSIDE of Christianity) is first of all UNSCRIPTURAL and seems to be more about control, tradition and usurping authority where God has not ordained it as a whole even if the individual doing it is simply following what they're denomination has always done.

To declare that one person who does NOT need to be re-baptized accompany the person who DOES for

the sake of comfort, is taking it to an even further, almost absurd extreme.

Where is Scripture concerned about our feelings or comfort when it comes to obedience? Re-baptism goes beyond Scripture, and re-baptism for someone who doesn't need it, passes into the realm of human foolishness.

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS RE-BAPTISM SCRIPTURALLY. Why? Because if a true "re"-baptism needs to occur (perhaps because someone was baptized in a cult) then there was no Christian baptism to begin with, so the baptism is not "re-baptism" anyway. It is the first.

This is what "churchianity" is all about: going beyond God's word and declaring things a "test of salvation or fellowship" that God has NOT. The name of your church, instruments or not, Bible versions, charismatic gifts, Calvinism vs. Arminianism, eschatology - when these things going beyond being "issues" or even doctrinal positions and are elevated to tests of salvation and fellowship, this is man turning Christianity into "religion."

It is not a Pastor's duty, nor do they have the authority to "accept or reject" anyone's baptism unless there is a question about whether or not it occurred outside of "Christianity" completely.

In closing, if an individual Christian for whatever reason his Holy Spirit led conscience leads him to believe it is necessary to be rebaptized does so, that is strictly a matter between the Lord and an individual. If a person

wants to be rebaptized because he believes God is leading him to do so and that it will honor God, we should accept that at face value and let it be between him and the Lord unless there is some very obvious and extreme reason to question the decision.

~~~~~

## Belief – Struggling To Believe In God

**How does one respond when confronted by someone struggling to understand why they should believe in God?**

Well the first thing to keep in mind is that it is not our responsibility to have to persuade, convince or change their mind. That is God's work. We must plant the seed (1Cor 3.6), give a good explanation and defense of our faith (1Pet 3.15)... but in the end, God does the work of changing hearts and lives.

This is a very subjective question with no set answer or perfect solution, so I can only give you some of the questions/thoughts I might offer to this person to get them to try to think.

And that is my first point: when a person is struggling to find Truth (saved or unsaved), in my opinion, it's better to give them things to think about; point them in the right direction; educate them about the issues and verses that apply... and let them discover the "truth."

Rarely does "because my Pastor said so" or "that's what Chuck Swindoll teaches" translate into a firmly held, well defended belief. People have to learn, search, study and dig out the answers for themselves to really come to a place of commitment and understanding.

That's why in my "Answer" series, I seldom just say, "Here's the answer; that's it." I try to get people to think, to reason, to wonder, to ponder, to analyze... and come to their own conclusions based on God's Word.

That's a long way around to say this: don't just give your friend "answers"; give him something to think about:

What hope or meaning is there to life when there is nothing more than the "physical" that exists?

How can we logically claim "no Creator" when the human experience declares that each "creation" requires a "creator" (a house, car, computer, pencil, toothpick... all require a creator). "Life" is infinitely more complex than any supercomputer, so why wouldn't it require a Creator?

If we are all just products of biology and elements mixed with time, chance and randomness (which must be true if God does not exist), then every thought your friend is having about "prove I have a soul" are just random thoughts of chance and mean nothing anyway! The fact that he is asking and wondering testifies that there is built into him a sense that there "is something more" (Ps 42.7). Who put that "sense" there? A Designer?

Ask him if you could show him a book that has predicted the future hundreds of times, hundreds of years in advance, and every single time has been 100% accurate, would the rest of the message in the book be credible?

Ask him if there is any happiness in "we're born, we live, we die, that's it".... but tell him to answer that privately only to himself.

There's no "smoking gun" GOTCHA'S in any of those questions. Those are just some that I ask "skeptics" to get them to start thinking.

Now typically, the skeptic will give you canned, smug, tired old answers with a big smile trying to show how happy they are without "your God." But the truth is, NO ONE is content or truly happy with any consistency or for any length of time without God. We are built to only be happy and fulfilled with God as the source of it.

Oh yes, we will have times where earthly pleasures, treasures and activities DISTRACT us from our hopelessness... but hopelessness and despair always comes back with a vengeance no matter how much we want to deny it, mask it and ignore it.

And don't forget to always clearly present the Gospel starting with the Law that leads to the Savior, Jesus Christ, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles (1Cor 1.23). He is the only real answer.

~~~~~

Bible – The Difference Between The Law And The Word

How appropriate would it be to replace the word "LAW" with the word "WORD" in scripture? The word "LAW" generally has an adverse effect on the mind, like we are living under the law of the Old Testament. The word "WORD" is less threatening and better understood by modern day terms.

It wouldn't be appropriate at all to replace "Law" with "Word."

First of all, we should never "adjust" God's Word simply because it's not "user friendly" in a given culture. But more importantly, the "Word" and the "Law" are not one and the same so you cannot interchange the two words completely and remain faithful to Scripture.

The "Word" is every word the proceeds from the mouth of God (Matt 4.4) whether inspired writing (the Bible) or words that God/Jesus directly spoke.

Of course the "Law" is part of the Word. The "Word" contains all of the "Law" but the "Law" is not all of God's Word.

It's a shame that people have a sour taste about the "Law." The only reason that "Law" carries negative baggage is

because of poor or inadequate teaching in our churches today.

Consider what God says about His Law and determine what could possibly be adverse according the Scripture's very own words (all the follow descriptions are aspects of the overall idea of the Law):

Psalm 19:7-11

- The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul;
- The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;
- The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
- The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;
- The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;
- The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.
- More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward. (NKJV)

I'm not criticizing your question because it comes from a very genuine reality. Today the LAW generally means condemnation, lack of mercy and legalism.

- The Law does not condemn, it illuminates sin (Rom 3.20) which is our condemnation.

- The Law is not unmerciful for it is the schoolmaster (Gal 3.24) that teaches us of the Savior.
- The Law is not legalistic because it is perfect, holy and just (Psa 19).
- The Law is not adverse to salvation or the Gospel. Nothing could be further from the truth. The reason it is seen as "negative" today is because of compromising and poor teaching.
- The Law is the key to salvation and to the Gospel because it shows the unbeliever (and the sinning Believer) exactly where and how they have violated God's holiness. True repentance cannot come unless a person truly believes they have done something wrong. You cannot believe you have done something wrong with the Law as your measurement.

NO, the use of the word "LAW" should NOT be replaced by saying "the WORD." We should use all Biblical terms as God uses them and if that offends, God is quite capable of dealing with offended humans.

~~~~~

## **Bible - What Does Matthew 5:18 Mean?**

**Matthew 5:18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. What does this verse mean?**

The "jot" is the smallest of the Hebrew letters. The "tittle" is a little decorative mark or point on the "jot." The phrase is the English equivalent of "crossing every 'T' and dotting every 'I'."

Jesus was NOT saying that Christians are obligated to KEEP the law and regulations of Moses. If this were true, we could not pick and choose what suited us (like keeping the Sabbath); we would be bound to all the Law (dietary laws, sacrificing, etc.)

You can't have it both ways, as some try today.

What Jesus was saying was that the effect of the Law to convict of us sin, to rightly condemn us for unholiness and to be God's measurement of righteousness, would not pass away until "all is fulfilled."

When will "all be fulfilled?" When the entire plan of God for mankind is fulfilled, when the final judgment is done, when those who reject God are cast into everlasting darkness, and those washed by the blood of the Lamb are home forever with their Savior.

When that time comes, all will be fulfilled, and there will be no need for the Law anymore.

Until then, not one letter or word will pass away, but will remain in effect to convict men of sin and direct people to Christ.

~~~~~

Bible – Who Decided Which Books Would Be In The Bible?

I know that the Bible has 66 books. Who brought that 66 books and combined it together so that we have the Bible today? Who did decide which books would be part of the Bible?

First let's start with some basics.

The Bible is made up of 66 books written by over 40 authors spanning around 1500 years. These writers were from all types of cultures, occupations and backgrounds.

Yet, the Bible is perfectly harmonious in its message and common themes. This is a true miracle, an undeniable evidence that the Bible is divinely inspired (among a mountain of other evidence too lengthy to discuss here).

Why is it undeniable evidence? Think about it... You could NOT accomplish this feat with human planning and effort. You could not, period. Without God's inspiration, you couldn't get 10 people in one lifetime to write a book as diverse and broad as the Bible and hope to get 50% harmony and accuracy.

The Bible is error free in its original form and remarkably error free in its translated forms. Critics claim "flaws" in the Bible that typically are either translation problems or can be answered adequately with a little study and open-mindedness. Even if you grant these "flaws," they are few and have NO effect on the common message of Scripture, or on any doctrine of the Christian faith.

Why do I tell you all that?

Because if you START with a basic foundation that the Bible is CLEARLY a supernaturally inspired Book, originating from outside of our human space-time experience, then you can trust that WHATEVER METHOD or EVENTS God chose to bring about the final compilation of Scripture, we can believe the Bible to be what God intended for us to have.

In other words, if God chose to have the final collection of books put together by having them tossed from a mountain top and whichever books fell into a circle on the ground became the official Bible, then so be it. We have overwhelming evidence that Scripture is inspired from God, so we can know that the method of canonicity (choosing the final books) was under God's control as well.

What method did God use? He used inspired men; flawed and human, but inspired and directed by God.

When Jesus was on the earth, the Old Testament had long been completed and the books accepted by the Jews as their Holy Books were settled. As the new Church began on the Day of

Pentecost, events were set in motion that would result in our New Testament.

Letters, historical accounts, personal accounts and visions were written down, copied and circulated among the growing churches. Over the decades, Christians began to call together councils to discuss which of these should be compiled as official Church teaching and eventually added to Holy Scriptures. The primary authentication that was considered was how closely any given document was associated with an Apostle, affirmed by them, and authored by them.

There were plenty of arguments and even lasting disagreement, but there can be no doubt that God was in control because 1) the Old Testament was proof of God's involvement in canonization up to that point, and 2) the final product we have today is proof that God inspired the compilation process.

Around the 4th century the process was final. God had used flawed men to compile a perfect book - God's Written Word to mankind. This Book would go on to change the world like no other before or after. The Bible has had more effect on the world than the COMBINED effect of all other books. It is the only book that changes lives, communities and nations for the good.

Everywhere the Bible has been read and practiced, mankind has prospered, flourished and become more civilized to each other. Wherever the Bible is ignored, civilization deteriorates rapidly. If

you doubt that, study the parallel of 1) the removal of God and the Bible from America in the last 50 years against, 2) the decline of morality, civility and integrity in America in the same time period. And that decline is accelerating at an alarming pace with each generation.

That's the "nutshell" version of how we got the Bible. This answer just scratched the topic. The evidence is plenteous, undeniable and irrefutable. However, a hardened heart will see no evidence at all, no matter how great or how obvious.

On the other hand, God promises to give wisdom and learning to those who turn to Him in faith and ask for it.

~~~~~

## Bible - Is It Really True?

**Why is the Bible the "Truth"? Every other religion claims their book is true? How you can be sure the Bible is really the Truth?**

This is another one of those questions that has been answered countless times from countless angles. So let me just give you a small taste of one angle for you to consider: uniqueness.

The Bible was written by over 40 different men, inspired by God, from all walks of life, from different areas of the known world, over a span of 1500+ years... and yet it presents a single, harmonious, life-changing message.

In fact, the message of the Bible is in such great harmony, that men have tried ferociously for 2000 years to point out it's "errors." The best that can be produced is a few textual discrepancies and some difficult circumstantial situations that are adequately reconciled with various alternative and VERY reasonable explanations.

Yes, there are some tough questions, and some difficulties to consider... but NONE of these difficulties represents a contradiction of any doctrine or spiritual principle essential to salvation, the church, Jesus or God.

What other religious "holy" book can claim anything even remotely as extraordinary as that? The Bible ALONE is unique among all, ALL, "holy" books.

It is a historical fact that the Bible has transformed nations, cities, communities and individuals all over the world for good. Wherever the Bible is prevalent and obeyed, wickedness decreases, lives are changed for the better and societies become more loving, helpful and caring.

What other "holy" book has this effect on the world to the same degree with the same longevity and same breadth? Today we have a "holy" book that produces terrorism all over the world; other "holy" books create cults and superstitious pagan societies; other "holy" books keep entire nations in abject poverty and misery.

Only the Bible consistently and effectively changes lives for

permanent, widespread and eternal good.

The Bible is unique. U-N-I-Q-U-E. One of a kind, with no equals and no competition.

The Bible is the sole book in the world that has predicted future events with incredible accuracy (in fact, with 100% accuracy!). If I could produce a sports book that was written over a thousand years ago, that accurately predicted every score and game in the NFL for the 2003 season, do you think people would trust what it had to say about the 2005 season?

Of course they would. But to trust the Bible, means to answer to God. So mankind conveniently ignores the fact that the Bible has HUNDREDS of prophecies that were fulfilled to the letter - hundreds of years after they were written.

That fact alone should convince any rational, honest seeker of Truth that that Bible is the GENUINE inspired Written Word from the God who created us. No other book in the world even attempts to make the same claim. NONE.

Why then do people still ignore/deny this fact? Well, the Apostle Paul tells :

Romans 1:18-23, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His

invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.” (NKJV)

People don't see the Truth about the Bible, because they don't WANT TO. They suppress it. God has made truth known, but men ignore it BECAUSE IT MEANS THEY WILL HAVE TO OBEY GOD, IF THEY ACCEPT GOD'S WORD.

The Bible is the only holy book that has a 100% accuracy rate with regards to predicting the future, which it has done hundreds of times.

The Bible is unique in that the Bible ALONE is prophetically accurate. This is irrefutable evidence that the Bible originates from a supernatural source outside of time and man's existence. Whoever wrote it (God) is obviously outside of time and space as we know it.

It is abundantly clear by virtue of uniqueness that the Bible is the TRUTH. That clarity is available to anyone honestly seeking truth but will remain forever hidden to those who are not interested in obeying God, or are attempting to earn salvation - or not interested in God at all.

No other "holy book" in the world even begins to reach this standard. THAT is why we can confidently claim that THE TRUTH and the ONLY TRUTH that leads to salvation and eternal life... even if hundreds of other religions and groups make the same claim. (This confusion is a very successful tactic of Satan to create weak, fearful and wishy-washy Christians.)

~~~~~

Bible – Which Bible Is The Real Bible?

God is omnipotent, would not He preserve a true text of His Word for His children? There are too many Bibles..... & people ask, "Which one is the Word of God?" Man keeps trying to create the "original autographs" & look where it has got them.....Confusion. Pretty soon there will be as many Bibles as there are denominations. Is there one true Bible today?

Well, I should know better by now than to open this can of worms, but I get so many people asking (baiting?) me, I'll go ahead and put my neck on the chopping block.

Yes, God has preserved His message. We do have access and knowledge of every doctrine of God DESPITE the confusion of "which translation is best."

The fact that we DO have all of God's message DESPITE the confusion and controversy, confirms the point I want make: God can, and has, preserved His message no matter what man does.

Is there ONE true text or version? Yes.

The true, "authorized" Christ-approved text is..... the ORIGINAL Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek manuscripts, scrolls and tablets.

All the arguments for subsequent translations as the "one and only, God-authorized version" are man's opinion, PERIOD.

There is no disputing this fact. Why? Because God has not revealed in Scripture by prophecy a future "authorized" translation past the originals. There is NO prophecy in Scripture that declares a certain future translation would be "the one."

If the King James 1611 is the "Christ-authorized" version, as is vehemently claimed by some, then I guess the Chinese, Africans and Indians, etc. are out of luck unless they learn English, and not just English, but an old unused dialect of English at that.

Other languages cannot duplicate the Kings James vernacular and vocabulary; other languages have to go back to the originals and translate Scripture into their own dialect. If they go back to the same manuscripts as used by the KJV 1611 translators, is that version any less approved by God?

Of course, a Chinese Bible translated from the Textus Receptus would not be the "King James 1611" version. So would it be "Satan's tool" as is so often declared by KJV-only supporters? Is God partial to white English Europeans? I guess we (white European descendants) lucked out that God made the "one true, Christ-authorized version" in our language. Of course, most of us can hardly read and understand King James English, but that is beside the point to KJV only folks.

I AM NOT SINGLING OUT AND PICKING ON THE KJV 1611 CROWD ON PURPOSE, BUT THEY ARE THE MOST VOCAL, MOST ADAMANT AND MOST CONDEMNING OF THOSE WHO ARGUE THIS ISSUE.

I have been called "Satan's messenger" and denied any chance of salvation over this issue more times than I can recall. So let me state clearly: The King James is a GREAT version. Maybe the best. Definitely one of the best.

It has some textual problems and was certainly influenced by the political and religious climate in England at the time. There are many translation inconsistencies and difficulties BUT THE MESSAGE AND DOCTRINES OF GOD COME THROUGH UNSCATHED.

There are textual and translation problems with all the standard versions... NIV, RSV, NASB... pick one. BUT THE MESSAGE AND DOCTRINES OF GOD ARE COMMUNICATED CLEARLY as a general rule. There are arguments (some valid) that certain doctrines ("the blood" and "the

Trinity" for example) are weakened or missing in certain versions but not absent.

We could argue all day long about which version IS BEST, or which version's translators had the most "problems" in their lives or had spurious motives... but it doesn't change the fact that the versions do exist, and they aren't going anywhere.

THERE ARE BAD VERSIONS. Some versions are deliberate attempts to change Scripture to promote a false religion, such as the New World Translation. But these translations are easily identifiable, and are not part of the ongoing debate about "which standard translation is best."

There are many paraphrases of Scripture today that range from "butcher jobs" to "decent." Paraphrases should NEVER be used for serious study, and are good only for casual reading at best. In my opinion, a paraphrase should NOT be your standard Bible and should only be a small portion of your reading if any.

MY PRIMARY POINT is that God is quite powerful enough to preserve His Message even through the hands of fallible translators and copyists; even through political agendas; even through immoral men; even through religious conspiracies, and even through Satan's efforts to distort the Word.

So what's a Christian to do?

First of all, remove yourself from the divisiveness and strife of "this translation only." Entire churches are dedicated and separated to this cause primarily. The Lord is surely sickened that His children war and fight and cast each other out of God's Kingdom over these man-made battle lines.

Second, get a version of each standard translation and a good Greek Keyword Study Bible. This will allow you to study the keywords in each verse and discover the ORIGINAL meaning of the word in the original language. Examine verses in each translation noting the difference and going back to the Greek definitions to clarify meaning.

You will have more than you need to properly read and understand God's Word.

Also, let me repeat loud, long and clear..... it is a pitifully weak God Who cannot sustain and preserve His Divine Message even through the fallible and questionably-motivated efforts of man. It is pitifully weak men who make a Bible translation a test of salvation.

God has preserved His message across the spectrum of standard translations of different times, different languages, different cultures, different agendas and different men.

If you are convicted that the King James is the best version, **THEN USE IT!** And let God deal with everyone else. It's like I tell my teenagers all the time, "You worry about what I'm telling you. I'm quite capable of

dealing with your brother and sister all by myself without your help."

You do what God tells you. God is quite capable of dealing with other Christians on this matter. Shame, shame, shame on Christians who deny fellowship and salvation to those who don't use "their version" of the Bible! The Bible only declares ONE test of salvation, and it's NOT a Bible version test!

Now let me close with this:

Every standard translation clearly states the "Great Commission"... to share the Gospel and make disciples of all the world.

If Christians invested as much effort in fulfilling this commission as we do in arguing with each other, and deciding ways to deny salvation to each other... we would turn the world upside down.

Less than 2% of Christians will share their faith, and disciple (teach) someone in any given year. When is the last time you did (no matter which Bible translation you are holding)?

~~~~~

## Bible Authenticity And Inconsistencies

**Are there inconsistencies in the Bible? Which "Ten Commandments" are \*the\* Ten Commandments - the ones listed at**

### Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, or the ones listed at Exodus 34?

Are there inconsistencies? Yes, no. (more about that in a minute!) Will I explain the "different" Ten Commandments? No.

Let's start with the latter. There are endless "trick questions" presented as straw man arguments or that take advantage of the pitifully low level of Scriptural knowledge that exist today in the average professing Christian.

Where did Cain get his wife? How could there be light before the stars were made? How could there be life before the sun? Who created God? Is the mustard seed really the smallest seed? Did Adam have a bellybutton? Then there's a myriad of "inconsistencies" about numbers that don't agree, people or places with differing names and varied accounts of the same story.

There are countless websites and teachers who have answered all these "inconsistencies" and "contradictions" already so I will not get into the details of them. I also propose to you, dear Reader, that you learn to NOT be trapped into these endless debates about trivialities when the SOLE REASON for the discussion is so the skeptic and "prove" the Bible is a fake.

Now, if someone is genuinely wanting to learn about these so-called problems with the Bible out of a genuine desire to know the truth, then by all means, have the conversation.

As for the inconsistencies in the Bible.... The Bible has been the most scrutinized and evaluated piece of literature BY FAR in all history. It is held to a stratospheric standard of authorship that no other book or "holy book" is even remotely held to. No matter, it has stood up to all tests.

Are there "inconsistencies" and "contradictions"? In one sense, yes.

Given the number of translations, good and poor ones as well as the difficulties that arise with meanings between times, cultures and languages - on the surface there seem to be many inconsistencies and difficult verses to deal with.

In the end, after 2000 years of intense scrutiny, these "errors" in the Bible have always come down to 1) translation issues; 2) definition and language problems; 3) misunderstanding about how different people view and communicate the exact same event or idea and 4) a foundational false belief that effects the meaning of Scripture (such as evolution which makes Genesis "false" or not believing in miracles which makes all sorts of people in the Bible liars and fakes).

Nevertheless, when considering these textual "contradictions" or "mistakes", they make up a ridiculously MINISCULE portion of the entire Bible (less than a fraction of 1%)... and yet that is PROOF to skeptics that the entire Bible is a fraud!

If that same standard was applied to ANY other book, it would be discredited, especially other "holy"

books. Only the Bible is held to such standards AND IT SHOULD BE. A book that proclaims to be the only inspired written word from the Creator of the Universe should be INFINITELY more authentic, consistent and accurate than anything man can write.

The skeptics quickly avoid considering the facts: the Bible was written by about 40 men, inspired and directed by God, over 1500 years from all walks of life and locales. Yet in all matters of faith, doctrine, theme, message and teaching it is still a completely harmonious, consistent and beautifully flowing work.

You cannot DELIBERATELY get a group of 10 people together, in the same room, at the same time and have them produce something even the size of one typical book of the Bible that would be anywhere close to being as accurate, harmonious and powerful. To deny this happened by chance or conspiracy over 1500 year in all sorts of disconnected locations and lives is to simply embrace the absurd to avoid the responsibility of answering to God.

To deny that the Bible is a work of divine power from outside of the human race is simply to ignore the obvious at your own peril.

Given that fact, the Holy Bible is the only book on the planet, using same the standard by which the Bible is scrutinized and judged today, that can be confidently declared as "supernaturally originated."

~~~~~

Bible Characters – Eli

Who was the priest that fell and broke his neck?

That would be Eli, the high priest of Israel. You'll find the story in the early chapters of 1st Samuel.

It was the end of a sad chapter in Israel's history and in the life of Eli and his family. He had two very wicked sons named Hophni and Phinehas who were very corrupt and did not know the Lord. Evidently Eli had not been much of a parent, because from Scripture he seems to be powerless or unwilling to deal with his sons. Even when his sons would fornicate with the women who assembled at the Tabernacle, he seemed to have a little more than a verbal rebuke for them.

In an alarming verse (1st Samuel 2:25) we find out that the boys did not heed their father's voice because the Lord desired to kill them. I don't know about you, but I don't think that I would ever want to be in a position where the Lord himself desired to kill me. It is shocking to even consider the thought that God specifically wanted to end the life of specific people. It would appear from the verses, that the Lord stopped up their ears from hearing Eli's warning. Scary stuff...

Late in Eli's life, the Ark of the covenant was captured by the Philistines. Hophni and Phinehas were among the Israelites who had decided to take the Ark of the covenant into battle against the Philistines after they

had already been beaten badly by them. The elders of Israel decided that taking the Ark to the front lines would assure them of victory.

Even though the Philistines understood that the ark of the Lord was present and it made them afraid, they still fought and won the battle. The men of Israel ran away, and while many escaped, 30,000 soldiers were slaughtered. The Ark of the covenant was captured and Eli's two sons were killed.

A messenger ran all the way to Shiloh to inform Eli and found him sitting by the wayside. The Bible says that Eli sat trembling because of his concern for the Ark of the covenant. When the messenger delivered the news of the defeat, the entire city cried out in anguish.

Eli, who was old and blind and fat (sorry there's not a more delicate way to say that), asked the messenger about his sons. Upon the news that Hophni and Phinehas were dead and the Ark had been captured, the Bible says that Eli fell off his seat backwards, broke his neck and died. Phinehas' wife went into labor when she heard that her husband and father-in-law were dead and she bore a son. The baby was named Ichabod which is translated "the glory has departed from Israel!"

A very sad ending to a very sad time and sad state of affairs for Israel.

(I'm often puzzled why people call the Bible boring when it is filled with such intriguing stories)


~~~~~

## Bible Characters – Mary

**Where would I find in the Scriptures the story of the mother of Jesus Christ, Mary? Also did she have more children and what were their names?**

Some of the Biblical mentions of Mary, the mother of Jesus, can be found in the following verses:

Matt. 1:16; Luke 1:26–38; 2:5–19;  
Luke 1:39–56; Luke 2:48–51; John  
2:1–10; Matt. 12:46, 47; Mark 3:31;  
Luke 8:19; John 19:25–27; John 19:27;  
Acts 1:14

Here is basically what we know of Jesus' family:

Matthew 13:54-57 - When He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, "Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?" So they were offended at Him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house." (NKJV)

~~~~~

Bible Study – Thoughts On Serious Teaching

Attending a meeting at our church for those who teach classes on Sunday, we were told that we were NOT to "act like teachers", that it was to be a time to help everyone "share", that we are to "walk in the footsteps of success" and not try to change people. I listen to Godly, uncompromising teachers like you and John MacArthur, and I'm strengthened. I grow. But then I go to my own church, I hear this kind of direction from our leadership and it doesn't ring true. Thoughts?

Well, first off, I'm not worthy to be mentioned in the same sentence with John MacArthur, which is a bit like comparing a mouse to an elephant, but thank you for including me in a list of those who are uncompromising.

What you are seeing is occurring all over Christianity from well meaning, but seriously off-track men like Rick Warren and Joel Osteen. Rick, a solid Christian who knows the Bible well, has just been swept away into the social Gospel, seeker friendly movement and has replaced preaching the complete and undiluted Word of God for messages that appeal to personal success and happiness, and social change.

Osteen, and countless imitators, are simply success speakers who have found a willing and primarily Biblically illiterate audience inside the

four walls of the Church (though the practice now is to remove all symbols, telltale sign and most vocabulary of Christianity... a revealing practice to the discerning eye). If he didn't call himself a Pastor and claim to represent the Gospel of Jesus Christ, I wouldn't have a problem with him. He would just be another personal development, success guru. No problem. But when you step over into claiming that this mindset of "victory", "your best life", "prosperity", "divine health" and "success" is what constitutes the Christian life, you've crossed the line and socialized, materialized and flesh-ized the Gospel (and that doesn't get into his butchering of Scripture to support his "success" preaching which is a whole other issue; Warren doesn't exactly avoid jerking Scripture out of context either to fit his "purpose" themes).

Let me stop for a moment here and clarify something: I often get called arrogant, judgmental, extreme and unloving when I write, and especially when I name names. However, like I say frequently, I'm only making comment on what people do PUBLICLY. I don't claim to know their motivations, their character, or their private personality. If I had to guess, I would say guys like Warren and Osteen are probably very nice people; I'm sure they love their families... I don't even doubt their sincerity. I bet they are wholeheartedly convinced of the goodness of their efforts. I bet they would make great, loyal friends. I don't doubt their "goodness" as moral, caring people.

But that doesn't absolve our duty to compare public Christian teaching and movements to the Bible, and proclaim

without apology, where it falls short, is subversive, or otherwise waters down pure Scripture and Christianity. I would expect ANYONE to publicly write the same about me if needed. When it happens, and it does, I seriously consider what is being said and make changes where I need to align more with the Bible, or with good Godly wisdom that has been offered. I make no claims to Biblical perfection or understanding (though writing boldly and confidently about Scriptures seems to be such a claim as far as most people are concerned). I do know that I have only one agenda: 1) find out what the Bible says, 2) try to teach what it says without compromise, and 3) change myself to match what I teach.

The Bible is not about social change (thought social change is a by-product of living the Christian life)... it's not about personal success, self-image, prosperity living (though a fulfilling life is exactly what real Christianity brings)... it's not about making people feel good about themselves...

The Bible is about the problem of sin, and the answer to it. Sin, repentance, obedience, humility, sacrifice, holiness... a far cry from the list that would describe today's Christian emphasis: success, prosperity, happiness, personal fulfillment, divine health, abundance, etc.

It remains a fact that the feel good, personal-happiness-centered, social Gospel (let's get together with everyone and create heaven on earth) has washed over the entire western Church, and more and more what we see are churches competing for the

“Osteen-Warren-Hybels-Hayford crowd” of Believers who are looking for personal success, prosperity, support programs, pop psychology and entertaining programs rather than the serious meat of God’s Word that affects change, sacrifice and humility in the lives of true Christians.

As a Bible teacher, if I’ve not encouraged, edified, offended or changed someone, I’m not doing my job - and all of those need to be present in equal balance over time. If all I’ve done is appeal to and lift up your “self” focus and need for personal fulfillment, I’ve abandoned my true calling as a teacher of God’s Word. The Bible is sharp as a razor, penetrating the depths of the human spirit. If I’ve used God’s Word and it has not cut, pruned, sliced or trimmed in such a way as to result in a healthier, more mature Believer, then I’m neglecting my responsibility to rightly communicate the Word of God.

Success, your “best life”, sharing, affirming, self-isms... these are all the terms of today’s ear-tickling “self”-centered Christianity. Christians who want to grow and mature should flee it, and find a group of serious Christians who want to know the Bible, know God, and change their life to fit.

Other than that, I don’t have any opinion on it.

~~~~~

Bible Translations

**About 34 years ago my parents gave me a bible that was called the "Smith-Goodspeed" translation. I have not been able to find any information on this translation, nor have I been able to find a copy to purchase. Do you have any information on this translation?**

The Smith-Goodspeed Bible is also known as the American Translation, or the Chicago translation because the authors were from various institutions in the Chicago area.

As with most modern language translations, the authors saw a need for the Scriptures to be translated into the common English language. By the 1930s when this version was started, textual criticism and the science of translation were far advanced from the days of the Authorized text.

Many Hebrew helps, lexicons, grammatical works and lexical studies were available. The Massoretic text was used as the general guide.

It was not a widely popular translation. Other than falling into the usual KJV vs. every other Bible controversies, the Smith Goodspeed version does not suffer from any extreme translation problems that I am aware of.

~~~~~

Binding And Loosing

What is binding and loosing? I hear people pray or talking about "binding Satan", "loosing finances" or "binding sickness." Is this Biblical? Are Christians supposed to "bind and loose"?

(note: I wrote a specific lesson about "binding Satan" here:

<http://www.seriousfaith2.com/asr/question.asp?questionid=1236>)

The terms "binding and loosing" have been used in the past couple of decades in the prosperity, "word faith" teaching. It is very common to hear someone "bind Satan" (sometime they loose angels), "bind sickness" (loose health) or "bind poverty" (loose finances).

One of the common Bible verses that is totally misinterpreted to support this is Matt 18:18:

"And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Obviously, there is something about binding and loosing for Christians, so what is it, what does it mean, and when/if should we do it?

Binding and loosing are legal terms much like a Judge makes a pronouncement about who was guilty (bound) or not (loosed). It is a statement of authority. The Judge speaks on behalf of the Law, and can say what will happen (loose) and

what won't happen (bind)... he declares, or applies the Law

In Matt 18:15-20, Jesus gives Peter, and by extension all Believers, the authority to "bind and loose" within the scope of Biblical guidelines. In summary, it has to do with church authority and discipline of the unrepentant but professing Believer:

Matthew 18:15-20 (NKJV)

15 "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.

16 But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.'

17 And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

18 "Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

19 "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.

20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

Likewise, the same authority is confirmed by Jesus after his death, appearing to the disciples:

John 20:23 - If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (the same principles of authority as bind and loose)

The errors in Christian teaching today, such as “binding Satan” or “binding sickness” comes from the practice of PROOF TEXTING. Proof texting is taking a Bible verse out of context, and interpreting it by itself. For example, take this verse:

Matthew 18:19 “Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. (NKJV)

By itself, you could interpret it to mean that when any two Believers agree on something in prayer, God will grant it. In fact, this verse is routinely used to teach exactly that, especially in the “prosperity” teaching of the Word Faith movement. However, in context, this verse is talking about church discipline. Correctly interpreted in context, it means that when two or more Believers have gone through the steps of disciplining a brother or sister who is sinning and will not repent, those two or more Believers can agree that the sinner should be put outside of the fellowship of Christians.

Avoiding any proof texting, and considering “binding and loosing” in context, it means this:

That a group of genuine Believers, in keeping and following God’s Word, have the authority to declare that an unrepentant person is no longer part of the Assembly, and the sins they are unrepentant of, are not forgiven (binding).

The Believers are not actually the ones who can forgive or not, or makes

the actual decisions about a person’s standing with God... they are declaring what God has already said about that person.

Much like the Judge declares what the LAW has already determined about an offender, authority is given to Believers to pronounce what God has already declared in heaven is true about putting a sinner out of fellowship if they refuse to repent.

When the person does repent, the Believers restore the person (loose, forgive).

Because they are doing so according to God’s commands, whatever they “bind on earth” is already “bound in heaven” (same for loosing); Christians declaring judgment in accordance to Scripture declare what heaven already declares.

It has nothing to do with “binding sickness” or “binding poverty.” It certainly has nothing to do with “binding Satan.” Binding Satan is simply not Biblical. Again, for a lesson about binding Satan, see <http://www.seriousfaith2.com/asr/question.asp?questionid=1236>.

At this point, I often get emails that say something like, “Well, I actually [put your experience here], and you can’t tell me it didn’t work, or wasn’t real.” Folks, we don’t interpret the Bible or determine truth by our personal experiences. Quite the opposite, we must evaluate our personal experiences by the unchanging standard of Scripture. So if you “loosed finances” and received some financial blessing, it was in spite of this unBiblical practice. If you said,

"I bind sickness," and someone got healthy, or healed, it wasn't because of your "binding." Our experience neither changes what the Bible says, or adds to it.

We need to remember that sometimes the ENEMY can also respond to these unBiblical practices in hope of continuing our wrong belief or false teaching.

Recently I wrote a clear and Biblical answer showing that the "slain in the Spirit" experience we see today is not Biblical. In fact, it is contrary to Scripture as well as easily being shown to be a psychosomatic technique often used by those who are good at working crowds and creating expectations of "spiritual experience." I received many emails saying I was wrong, not based on a Scripture, but simply because those readers had "experienced" it, and was SURE it was real, and therefore Biblical. One reader emphatically declared (and unsubscribed) saying that it was obvious I have never experienced anything truly spiritual. You'll note that I never question the INDIVIDUAL and their experience... that is between them and God. However, it's another to evaluate the PRACTICE and the TEACHING according to Scripture.

I'm amazed (not really) that anyone who searches the Scriptures to see if something is truly of God, is quickly labeled as "unspiritual", stuffy, legalistic or "closed" to the supernatural. The Bible declares this discernment as a Godly quality (Acts 17:11), while much of Christianity declares it to be divisive or unloving.

I'll trust God's Word, not my experiences... or yours.

~~~~~

## Birth – Is God Responsible For Birth Defects?

**Hello Mr. Riggs. Recently I had a discussion with several people about to what extent does God form us in the womb. The main question that we discussed was does God purposefully create people with missing parts, blind, or in any other misshapen way because it is part of his plan. Since we still do not have a clear answer, then I was hoping that you could please help us answer this question. Thanks, Jim**

I don't have a definitive answer, because the Bible does not provide it. So here is my opinion.....

No, I don't believe God actually CAUSES or FORMS a person to be less than the perfect human body that God designed. However, the effects of the sin-curse has caused snowballing degenerative mutations in the human gene pool. Genetic imperfections are the source of everything from baldness to crooked teeth; from retardation to severely mis-formed (or unformed) body parts... and everything in between.

God, full of mercy and grace, then turns those deficiencies into strengths and/or molds them into part of His plan. For the Christian, it's the

Romans 8.28 effect; all things, even the bad, are used for good and God's glory. For others, it's God using whatever He chooses to fulfill His secret or declared plans, much like He used the evil Pharaoh to free the Israelites and display His power through the plagues, etc. Or when He used the lame and crippled to display Jesus' power on earth.

In summary, God is not the cause, or originator of anything less than perfect. Everything that falls short of perfection is a consequence of sin and how it has damaged God's creation. God in His Endless Wisdom and Infinite Power is quite capable of STILL fulfilling His desires and plan down to the last letter, in spite of, and even using, those imperfections.

Psalms 119.33

~~~~~

Birth Control

Should married Christians use birth control? My wife believes the Bible clearly says no. I do not agree. What is your advice?

This is an issue that has been written about many times, by many teachers. So instead of a long rehash of comments you can find fairly easily with a little effort, let me just give you a couple principles to consider.

Obviously, there is no verse in the Bible that says, "Thou shalt not practice birth control." If there was, this would be a question or debate. So

it's left to arguments, principles and individual conscience.

For every issue that God has not specifically addressed, He leaves us the liberty to pray, study and follow our Holy Spirit led conscience. We look for examples in Scripture of how Biblical characters acted. We look for principles, even implication. But in the long run, what God has not given clear instruction or command about, we have the liberty to follow our Spirit-led conscience.

1 Peter 3:7 - Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered. (NKJV)

Considering the principles of the "weaker brother" (1Cor 8:13), "offending the conscience" and "honoring our spouse", in your case, it seems to be the Godly thing to do would be to defer to and honor your wife's conscience, even if it means surrendering your liberty.

For your wife, she should recognize this is NOT black and white issue like "thou shalt not commit adultery"... and should realize you may disagree with her Biblically and with a clear conscience.

For married couples, we should always defer in matters of liberty in order to love as Christ loved. Sometimes this means giving up something that we REALLY want, or really do not believe is the best choice.

For men, this is an especially delicate balancing act because we are called to both love and lead, serve and be responsible for our marriage.

~~~~~

## Boldness

### **Why are people, even Christians, embarrassed to speak specifically about God and Jesus?**

Often you hear folks who want to give God credit but speak about “the man upstairs”, “somebody up there”, “a higher power”, “someone must have been looking out for me”, “the Big Man up there”, “my guardian angel.” There are two common reasons for this: 1) they don’t really know who God is or 2) they know God, but they are embarrassed to say so.

It’s amazing to me that “somebody up there” can save a person’s life, give them the “miracle” they asked for (a child found, a loved one saved, a disaster survived, etc.), and then the best they can do is acknowledge some generic “higher power” or “the Big Fella” because they are too embarrassed to say “Praise GOD.”

When I hear someone who I know is a Christian say something like that (i.e. “the Man Upstairs”) I immediately and lovingly call them on it. God is too holy, too worthy and too jealous to be referred to in such a flippant and casual manner by His children.

On the flip side, maybe worse, you have lots of celebrities and sports figures who routinely say, “I want to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” or “give all the glory to God” and offer a “God bless you” right after winning an MTV video award doing provocative and overtly sexual dancing/singing while wearing clothes that are nothing short of shameful immodesty, slugging down a cold one in the latest beer commercial and pimping ten pounds of bling right before getting caught with a prostitute.

We have failures folks, but it’s not a stretch to doubt the debt of someone’s commitment to true Christianity when they just finished a music video that would make Larry Flynt blush.

To give credit where credit is due, you have guys like Tim Tebow, Mike Holmgren, Tony Dungy, and Orel Hershisier who frankly and plainly speak about their faith in the common course of their conversation, and they mean it. Interestingly, I did a couple of searches for famous Christian actors and celebrities, and not many current names came up. Does that say anything about the film industry? You decide.

I’m not sure which is worse: giving credit to a “higher power” when God just saved your life, or credit Jesus for your success on a worldwide broadcast while standing almost naked in your athletic or performance clothing after singing raunchy lyrics. You can decide that one too.

Obviously, you don’t have to choose which one is “worse.” It’s all just signs



that the world is plummeting away from God "as in the days of Noah", and despite the false doctrine of "Dominionism" (i.e., the Church will overtake the world and usher Christ's return), it is obvious that the world, and the modern Church are abandoning God and His Word.

"As in the days of Noah" ... only one family was left who loved God, and the rest of the world did evil continually. It was then that God destroyed the world and moved into the next phase of His master plan. Does one have to be a FANATIC to see that we are rapidly approaching "the days of Noah" and that God must be getting ready to move to the next phase of His eternal plan? Let's hope so, but let's also hope that we can warn people before it's too late.

Consider the slide away from God and Scripture that is occurring on a mass scale in ALL segments of Christianity:

- Abandonment of Scripture as the ultimate and singularly reliable source of Truth
- Humanistic Psychology and so called "Christian psychology"
- Ecumenism
- Dominionism
- Watered down, ear-tickling personal success oriented Bible teaching
- Prosperity Gospel
- Positive Thinking
- Social Gospel
- Tradition over Bible
- Experientialism over Bible
- Pragmatism over Bible
- Lack of Scriptural integrity
- Dependence on extra-Biblical information and sources

So my answer to your question is people aren't open about God because they either don't really know God, or they know Him but have such poor understanding, they are embarrassed to speak directly and plainly about Him.

Of course, society also makes it hard to talk about Jesus. There is a lot of peer pressure and gossiping waiting for those who speak openly about God. However, substantive teaching and preaching about the TRUTH of God and the world counteracts this. Serious faith counteracts this. Serious truth counteracts this.

So I don't lay the blame at the world's feet for making it hard... I lay the blame at our feet for not being stronger, bolder and more serious as Christ followers.

Lord, come quickly!

~~~~~

Books – What Books Do You Recommend For Christians?

In addition to the Bible, of course, what one book would you recommend as a gift for an adult woman who is not saved and does not even believe in God? A friend said she had a heavy burden for her unsaved mother-in-law and asked me to recommend a book. "The Case For Christ" by Lee

Strobel came to mind. What would you recommend?

It's quite amazing that you suggested "The Case for Christ." Even before I reached that part of your question, I was already thinking that book AND looking directly at it on my bookshelf.

If that's not a confirmation, I don't know what is!

Since we're on books, let me give you a few of my favorites that I consider MUST reads for every Christian:

- Foxe's Book of Martyr's (modern English version)
- More Than Meets the Eye - (Richard Swenson)
- Disciplines of a Godly Man - (Kent Hughes)
- Changed Into His Image - (Jim Berg)
- Hard to Believe - (John MacArthur)
- Pilgrims Progress - (modern English version; John Bunyan)
- The Purity Principle - (Randy Alcorn)
- The Treasure Principle - (Randy Alcorn)
- Overload Syndrome - (Richard Swenson)
- Everyman's Battle - (Stephen Arterburn; MEN)
- The Case for Creation - (Lee Strobel)
- Learn the Bible in 24 Hours - (Chuck Missler)
- The Word-Filled Family - (John Barnett)

That's off the top of my head. I'm sure I'll think of 20 more as soon as I post this!

~~~~~

## **Business – Should We Be In Business With Unbelievers?**

**My question is around the passage in 2Cor 6 on being "unequally yoked." Most of the things I am finding is concerning marriage, but I am wondering: how does it relate to a business relationship?**

Well I certainly miss my friends and brethren at Tulsa Bible Church. (I attended and served there for about 10 years, but moved about 2 hours away a couple of years ago. My brother who wrote this question has a beautiful sweet wife and the MOST adorable children. How HE ended up with them, is beyond me. Luckily the kids look like his wife... :)

The passage in question is:

2 Corinthians 6:14 - Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? (NKJV)

We typically hear this associated with marriage but I think that gives a misleading impression that this verse is just "marriage instruction" from God. While it certainly has application to marriage, very important

application, it tends to constrict the true application.

In fact, I find it interesting that we quickly and concretely apply this to marriage, but start wiggling, waffling and getting nervous when we consider business or personal relationships. I think this comes from two things, 1) a lack of understanding of what it really means, and 2) tepidness about being called "judgmental" or "holier than thou."

In 2Corinthians, Paul is writing to Believers in Corinth who lived in a society known worldwide for its decadence, immorality and pagan idolatry. Being "unequally yoked" was a daily issue, especially in a newly founded Church that was still finding its way in a thoroughly hedonistic society.

The literal picture of "unequally yoked" is the act of teaming up two different kinds of animals to a piece of farm machinery. Picture two oxen pulling a plow. If they are the same type animal, with the same instincts, size and power - the plow is pulled forward effectively with guidance by the master. (Two Christians with the same power - Holy Spirit - being guided by the Master)

However, if you yoked an ox and a dog together, the work would be impossible. (Believer and unbeliever)

The principle of "equally yoked" is not to join together, or create an alliance between Believer and unbeliever for the purpose of doing God's work, fulfilling God's will in your life or upholding your Christian testimony.

Whether marriage, business or personal... you cannot be yoked to an unbeliever in matters that pertain to furthering and fulfilling God's will.

The marriage example is easy: a Believer cannot marry an unbeliever because they will at best have only one spouse serving God, and at worse, a constant struggle pulling the marriage family in two directions. This principle ("equally yoked") applies across the board in marriage concerning a variety of topics: money, sex, family, work, etc. However, it becomes infinitely more important when you are talking about being equally yoked concerning matters of salvation and eternity. It is infinitely harder, if not almost impossible, to fulfill God's purpose in a marriage or family if you are married to an unbeliever (I say "almost" because we cannot discount the noble efforts of single parents or believers who ARE married to an unbeliever and carry this burden alone).

What about business, recreation, etc.? First, God does not call us to sever or avoid all relationships or dealings with unbelievers. We have to live in the world (while being separate from it in heart) because we simply MUST live in the world... we don't really have a choice. As well, we must live as a part of this world in order to take the Gospel to it.

So how does "unequally yoked" apply to business? As Christians, we should not enter into business relationships where our Christian integrity or mission will have to be compromised because of the relationship.

For example, maybe your non-Christian potential-business-partner wants to buy products from overseas and claim they are American made. Or perhaps he wants to hire illegal workers because everyone is doing it, and you can't compete unless you do the same. The Christian cannot capitulate to deception or unethical behavior no matter what the business reason.

If you are already IN a business relationship like this, you need to start asking God what is your next move. If a non-believer is wanting you to START doing business with them (be a partner or associate), then you must really give some thought about the possibility of a situation like this and how you would respond. It is also prudent for the Christian to make sure that BEFORE you enter into a business relationship with an unbeliever that they are fully aware that you will not, under any circumstances, violate your conscience or principles no matter what the profit, or financial loss.

Being unequally yoked in personal relationships, I believe deals more with the question, "Can I maintain my Christian testimony when participating in this relationship?"

Some Christians isolate themselves totally from just about all unbelievers. We are not called to this. We are called to go out into the world and be the light in darkness.

I think being unequally yoked would be a type of situation where you have a friendship, for the sake of having a friend, that is not based on sharing your faith with them AND causes you

to do something that degrades your Christian life or hurts your testimony.

For example, let's say you are a golf nut and all your friends just golf, golf, golf. If you are using those rounds of golf to demonstrate your faith, develop friendships that lead to spiritual conversations, and your true motive is to lead them to Christ, then golf buddies are your "field of harvest."

However, if they are simply golf buddies, and golfing with them just fuels your desire to golf and drives a growing passion for more and more golf, and golfing is the objective, I would say that would be in danger of being an "unequally yoked" relationship.

It's a fine line that each of us has to determine because there is no way to cover all the variables, or create a set of rules that apply to all situations.

For me, I think of this: are my relationships with unbelievers pulling me away from God? Is there an underlying agenda in those relationships to culminate them with sharing the Gospel? Does my relationship with any specific unbeliever hinder my own spiritual growth?

In the end, God will let us know if we are "unequally yoked" in anything or with anyone:

James 1:5 - If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (NKJV)

So whether business, personal or marriage, ask God for wisdom, and He will show you if you are "unequally yoked" in any way.

~~~~~

Business – Should I Do A Deal With An Unbeliever?

I am believer and contractor. I was recently asked by a husband (non believer) and wife (a believer) to build some apartment buildings for them. In exchange for doing this work they want the compensation to be in the form of an ownership interest in the apartments. I have prayed about this situation and have looked up scripture. I am struggling with what to do. Any thoughts would be of great help.

There are no prohibitions in Scripture against doing business with unbelievers. In fact, as we do conduct business with them, we should do so in such a way that our conduct witnesses to them and brings glory to God.

I see no caution from the standpoint of Biblical principle. But of course, you should exercise practical business caution when entering into agreements with anyone.

From what you describe, it is a matter of conscience for you to pray about and seek God's will. If you find no biblical principle based on facts you

have not disclosed in your question that would prohibit you from doing business with this couple, then follow your spirit led conscience to the best of your ability and trust that God will help you.

Sadly, Christians do not often enjoy a good reputation in the business world. Often Christians are guilty of thinking that other Christians should do work for them or heavily discount their services simply because both parties are Christians. Even worse, it is an ugly fact that Christians in general have a reputation for not keeping their word and paying their bills. Now I realize that is a broad stroke generalization, but it is supported with plenty of experience and confirmation from other business owners.

If you choose to do business with this couple, be sure to give them a fair price, do your best work, pay all of your vendors and contractors and conduct yourself in such a way as to witness to the unbelieving husband.

~~~~~

## Calvinism–Arminianism

**What about predestination, election, Calvinism, Arminianism... things like that? It seems that everyone insists you be on one side or the other? Is that necessary? Can we really have a dogmatic position on these issues?**

Well there are a lot of mysterious but plain teachings in Scripture that are irreconcilable. God reveals some things to us from HIS viewpoint then tells us how it works from OUR viewpoint.

We get in trouble when we INSIST (then bind others) on understanding and "systematizing" the mysteries of God (i.e., Calvinism, Arminianism, the mysteries of salvation, sovereignty and election). We insist on seeing things from God's perspective rather than being content with what God has revealed from OUR perspective (i.e., salvation - we see the "steps" of salvation but can't begin to see the mystery of the supernatural occurrence).

For example, these things are plainly taught in Scripture, but cannot be logically deduced or quantified (and yet men insist on doing it):

Is God utterly sovereign? Yes.

Does man have personal will and choice? Yes.

Has God ordained from eternity past all things about our existence? Yes (Ephesians 1:4-6).

Do men still have free will and choice to "change" our existence? Yes, it is a plain Scriptural assumption based on how Scripture talks to us about life and it is the common experience of every human that has ever lived (name one person who ever thought they had no free will choice in any thing until someone plants that thought in their mind).

Did God choose in eternity past who would be saved? Yes (Rom. 8:29-30; Eph. 1:9-12; Ephesians 1:4-6).

Did Jesus die for ALL mankind, and every person has a choice? Yes (John 4:13 ; John 6: 54; John 11: 26; John 12: 46; Acts 2: 21 ;Rom 10: 13 ; I John 5:1 ;Col 1: 27).

Did God ordain our personal salvation and cause it all to happen without fail? Yes (Rom 8.30; John 6.37).

Do we still have a personal choice to accept or reject Christ? Yes.

Did God choose who would be saved and NONE will be lost? Yes (John 18.9; John 6.37).

Can ANY man reject Christ and the Gospel? Yes, that is our obvious and universal human experience.

Is man capable of any righteous act that leads to salvation (including baptism, repentance, etc.) before regeneration (Titus 3.5)? No (Romans 6).

Does man have to hear, respond and obey the Gospel in order to be saved, all acts of his own choice? Yes.

Did God determine and predestine every person who would be saved and make it a secured fact? Yes (Ephesians 1:4-6; John 18.9; 2Cor 1.22; Eph 4.30).

Does man still have a free will choice to reject Christ and will every man who rejects Christ be lost? Yes.

Was Christ's blood shed only for individuals who would eventually be saved? In a real sense, yes (John 6.44; Luke 22.20; and if Christ paid for all sins, wouldn't all people then be justified in God's sight?).

Was Christ's blood shed for the entire world? Yes (John 4:13 ;John 6: 54 ;John 11: 26; John 12: 46; Acts 2: 21 ;Rom 10: 13 ; I John 5:1 ;Col 1: 27).

It is not "unGod-like" to have mysteries or irreconcilable issues in Scripture. Who can logically deduce and understand the Trinity? Jesus' duality (man/God)? The supernatural regeneration of the heart? Eternity?

Generally, Calvinists insist that if election, predestination and sovereignty is true (as they define it), then choice, free will and universal atonement can NOT be true (according to logic).

Arminians (which includes traditional Church of Christ, many types of Baptists and several other denominations) believe that if men have free choice, then other things CAN NOT be true logically (these are just a few):

men cannot be eternally secure because they can choose to give up their salvation willingly;

that there is no "eternity past election";

that limited atonement and election (as defined by Calvinists) can NOT be true.

Each group attempts to LOGICALLY RECONCILE the mysteries of God. There are truths, plain Biblical truths in both positions. But our human minds INSIST that we come to a full, logical, conclusive system of belief... then bind it on others!

After deeply struggling with these issues, I have come to this position:

TEACH WHAT THE BIBLE PLAINLY TEACHES, AND KEEP PERSONAL "CONCLUSIONS" IN THE REALMS OF JUST THAT: CONCLUSIONS

Teach only what the Bible teaches, unapologetically, even IF others try to FORCE you into a corner and try to force you to take a "position."

"The Bible says"

"The Bible says"

"The Bible says"

"The Bible says"

"The Bible says"

"The Bible says"

That is the proper response (not "I think, I think, I think"). I have learned, and chosen purposely to NOT feel like I have to answer every person's demand that I reconcile these seemingly contradictory Biblical Truths.

These mysteries, these "illogical" realities - only add to the Majesty of God. Each view has points that are logical and understandable....

BUT>>>>>>>

each side has incorrectly decided that "since our points are true, the other side cannot be true."

That's where we go wrong. By the way, both sides have some things RIGHT and WRONG. They are right when they stick to the Bible... they are WRONG where they elevate their

CONCLUSIONS to the value of plain Scripture.

Where a church, group, systematic theology, denomination, belief or individual overlaps PLAIN Scripture, then to that degree they are sound and can be dogmatic about those things. All of the different Christian groups have some of the Biblical Truth, but the amount that overlaps clear Scripture varies greatly. The idea is to move your doctrine completely inside the plain Scripture as much as possible.

The CONCLUSIONS drawn by various groups and systems should be presented as CONCLUSIONS, not doctrine... especially not salvific doctrine.

This is a VERY broad and deep controversy. My Bible references are no doubt incomplete, but hopefully useful. This Q&A format does not allow for a full study of the entire Calvinist/Arminian.

~~~~~

Cannibalism

Is Cannibalism forbidden in the Bible?

The Bible does not explicitly address the issue, although many ABSURD, biased and frankly silly opponents of the Bible try to use verses about "mothers will eat their children" and the Lord's Supper being the body of Christ... and try to put those passages

forth as the God condoning and in fact, commanding, Christians to practice cannibalism (Leviticus 26:29; Deuteronomy 28:53-57; Jeremiah 19:9; Ezekiel 5:10; Lamentations 4:10; Matthew 26:26-30).

That type of argument is so patently ridiculous and such a wicked twisting of Scripture, I'm not going to waste time with a rebuttal here on that particular point. Even a cursory reading of the Bible by a fair-minded atheist will show how comically stupid this argument is. Only those who oppose the Bible at all costs and are unwilling to accept ANY reasonable interpretation of Scripture believe such nonsense. To the contrary, Christianity, when embraced by a pagan culture, has always brought THE END of cannibalism, if practiced.

There are several things to think about.

First, the divine moral law on our heart makes the whole thought of cannibalism repugnant. It is hardly arguable that the act of killing someone (murder) in order to eat them is wrong on both counts... the killing and eating.

But what about "survival" situations where people have consumed the dead? Is this necessarily wrong? I would say YES if the choice was made to KILL someone for the purpose of survival (food). I would say NO, if the choice to consume an already deceased person is made in the desperation of facing life or death UNLESS you are clearly violating your conscience.

When the eternal spirit leaves the body, the body is just flesh, nothing more than the flesh of any animal. However, we appropriately treat it differently under NORMAL circumstances.

I could find no Biblical reason to automatically condemn someone in a life or death struggle who chose the option of cannibalizing someone already dead, but in all cases where a life is TAKEN for that purpose, you commit murder.

However, I do not hesitate to CONDEMN the practice as part of war, religion, paganism, fetishes, sick curiosity or anything other situation short of a truly desperate survival situation because it clearly violates our collective God-given conscience and divine moral compass.

If I've missed a Bible verse or principle that you think should be included with my answer, please let me know. I've never really seriously studied this question, so I might be missing something.

~~~~~

## Causality - Everything Came From Something

**One only needs to open their eyes, heart, and soul to reality to see that God does exist. However, I have one question. If as you say, "Everything must come from something," and that something is**

**God, where then did God come from? He had to come from something; where or what was it?**

Before I answer your question, let me point out a technique that is often used to "prove" a point called the "straw man" technique. It's not always done on purpose, but very often it is.

To set up a "straw man," one presents a secondary or lesser argument then uses that argument to either prop up or knock down the primary argument.

In this case, you first state without support or discussion that, "As you say, everything must come from something." This statement is out of context of the series you cite ("Does God Exist" - [http://www.seriousfaith.com/series\\_details.asp?seriesid=7](http://www.seriousfaith.com/series_details.asp?seriesid=7)) then used to prove your next point. (I'm not saying you are taking my statement out of context on purpose, or maliciously; I will assume your question is just that... an honest question.)

However, you start with one premise to support the second. The first premise is false, so it cannot support your second, main point. I will start by commenting on the argument of "everything must come from something."

In one sense, it is true. Every THING must come from some THING. "Thing" implies creation - that is "it once did not exist, and now it does exist." Every THING that fits this definition MUST come from something else. If God were a "THING" in the "did not

exist, now does exist" sense, then He would have had to come from somewhere or something.

However, this is where some simple logic must come into play. For ANY THING to exist, something must be ETERNAL. In other words, you can't keep asking infinitely, "Where did that come from? Well, where did that come from?" At some point, something MUST (no matter how far you go back) exist eternally for anything to exist presently. We only have two choices:

That material THINGS (the Universe) are eternal;

Or, that something outside our universe (or some ONE) existed FIRST, and then every other THING came from this eternal FIRST CAUSE.

Can the Universe be eternal? Logically... No. All the Laws of Science, specifically Thermodynamics, make the idea of eternally existing MATERIALS an absurdity and illogical. To believe that the Universe is eternal and self-existent is to still deny the obvious question: Where did the material the universe is made of come from? The universe is made of tangible, physical material. No matter how long, or in how many forms it has existed, it still begs the unanswerable: Where did the Universe come from? Why? Because the universe is PHYSICAL.

Even if you accept the illogical and hopeless position that the Universe is eternal, you are still left with the statistical absurdity that life and design just happened by "chance" (a

enigma to begin with!). So to simply give in and believe by "faith" that the Universe is eternal, leaves you with an almost equally hopeless leap of faith that the "eternal Universe" then transformed by chance (evolution), into all of the exquisite design we see. BY CHANCE, it accidentally became all the wonders of space, all the life on our planet, and finally in an infinite leap, intelligent man "evolved" by chance with all the characteristics that separate us from every other living thing (ability to reason, love, appreciation, empathy, justice, creativeness, compassion).

The LOGICAL answer is: something NOT physical, or someone, has EXISTED ETERNALLY and made a purposeful and willful choice to CREATE all else that exists.

Once we reach God, there is no need to ask "where did God come from" because God has existed UNCREATED eternally. He did not come from anything. He has always been. Only something that was not created can exist eternally. Every material thing must have a cause. God is not material. God is Spirit. Eternal Spirit.

God is the First Cause. He is the Source. He is the Creator. It is natural that we cannot fathom this because the CREATED is never equal to the CREATOR.

What house can fathom the carpenter that built it? What cake can comprehend the cook? What computer can explain and understand the engineer that designed it? No matter how powerful computers

become, they are always far INFERIOR to the intelligence that created them.

In the same way, we (the created) cannot hope to fathom and completely grasp God (the Creator). Why do we accept the FACT of God then?

Because it is logical. Because it is the only reasonable choice. Because God has DESIGNED into our spirit a deep down sense that HE exists, and that is why we look for Him. How could evolution ever bring about a need, a sense, a longing for, or even the idea of "God"? Evolution does not need God; evolution does not need hope; evolution has no use for beauty, love, poetry, heaven or eternity. It is only concerned with "survival".

The very fact that we can conceive of God, think about God, partially comprehend God and have faith in God is part of the PROOF of God's eternal existence and plan.

God did not come from anything. He is Eternal. We cannot grasp that but it is fundamentally logical, spiritually sensible and yes, scientifically sound. God was first, then He created all that is, for His reasons, and His good pleasure.

All things come from God. God is the FIRST CAUSE. Material things that need a cause came from the eternal God who was not caused but simply IS. That explains the name God calls Himself by: I AM.

~~~~~

Children In Ministry

Is ministry among children biblical? I have not come across a reference which can support it. Many today are involved with child ministry?

I get a lot of the same questions over and over again; this question gets the "haven't heard that one before" award....

I'm not sure what you mean by "ministry". It may mean "caring" for children who need help or support; or you may mean sharing the Gospel with them. For either, I think that answer is the same.

Let's look at just a small portion of what the Bible has to say about children:

They are a gift from God: Psalm 127:3 - Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, The fruit of the womb is a reward. (NKJV)

God cares for the unloved and abandoned child: Psalm 27:9 - Do not hide Your face from me; Do not turn Your servant away in anger; You have been my help; Do not leave me nor forsake me, O God of my salvation. (NKJV)

They should be taught and reminded about God: Joel 1:3 - Tell your children about it, Let your children tell their children, And their children another generation. (NKJV)

We should pray for them: Job 1:5 - So it was, when the days of feasting had run their course, that Job would send

and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did regularly. (NKJV)

God's promise of salvation is for them as well: Acts 2:39 - For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." (NKJV)

Whoever ministers to children, ministers to Christ: Luke 9:48 - ...and said to them, "Whoever receives this little child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me. For he who is least among you all will be great." (NKJV)

They are an example to adults of how to enter the kingdom: Mark 10:15-16 - Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them. (NKJV)

And finally, our greatest example of whether or not children are worthy of "ministry" ... Jesus ministered to children:

Mark 10:16 - And He (Jesus) took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them. (NKJV)

That is just a taste of what the Bible says about children. In light of these verses alone, it is abundantly clear that not only is ministry to children acceptable to God, but would seem to bring about a special measure of favor and blessing from the Lord.

~~~~~

## Children Of Divorce

**I'm 19 and my parents just got divorced. Every day, I continuously think about the situation and it makes me feel depressed, mad or both. All this has made me feel resentful towards my Dad, and I want it to stop so I can go on with my life and enjoy it. What is your advice?**

First of all, I'm sorry that you're having to go through this and I know it's not easy. I wish I had a magic answer for you but I don't, and anyone who says they do, either hasn't lived through this, or probably wants to sell you something.

First let me tell you, that as an adult you need to recognize that your parents are adults too. There is nothing you can do about their choices good or bad other than try and be a Godly influence. If they choose to sin, that is their choice and while it may have an emotional effect on you, the responsibility of that choice is between them and God. No matter how much you dislike it or resent them for it, their adult choices about their life is simply something that you can do nothing about nor, in my opinion, is it really your responsibility to do anything about.

Don't get me wrong. If you see someone sinning, even your own parents, then of course as a Christian you have a duty to point that out to

them and reveal the truth of God's word to them about their sin. This can be an obviously touchy and delicate situation, but nonetheless it is our duty as Christians.

Now having said that, concerning your emotions toward your parents and particularly your dad, this is no longer an issue about their choices but about yours. Your choice to forgive, your choice to trust God, your choice to accept the fact that they are adults who are responsible for their own lives, and your choice about how long and how much you will linger on the matter.

I realize that it is sad and I can understand a certain amount of sadness (depression) over the issue. But if the depression lingers, you have to start asking yourself if you are taking on a burden that is not yours to carry and not trusting God to be sovereign over the situation. If you continually stay mad, then ask yourself if this is righteous anger, appropriate in God's eyes or if you're mad out of selfishness. You don't like the way things have turned out and perhaps you are punishing them with your anger.

Or it may simply be time for you to experience this side of life, and through it you will learn and gain emotional/spiritual maturity.

If you are resentful toward your father, resent is usually a polite way to say "bitter." Bitterness will eat away at you and rob you of joy and peace. It will destroy or severely damage any future influence or relationship you may have with your father and

mother. As well, it runs a great risk of tainting and distorting YOUR marital relationship, present or future.

Philippians 3:12-14 - Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (NKJV)

My advice to you is this: find yourself a couple of older mature Godly men who you can share these feelings with. Be honest with them and ask them to hold you accountable and help you to forgive your parents, learn to trust God, leave the past behind and press on to the future. Ask them to help you come to the realization that the joy and peace you seek cannot be found in any circumstances, good or bad.

Finally, in response to your comment that every day you continuously think about the situation, my advice to you is pretty simple: quit thinking about it.

In order to do that, you have to make a willful choice to think about what God would have you think about.

Colossians 3:2 - Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. (NKJV)

Philippians 4:6 - Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer

and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; (NKJV)

God may just very well use you in this situation to convict your parents about their choices. If your parents see you praying for them, compassionate towards them and demonstrating Godly love and holy standards in your life, it may be the catalyst God employs to open your father's eyes about the situation.

You have no power over your parent's choices. You have ALL power over your choices, emotions and responses because you have the Holy Spirit in you. You simply need to avail yourself of that blessing.

~~~~~

Christian Living - The Gospel Of Peace

What does it mean to "shod your feet" with the "preparation of the gospel of peace"?

The verse in question is:

Ephesians 6:15 - ...and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; (NKJV)

This verse is part of a common section of Scripture referred to as the "Armor of God." It describes several pieces of what would have been the common equipment of the Roman soldier of that day.

The soldiers wore boots with long cleats or nail-like spikes that would allow them to anchor themselves to ground with more stability than the enemy.

The Gospel of Peace anchors us, giving us divine confidence that when the battle for souls rages, and the enemy world comes against us, we can stand firm know that 1) we are saved because of the Gospel, and 2) that we are at peace with God when all around us is in chaos.

The armor of God is a fascinating and deep study I recommend every Christian pursue.

~~~~~

## Christian Living - How Worldly Is To Worldly?

I am a young, hip, urban individual... yet I am also a Christian. I have a tattoo and I smoke - is this despicable in the sight of God? I am struggling with an answer to this - is it possible to be a good Christian - in faith and good works - and still have ties to things some folks would call "worldly", not in thought or philosophy, but in outward expression - like smoking or my tattoo? I'm not looking to justify my decisions or rationalize them, just interested in one Godly man's opinion on the state of this scenario.

If I were to approach this answer by addressing smoking and tattoos, then I'd be left answering the same thing about dancing, clothing, music, possessions and a host of other "worldly" things.

So let me approach from a different angle; actually, a couple of different angles.

First, let's start with something that I have repeated often, and that is, "I think you're asking the wrong question." You are approaching the issue with what I call a "club member" mentality.

A "Club Member" mentality is, "What is the minimum requirement that will allow me to claim membership to the club?" For Christians, this is the mindset that says, "How much of the world can I enjoy and still be 'godly'?"

As we mature and transform our lives to Christ, we should find ourselves asking, "What can I do to bring the most glory to my God and Savior?"

Genuine Christians are capable of all manner of worldliness, and who would argue that in American Christianity has become comfortably conjoined with worldliness? I get questions every day about, "Is it okay if....?" that deal with behavior or lifestyle.

Many people WANT to be Christians, but they want to do just the bare minimum to be able to claim "membership" so that they can enjoy as much of the world as possible too.

Learn to ask the right question if you're looking for a Godly answer. When it comes to lifestyle and behavior issues the right question is, "What can I do to most glorify God?" - not "What can I get away with and still be a Christian?"

My second challenge to you would be this: don't be concerned about what "some folks" call worldly. Who cares what Brent Riggs, or your Preacher, or what any person thinks when it comes to what is worldly and what is Godly?

We should turn to God to find out what He thinks. This takes some hard work and discipline to search God's Word which is not exactly in vogue today.

If you want to know what God considers acceptable, ask Him, read His Word. Don't worry about "other folks"... they aren't your Savior or God.

In closing, since you asked the direct question (and this is directly for the person who actually submitted the question), I would tell you that "YES" - from my experience - I would guess that you're simply trying justify behavior you know you should give up.

Let me give you a rule I have always used... IF YOU HAVE TO ASK IF SOMETHING IS WRONG, THEN 99.9% OF THE TIME, IT IS.

As Christians, the Holy Spirit tells us when something is wrong, and often that is manifested by the fact that we "wonder" or "question" if something is okay. If we have to question it, it

almost always means that, yes, it's wrong.

~~~~~

Christian Vocabulary

I have a question about "God's best." Why do a lot of Christians believe it means literally "the best"? I've seen a lot of relationships that could have turned to be a good marriage, fall apart because one person misunderstands what the term means. I believe understanding contentment has a lot to do with understanding the term also.

"God's best..." is one of the oft repeated terms that people come to believe is actually in the Bible, like "cleanliness is next to Godliness."

In light of today's positive confession, prosperity, "Jesus will improve your life" mentality, it is no wonder that "God's best" has become an excuse to ignore, excuse or discard that which we very subjectively deem as missing the mark.

First of all, the only real way of knowing what is "God's best" is to be able to support it with plain Scripture. For example, it would clearly be "God's best" to have a commitment to a lifelong marriage.

But how does that fit with "God's best" when you roll over in bed 10 years later and you want to strangle the life

out of your spouse and you "feel" unhappy?

It doesn't.

"God's best" can only apply to those things we can directly derive from clear Scripture: a lifelong commitment to marriage, honesty, serving others, holiness, etc.

"God's best" has been redefined in our current culture to mean "personal happiness and material abundance" which in turn has led to many messed up and torn apart lives.

I prefer to say "God's way" - not "God's best." This takes personal ambiguity out of the equation, and regardless of what my deceitful heart thinks is "best," I can always go to the Bible to find out "God's way."

Yes, you are correct that contentment is a VERY large part of being able to determine and be satisfied with "God's best" for our lives.

~~~~~

## Church - Is It Really Important?

**I belong to a wonderful Godly church, but for the past year I have not had any desire to attend. Do you have any advice for me?**

This is a comment I hear more and more. From talking about it with lots of different folks of all walks of life, I



think these are some of the reasons why people are feeling this way more and more about "church" (all or part of any of these reasons may apply):

Churches have become so market driven and seeker friendly that they have lost any real power to change lives and mostly exist to meet needs, or provide a "Christian" social gathering.

Church has become more about "experience" and "entertainment" than the assembly of saints for the purpose of honoring God, learning His word together and demonstrating our love for each other so that a loveless world will see that and know that we are different.

Churches are made of people we primarily only know about and see "at church." Churches nowadays aren't typically a local community who live near each other, work together, take care of each other, look out for each other and "live life" during the week. Churches are filled with commuters and "church shoppers" who come there because the church meets their needs. We only see these folks inside the church doors, for a short busy time, and rarely do more than greet and smile a lot. It feels good, but lacks real depth. Relationships built on a 30 second smile and hug once a week are not relationships that notice or take time for those very same people when the storms of life come raging.

I hear stories all the time of people who attend a church for 10 years, are really involved, do a lot of service... then for some reason have something in their life that discourages them or drags them down away from the church - and they never hear from

anyone except the occasional coincidence when they run into someone who says, "I was wondering where you were; I've been meaning to call."

We have just become too busy and too affluent to really slow down and care about people, invest in their lives and take time for them. Likewise, churches have become centers of "busy"ness, programs, initiatives, building efforts and endless activities. Added to our endless schedules outside church, and it's just too hectic of a pace to really get to know anyone or have time for them.

Churches have become a mess of professional production, business, marketing, careers and politics. High budgets, paid staffs, expensive building and lots of inter-church competition keep the pressure high to "run the business" at the cost of "soul care."

There is too much competition for our time and attention to have "church" really attract us if it has become nothing more than entertainment and busyness.

That's from the "church" side. From the viewpoint of individuals, I have found by my conversations that:

People are so entertainment oriented, church doesn't hold their attention anymore.

People are so "me" minded, that if the church is not feeding "me" and taking care of "my needs," they become disenchanted.

People are so poorly taught, spiritually selfish and devoid of

spiritual discernment that they lose their desire for church simply because they don't "feel good" about it.

People are generally pampered and soft emotionally; they get easily discouraged and want other Christians to continually encourage them and stroke them into action. This is both a consequence of very poor Bible teaching and our overly indulged society.

It's hard to pinpoint exact reasons or solutions because there are so many variables, circumstances and of course the one thing that always ruins everything: the sinful nature of man.

Now that I've offended just about every one - from the church staffer, preacher and church leader to the spiritually soft individual - let's look at a few things to consider.

What's the spiritual state of the church?

What's the spiritual state of the person?

It could be partly the church, and partly the person.

It could be all the church, or all the person.

It could be that the "bored with church" person simply needs a good kick in the pants and needs to get moving spiritually. Or it could be that the church is dying spiritually, lukewarm or a "feel good" spiritual junk food fest that is slowly causing all its members to be spiritually malnourished. You can only eat so many donuts and ice cream before

you 1) get sick of it, and 2) become sick.

From an individual viewpoint, a Christian needs to realize that a church is about serving, loving, worshipping and being part of a family. It's not "what's in it for me," or "how does it make me feel."

Once our personal attitude about the assembly of believers is in line, then we may have to think about whether or not "traditional church" is still the best, or only choice.

The early church started out meeting as local groups in homes. It was an intimate gathering of a community of believers in the natural setting of someone's home - the same place they lived the rest of the week. "Church" wasn't something separate and compartmentalized from the rest of their life. It was a part of their life.

The growing discontent with "professional" church as a "business" has seen the current rise and return of the basic home church. A group of people who live and work in the same area simply meet together on Sunday to learn the Bible, worship in song, fellowship, take care of each other's needs and prepare to go back out in the world to witness for Christ.

No paid staff, no buildings, no politics, no governing organizations. Just the simplicity of the assembly of saints together, with spiritually mature men shepherding and teaching (Elders), honest and trustworthy men leading (deacons) and the entire group serving each in their own gift and capacity as blessed by God.

My advice? If the problem is with YOU spiritually, then I would seek out several spiritually mature friends who will hold you accountable and get you out of your lukewarmness.

If the problem is that "Church" has become "church" and not "the assembling of saints" as it should be, then consider a home church. Consider starting a home church in your neighborhood. Discover the blessing of the early church who lived "church" where they actually lived the rest of the time.

~~~~~

Church – Biblical Leadership And Structure

I am concerned as to the proper leadership/governmental structure the Bible demands of a local Church. Can you explain how God expects this to work (Pastor vs. Elders vs. Authority vs. Staff)? My pastor seems to be "ruling" the flock?

To cover this would take a lengthy series of lessons but I can give you the basics to get you started.

What I am about to give you is, "What the Bible says".... it is not within the scope of this answer section to thoroughly argue whether certain things men have chosen to do with regards to church structure is "right or wrong." I am going to mention a couple of things that seriously

concern me, but overall, this is not an attempt to argue the points.

What the Bible does say about the Church:

Christ is the Head - Eph 1:22;5:23

Meets regularly - Heb 10:25

Meets for Communion on the first day of the week - Acts 20:7

Membership is spiritual and universal for all who are truly saved - 1Co 12:13

Is to be spiritually shepherded by a plurality of Elders (Pastor, Bishop, Elder - all the same word, the same thing in the Bible) - Acts 14 & 15

Deacons are to be appointed for administration and management of church responsibilities - Acts 6:1-6

God gives different members different gifts but all are for the good of the entire body - 1Cor 12

Godly women are to teach the younger women - Titus 2:3-5

All members are to be humble servants, preferring the good of others before themselves - Roms 12:1; 12:10; Col 3:12

Here are some things that are in practice today in churches that are not addressed or specifically proposed in Scripture:

Paid, fulltime, professional Preachers (in Scripture we find only full time traveling Evangelists). The closest we get to the modern paid Preacher in Scripture would be an extension of 1Tim 5:17-18 which concerns Elders.

Paid staffs, administrators, leaders, directors, facilitators

Church buildings, facilities and complexes

Governing bodies such as the Southern Baptist Convention, the Roman Catholic hierarchy or various mainstream organizations (Presbyterians, Methodist, Assembly of God, etc.)

Again, I'm not attempting to argue here whether any of these things are "wrong" - I'm simply pointing out that the Bible does not directly point them out specifically.

Along this same line, here are some of the more modern developments that are not in the Bible, and frankly, can be a cause for great concern:

Churches dominated, controlled and dictated by a single personality... typically one Pastor or the founding publicly-visible personality (where it is patently obvious that the church in question is identified by, and exists on the popularity of this person)

Churches where Elders are not spiritual overseers but political dictators and authoritarians

Churches where the Elders are not Shepherds but glorified managers or "super Deacons"

Churches that totally ignore the Biblical structure and just make up their own organizational structure

In my opinion, by far the most dangerous unScriptural church organization issue today is the

incredible amount of churches which are led (controlled?) by a single "personality" who "makes or breaks" the popularity of the church. This has resulted in the epidemic "church hopping" we have today where nominal Christians "shop" churches based on the "awesome Pastor." That's a harsh statement, but unfortunately, it's true.

Following closely after that, is the danger of "governing bodies" that have authority over local churches which results in "politics" and power-mongering in the Church.

To close on a positive note, here is a one sentence summary of Biblical church organization:

The church (the "called out" community of believers) is to be a self-governing, local, autonomous body which is spiritually shepherded by a plurality of Elders; administrated and managed by Godly Deacons; and where every individual is gifted by God to fulfill their specific purpose within the body in humble submission to the spiritual leaders God has placed them under.

~~~~~

## Church - Planting A New Church

**When starting in a new church, what is the best way to get started other than going? Should you meet with the pastor? Should you meet**

## **with the elders? Should you just go?**

Let me address the negative side first - "church hopping" is epidemic in America. If you don't like what one church teaches or offers, just shop around until you find one that "meets your needs." Oh, how awful!

That idea is totally foreign to Scripture. The local church is about serving God and serving others, not looking for a place to "get your needs met." Church is treated like a business that competes for the market share of church attenders. This should not be.

Now having said that, let's address the issue of going to new church, and assume it's not a case of "church hopping."

Yes, you should investigate a church first to find out what it teaches and what it emphasizes: is it committed to fulfilling the great commission to spread the Gospel? Is it spiritually led by Godly men who nurture, train, and if necessary rebuke those who are under their care.

Is the Bible their sole authority for determining the will of God for the church? Do they emphasize prayer? Do they preach God's Word as it is written without regard to how it may offend or discomfort hearers?

Don't be afraid to ask questions and get clarification, **BUT DON'T EXPECT TO FIND A CHURCH WHERE DIFFERENCES OF OPINION AND INTERPRETATION DO NOT EXIST.** You have to be firm and unwavering

in the fundamentals; and give liberty and love in the peripheral issues.

It may take a few visits, talks with the Elders/Pastor and visits with members to determine those things. But once you do decide, then jump in with both feet and get busy serving the Lord, and serving others. Don't be a parasite; a "what's in it for me" type of Christian. There are plenty of those already...

~~~~~

Church – Selling Products And Books

Is it O.K. for a church to turn a library into a book store and have it open on Sunday mornings to sell books, t-shirts, tickets to Christians concerts....? I don't know if this applies to Jesus turning over the tables because of it being a market place or not. The elders of this church say it is not the same thing. They justify it: that the money made goes toward mission efforts, etc... But didn't the people selling animals for sacrifice have the same excuse... that is was for church?

The "market" in the synagogue that Jesus ransacked was forcing people to spend money in order to fulfill their duties of worship. The greed was obvious no matter how convenient it was. The temple had truly become a place of PROFIT and business rather than worship (for those administering

the temple, and no doubt the highest religious leaders were getting a big cut, if not most, of the income being made).

The "money changers" were profiting from a mandatory need of the people to buy their products in order to then do what God had asked them to do. We should never personally take advantage of people or profit from them by force or obligation in order to do God's will. And church leaders should never arrange a situation where their personal profit is the motive of how things are set up in the fellowship of Believers.

So in that light, I wouldn't say that having a bookstore in church is the same. However, I think if marketing products, services or conveniences at a church becomes a distracting emphasis, then the spiritual leaders of the flock should speak up, as they should anytime something detracts from the sole focus of JESUS CHRIST in the assembly of Believers.

I think it is hard NOT to argue that marketing, selling and business is encroaching rapidly into the church arena. How far is too far is a matter for the spiritually mature leaders of each church to determine knowing they are responsible to God.

~~~~~

## Church - Modern Practices

**People are trying to reinvent church today. The reason why I know my Church is right is because**

**we seek to model ourselves after the first century church. I don't think all these modern approaches are Godly, do you?**

Yes, I think there is much to be concerned about many modern fads and movements in the Church today. However, I would like to more specifically address your comment about "the first century church."

I often hear phrases like "restoring first century Christianity" or "modeled after the first century Church" or "the first century Church is our example." I've often heard arguments such as, "Well, the first century church didn't do that (or did do that)."

My question was, and is, and will always be: where does the Bible command us to be like the "first century Church?" What Scriptural basis is there to say that the first century church is some sort of model?

Biblically, our only example and model is Jesus Christ (1Cor 11:1; 2Cor 10:5; Phil 2:5; 1John 2:6; 1Peter 2:21).

If we do insist that the first century church is some sort of model example, I would then ask which of the following characteristics do we need to imitate (all were present in the "first century Church"):

Division - 1Cor 1  
Contention - 1Cor 7  
False teaching - Rev. 2; 2 Peter; 3John  
Sexual immorality - Rev. 2; 1Cor  
Wickedness - Rev. 2  
False Apostles - Rev. 2  
Toleration of sinfulness - Rev. 2

Spiritual deadness - Rev. 3

Lukewarmness - Rev. 3

The "first century Church" was made up of fallible, weak, sinful human beings no different than us. There was no magic about being a "first century" Christian.

The next time you hear the phrase "restoring the first century church" or "the first century church is our model" ask that person to give you Scripture that commands us imitate first century Christianity, and then ask them who gets to decide WHAT we imitate. Consider:

They met in homes not facilities

They had full celebratory meals for the Lords Supper

There were no paid staff or orators

The assembly was not a "spectator event", it was a fully interactive and mutually involved gathering

There were no choirs, bands or entertainment or full time song leaders

I could go on, but the point is, people PICK AND CHOOSE only certain parts of the "first century church" to imitate or restore. Who gets to make that decision?

Answer: no one... because it is an erroneous and non-Biblical idea to begin with.

Imitate Christ, not flawed first century Christians. Restore Christ to our lives,

not first the century Church examples that are imperfect and incomplete.

We are only on the right track to the degree with imitate (act like, look like, talk like and think like) JESUS CHRIST.... not the sinful converts of the first century.

That does NOT denigrate their commitment and sacrifice to the early Church. In fact, I think they would find it quite appalling if they knew the 21st Century Christians were "restoring first century Christianity" rather than fulfilling the call to be the 21st Century Christ-Followers we are called to be when we "imitate Christ."

Repeat something long enough and often enough, and it goes from good concept to tradition to doctrine.

Am I splitting hairs? I don't think so. We should not hang our Christian focus on a phrase that is not even Biblical to begin with. Repeating a phrase long enough and often enough transforms it from concept to tradition to doctrine. For some Christian groups today it most certainly has become a foundation.

The bigger point is that as Christians (and the Church) the only thing we should strive to restore is Christ-likeness; then only thing we want to model ourselves after is Christ's life; the only example we imitate is Jesus Christ.

~~~~~

Church – Biblical Illiteracy

How is it that so many churches today operate in complete defiance of God's Word, yet present itself as holy? There is clear and verifiable evidence of idolatry, arrogance, greed, just to name a few. Many of these churches boast of thousands of members. Many of those same members complain among themselves, but rarely address the powers that be. Tithing has been converted to acts of continuous begging, several times during church services. Yet when you read the church programs, you see no provisions for the hungry, or homeless or the lost that are beyond the church doors. God said that we are to visit those in prison as if we were He visiting them. Yet the majority of churches have no members ministering to this population. However, the so called Christian world ignores all of the above atrocities. And yes, that is what they are. My question is, how has this happened, and more importantly, how does it continue to happen?

In a nutshell? Biblical illiteracy and a casual attitude about sin.

Psalm 14:1-3 - The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, They have done abominable works, There is none who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, To see if

there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, They have together become corrupt; There is none who does good, No, not one. (NKJV)

Jeremiah 17:9 - The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? (NKJV)

Matthew 15:19 - For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. (NKJV)

1 John 2:15-17 - Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (NKJV)

1 John 5:19 - We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one. (NKJV)

Revelation 3:16-17 - So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— (NKJV)

~~~~~

## Church Leadership



## **Why do people call the Preacher 'Pastor' when that's wrong and not in the Bible?**

Pastor means "shepherd or overseer." There are two positions we commonly see today that are not Biblically supported (wrong? I don't know, but not explicitly Scriptural).

First is "Pastor" where "Pastor" is defined and manifested as "one man who preaches and rules a congregation."

Second is "preacher or minister" as in paid pulpit teacher who is on "staff" of a church to do the "sermons," visit the sick, engage in most of the evangelizing.

I've known people who say the "preacher" (or "minister") can NOT be an elder; when I've pressed for Scripture, was met with "they just can't." What they really mean is, "In our church they aren't." That's not the same as being a Scriptural command.

Also, the "preacher" at a church is not an "evangelist" per se. An evangelist is called to primarily teach and preach the Gospel to the unsaved and in Scripture is not represented in the mode of what we call "ministers, preachers, Pastors" today.

Ephesians 4:11 ....And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, (NKJV)

Apostles and prophets are not in operation after the founding of the

Church. Pastors are elders or bishops (Acts 20:20-28; 1 Peter 5:1-5).

Teachers are those specially gifted by God to proclaim and explain His Word to others and will be held responsible for it (James 3:1). Evangelists are "publishers of glad tidings", - missionary proclaimers of the Gospel such as Philip:

Acts 8:40 - But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea. (NKJV)

More accurately, and I think more Biblical, effective and spiritually sound is that the "preacher" (as we refer to the "sermon-deliverer") at Church should ideally (but not necessarily) be a "teaching elder." Who is more qualified to teach the sheep than a shepherd? We get too caught up in our church traditions and begin to confuse tradition with Scripture.

1 Timothy 5:17 - Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. (NKJV)

Some might say, "That verse doesn't say preach," but the implication is clear. He doesn't have to pass his "labor in the word and doctrine" to some mouthpiece called "preacher"... that's REALLY forcing tradition on Scripture. A "preacher" is a "proclaimer" used in Scripture to denote someone who teaches publicly, what we would refer to as a sermon. This could be an Evangelist proclaiming the Gospel, or an Elder publicly teaching, or a Teacher publicly teaching (2 Timothy 4:2).

However, "preacher" is not a particular gift or office like evangelist, teacher or Elder. "Preacher" - as a paid church position referring to the person who gives a sermon every week - is a concoction of religion, not Scripture. "Preacher" refers to an action, not a gift, calling or title. The "gifts" or "offices" in Scripture are teacher, Elder, apostle, prophet or evangelist.

It is our traditions that cause confusion. An evangelist is not a "church preacher"... an evangelist is someone who focuses on preaching the Good News to the lost (which is NOT a primary purpose or responsibility of the corporate church gathering whose purpose is for worshipping God and edifying the Saints). The person who stands up and teaches the "flock" during corporate worship ("the assembling of ourselves together" Heb 10:25) should either be a spiritually mature man who is gifted by God to teach and/or (even better in my OPINION) a Shepherd who also filters his teaching through his responsibility to oversee and tend to the sheep he cares for.

The Bible only mentions the Elder (Pastor, Bishop in the true Biblical sense) and the evangelist (the Biblical version as discussed here) as worthy of being supported by the church as far as full time ministry work goes. Of course, our "missionaries" are about the purest form of "evangelist" you can get taking the Good News to the world. (1Tim 5:17-19; and Paul, an evangelist among other things defended his right to be supported, 1Thess 2:9). The idea of paid pulpit preacher and the "Pastor, one man church ruler" is not found in the Bible.

I have asked these questions many times to church leaders about this common, but not Biblically supported, idea of both "Pastor" (one man who preaches and rules) and "minister" (paid preacher/teacher who is 'managed' by Elders and does most of the evangelizing, visiting and "church work") and have yet to receive any answer that isn't simply "tradition" dressed up in a few proof texts, or been accused of being divisive. I've even been answered with, "Who cares; it doesn't matter." To their credit, I have a few church leaders simply say, "Yes, you are correct. It's tradition, not Bible."

Is it wrong? Is the "Pastor" or "pulpit minister" - as we see and understand them today - something God doesn't approve of? I will say, "It isn't Biblically supported." Not that I'm wishy-washy, but I don't consider any of these questions to be "salvation-centric" - they don't constitute "preaching another gospel." So I won't call it false teaching, apostate or sin; but I will declare firmly that it is NOT specifically Biblical.... it's tradition, often times elevated to and mistaken for Scripture.

I will say this. It is my opinion that the most potential for problems and failure comes with the "Pastor" (one-man church-ruler-preacher) arrangement. The Bible calls for a plurality of Elder/Shepherds because of the simple fact that one man ruling a church alone is a mine field of potential difficulties, ego, abuses, politics and power struggle. Again, is it wrong? I can only state my own opinion that I don't think it's BEST.

My opinion is that we should be CAREFUL when we adopt tradition, good ideas or proven methods that are not specifically Biblical. They should be continually evaluated, and as Christians we should be constantly alert that tradition is not elevated to "Scripture" or "doctrine."

~~~~~

Church Organization

How are churches supposed to be organized? What about overseeing organizations like the Southern Baptists or Presbyterians?

The Bible is very plain and straightforward about church structure, and yet Christians for the most part do their own thing, what "seems right in their own eyes."

Jesus Christ is the only Head and Ruler of all churches - Eph 1:23; Col 1:24.

The Bible is the sole and complete authority for doctrine - 1Pet 1:3; 2Tim 3:16-17.

The Bible never gives example of anything but churches that are local, autonomous groups of Believers. After the Apostles, there is no record or command of an overseeing Body, something which did not begin to appear for about 150 years when the first "bishop over several churches" appeared. There were councils of church leaders that decided early church doctrine, but this part of the establishment of the early church and did not become a governing body.

Once the council decided on issues, the group was dissolved.

Each church is shepherded (spiritual overseers) by a plurality of Elders (Pastor/Bishop/Elder; same thing, same word) - Acts 14:23; Acts 16:4, 5; Acts 20:17, 1 Tim. 4:14; 1 Tim. 5:17, 19; Tit. 1:59; Heb. 11:2; Jas. 5:14, 15; 1 Pet. 5:15

Each church is served by Deacons who are spiritually mature managers of church activity - Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim. 3:8-13.

That is the plain and simple teaching of Scripture, and yet we see it routinely ignored by Christianity.

The SBC has the same problems with scandals, politics, power struggles and money that every other big overseeing organization has whether Catholic, Presbyterian or Assembly of God (or the cults with big organizations).

While the SBC is CERTAINLY more Biblically conservative than most every other religious hierarchy, having a parent organization is still not Biblical, and thus predictably, fraught with problems. At the very least, we cannot expect the highest blessing of God when we do things differently than He prescribes. I don't think it constitutes the absence of a saving Gospel by default, but there are certainly "religious organizations" that seem to have lost the basic Gospel message.

There are groups who would claim an improper church organization is tantamount to false religion, and thus not truly Christian. I disagree. Church

organization can be out of kilter while not resulting in a false Gospel message. Correct church organization is not salvific... though that is NOT a reason to think it is unimportant.

I have people at this point say "yeah, but the Bible does NOT say we CAN'T have governing church bodies."

Correct. It doesn't. And often times when the Bible doesn't directly speak to something, it becomes a matter of liberty. However, God has plenty to say about how His Church is organized and when God speaks proactively, it eliminates the liberty to do it differently (unless the Bible plainly grants that liberty).

The example we find in the Bible is always a local, autonomous church, shepherded by a plurality of Elders, served by Deacons. This is not a denominational preference... it is the plain directive of Scripture that has been ignored to both extremes by man. Today we mostly have churches either ruled by one man, or ruled by a overseeing political body... very interesting (and predictable) that man wants to do everything EXCEPT what God prescribes.

With "one pastor" churches you risk personality worship, dictatorial rule, and one man with little or no accountability. Or, you have the situation where the "one man" is at the mercy of the "church vote" and has to keep people happy to keep his "job." It is not Biblical (neither is the paid professional church preacher/Pastors/staff... but that's another issue). That IN NO WAY means every "one man ruled" church is experiencing any of these things,

but it certainly makes a fertile ground for it.

With "overseeing organizations" you get politics, power struggles, and unbiblical authorities telling other Christians how to worship, live, believe etc.

The local autonomous church is made up of a community that lives together and works together. Jesus Christ is our only higher "authority" to which all churches are subject, and the Bible is His revealed will. There is no Biblical permission or example to create overseeing organizations and they have ALWAYS been problematic, starting with the Roman Catholics and every other one since then. "One pastor" churches are just as problematic because God wants accountability within a plurality of Godly men.

Is it WRONG (sinful?) to have the large overseeing organization? Let's just say it's not what God commanded, or gave as examples in the Bible, and therefore MAN is deciding there is a BETTER way than what God has prescribed. Historically, it's easy to show that it causes problems... it is the human "we must have a King" syndrome. Humans want someone to tell them "what to do" and "how to do it" because that is much easier than "working out" our own salvation with the fear of God and the liberty of Christ.

I would stop well short of saying that churches with non-Biblical organization structures are heretical or unchristian (some are, but for other reasons)... but I would not hesitate to

say that using a non-Biblical organization is LESS than God wants, and can never be as fruitful or spiritually healthy as sticking the clearly presented Biblical model (all other factors being equal).

Church organization is not presented in Scripture as a TEST of Christian fellowship and those who make it one are at least as worse off as those with the unBiblical church structure.

The principle involved here holds true for ALL aspects of the Christian life: do it God's way, that's the best way. Add man's "improvements" and you get less than what God would have. Most of the time, you get a LOT less.

~~~~~

## Civic Duty

**A Jehovah's witness told me that they do not vote or do anything with the government. Does the Bible teach us not to vote?**

The JW prohibition extends to other things as well, such as military service (which is ironic considering the fact that the very government they won't defend gives them the religious freedom to do so).

This question is just a parcel of a more general question, and that is, "What is our duty to the government and the authorities as Christians?"

Answering this question covers issues like voting, saying the Pledge of

Allegiance, serving in the military and general civic issues. It doesn't matter if it's JW's, Baptists or unbelievers, God's Word is binding to all whether they acknowledge it or not (for all people will be judge by God's Revealed Will).

So let's see what Scripture says about civic duty, obeying the authorities, and being part of a governed society (emphasis mine in the verses):

Romans 13:1-7 - Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor. (NKJV)

We are to be subject to the government because NO authority exists that God doesn't allow (hard for us to understand sometimes, but still true).

We are to pay our taxes, even if we don't like them, or they are too high. We are to respect our authorities and honor those who serve.

Matthew 22:21 - They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (NKJV)

Jesus Himself said in effect, "Do what you have to do as a citizen, and do what you have to do as a Christian." If Jesus was against things like taxes, voting and military duty, He passed up a perfect chance to say so.

1 Peter 2:13-17 - Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men— as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king. (NKJV)

The Apostle Peter tells us to obey the laws of the land "for the Lord's sake" that we may silence the "ignorance of foolish men"... fear God, honor the King.

But, we are NOT to give blind allegiance to the government. When they command us, or require us to do something that violates God's law, we are to respectfully refuse to comply...

Acts 5:29 - But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men." (NKJV)

As Christians, we should be the very best of society: the most honest, the most loyal, the most obedient (within the boundaries of God's Word) of all people... examples of what model, productive and hardworking citizens look like.

Matthew 5:14-16 - "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." (NKJV)

~~~~~

Clothing – Women Wearing Pants

Is it wrong for woman to wear trousers (pants)?

Yes and no.

No, there is nothing inherently or innately wrong about a woman wearing pants. There is no Scripture forbidding it.

Yes, it is wrong, if it violates the principles of modesty or roles. What I mean by roles, is that Biblically, men are supposed to be manly, and women

are supposed to be feminine. That is how God created us.

Oh! But that is mighty old-fashioned, prudish and sexist, isn't it? No, it's God's perfect plan, and the reason we have so many "gender" problems today is because we have "gone our own way" rather than adhering to the Creators plan for boys and girls.

So pants on women are not only wrong, it is sinful, IF they are immodest, or if they are not recognizably feminine (and that depends a lot on the rest of the clothing that is worn).

1 Timothy 2:9-10 - ...in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works. (NKJV)

~~~~~

## Communion – Are We Picking And Choosing?

**Must we use unleavened bread in communion? I know the "Lord's Supper" is a "type" of the "Passover." I know they used unleavened bread in the Old Testament and we have examples of that in the New Testament. Is it a "sin" to use regular bread today? We don't use "wine" today, just**

### **grape juice. Are we picking the parts we want?**

It is correct to say that the "Biblical example" was unleavened bread for Communion because indeed it was; that is not an argued fact. There is plenty of historical, culture and Jewish history to confirm it.

Because of all the obvious symbolism, I would argue strongly for the use of unleavened bread, but I would never classify it as doctrine; nor would I go so far as to call it a sin to use other types of bread.

It is our "example" - and absent a direct command in Scripture - we should stop short of commanding its use; however, I would always argue VERY strongly for its use if possible because of the example and symbolism.

There is a CHASM between saying something is an example, a suggestion, and even to arguing that it SHOULD be used - to jumping all the way to saying it is command - or a sin not to use it.

It is not commanded - so it is not a sin to do otherwise unless you violate your conscience. Given the incredible symbolism, we should not shy away from teaching Christians about unleavened bread which of course goes all the way back to Jewish feasts.

We are far too quick to declare "sin" and "not sin" about things that the Bible simply does not definitively declare. We do this about Church particulars, peripheral doctrines and religious traditions. It's amazing how

many things we make "essential to salvation" or "essential for fellowship" when the Bible declares only a short list of "essentials" - and grace-filled liberty in all else.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Communion – Miming It?

**This weekend I attended a church gathering and they had what they called a Mime Communion service. The two persons that were giving communion were dressed entirely in black with black hoods and their faces painted white with a black tear drop from one eye, she held a loaf of bread wrapped as The Infant Jesus and he stabbed the bread and the (wine) blood went somehow into a special cross on what was to be the altar, then they served communion (I would not receive it). I am 61 yrs. old and have never in my life time seen such a thing. I am so confused, if this is Godly where in scripture can I find it?**

Let's answer the easy part first: it's not in Scripture.

The second easiest part to answer is to identify what is clearly unBiblical AND wrong, thus having no part of any Christian assembly of Believers:

- The infant Jesus being stabbed and bleeding onto an altar

- Black hoods, painted faces, bread wrapped in baby clothes, special crosses for drama skits or miming

Now some may criticize me at this point saying that drama falls into the realm of liberty, and I will allow that this point is my own opinion. So let me explain it.

While some may exclude "drama" in the Believers assembly at all, this is without Scriptural prohibition. "Ah yes," some will answer, "we do not have Scriptural permission for it either! We are SILENT where the Bible is silent."

The same folks will turn right around and defend the use of legions of things that we do not have Scriptural permission for justifying each by saying that it is either a "help" or "means to an end" or "helping fulfill a command." However, the list is quite lengthy to defend: musical instruments, song books, sound systems, dedicated edifices, paid pastoral staff, professional speakers and leaders, multimedia, pews, Sunday schools, seminaries, preaching schools, pulpits, etc. We tend to defend those things we are used to, comfortable with or desensitized too, while quickly pointing out the "obvious wrongness" of anything we don't regularly experience or practice.

Even the ritualistic nature of our modern "Communion" is not Scriptural, much to the chagrin of most Christians. Originally it was a full meal of joyful fellowship, not a somber, symbolic ritual.

You cannot categorically dismiss "drama" as unscriptural and call our modern "Lord's Supper" observance a



“liberty” (because we have changed it to be more convenient for us? Or simply because of religious tradition?). If we want to use the “by specific permission only” argument, then we need to do away with little pieces of broken unleavened bread, little plastic cups of grape juice, communion tables, silver serving dishes, ritualistic routine and rote prayers to accompany it, paid leaders or clergy to administer it and the very buildings we have built to accommodate the entire process.

We either have liberty, or we don't. Most people only want the liberty THEY are comfortable with, and point out how clearly wrong the rest is. MY liberty is okay. YOUR liberty is unScriptural.

To say that “drama” in total is categorically unscriptural and prohibited in the Believers assembly, is speaking where God hasn't spoke. However, the absence of prohibition must certainly not be the definitive requirement for what we can and cannot do... or we might as well play football and “bingo for Jesus” too.

As with all things “Christian” that are not specifically clarified in Scripture, we exercise prayerful discernment, principle and maturity. So when considering something like drama, we ask ourselves if it is decent and orderly? (1 Cor 14:40); is it violating specific Scriptural command or direction; does it cause confusion? (1 Cor 14:33); is it edifying? (Eph 4:12); does it glorify Christ? (1 Cor 6:20); is it overtly worldly? (Rom 12:2).

I'm sure there are other questions as well, but those are off the top of my head. In this case of “mime

communion” I can see where several principles are violated: it is confusing simply because parts of it are unbiblical and simply human invention; it doesn't seem very orderly and decent given the imagery of stabbing a swaddled loaf of bread; it certainly appears very worldly minded with its artistic license and use of the spectacular.

I personally enjoy a good Christian dramatic presentation. I've seen wonderful presentations of Bible stories, dramatic readings of Paul's letters... even dramas about the resurrection. All were decent, edifying and clearly glorified God in their presentation, in the assembly of Believers.

Besides the obvious errors in this “mimed communion,” I personally do not think we have the liberty to “monkey around” with something the Lord established in a prescribed manner. I'm not sure there is anything to “mime” about the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper is pretty clearly set out as far as the manner of it... but having said that, we have stretched the original version to its outer limits in my opinion by transforming a joyous meal of memorial fellowship into a somber, symbolic ritual. I don't think an unscriptural dramatic miming and stabbing a loaf of bread is the answer; however, we should do a lot of thinking about our “traditional ritual” too.

So perhaps we ought to next look at the hypocrisy of condemning one aberration of the original, while participating willfully in another... hmmm.

I think you showed discernment and courage in not participating since it violated your conscience. Would that more people heeded the Scriptural warning to not participate in an "unworthy manner" (1 Corinthians 11:29).

What are your thoughts and questions about the Lord's Supper, this "mime" version, and our current traditional version?

~~~~~

Communion – Every Sunday?

I was told that Communion must be taken every Sunday, only on Sunday, and only at church. They said it was a sin to do otherwise because this is what the Bible teaches. Is this true?

There are no specific verses in Scripture that COMMAND or explicitly instruct that Communion be taken EVERY Sunday, ONLY on Sunday or only at Church.

That we ARE to partake regularly of the Lord's Supper until He returns is not optional (1Cor 11:23-26). That God has clearly set out some sort of special day for it, frequency or location is another matter altogether.

The Church of Christ is the most well-known church group to hold and teach this view you describe. It comes primarily from this verse:

Acts 20:7 - Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came

together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight. (NKJV)

Taking this verse, a hermeneutic (a method of interpreting Scripture) is applied that is referred to in the Church of Christ as "command, example or clear inference."

First, let me say this: there is NOTHING wrong with taking the Lord's Supper every Sunday or at the church service. The question is, does this frequency and location become a matter of doctrine supported by clear Bible teaching and thus a "sin" if not adhered to?

That is where I believe this view goes astray and exposes the multitude of weaknesses that come into light regarding this peculiar (and concerning) method of Bible interpretation ("command, example, or clear inference").

There is NO COMMAND in Scripture relating to frequency, day or location concerning Communion; if there was, it wouldn't be a question in the first place.

Using the idea of "example" or PATTERN, as it is often referred to, we do find in Acts 20:7 an EXAMPLE of the day, and an inference of the frequency:

The first day of the week; Sunday, the Lord's Day;

And it is clearly implied this was a continual practice.

Fair enough, but who gets to decide WHICH examples we follow, and WHAT inferences are binding? Consider the other examples and inferences in the same passage:

Should it be only when a church leader is ready to depart somewhere? v.7

Must it include a spoken message every time? v.7

By example, the message must continue until after midnight. v.7

Should the room we are in have windows, with people seated in them? v. 8

It should occur in an upper room, lit with many lamps. v.8

The eating of the supper should occur on MONDAY. v.11

Looking at Mark 14:17-26:

Are we supposed to sing a hymn afterwards every time? v.26

Should we go outside to a hill or mountain, or can we only do it when the Mount of Olives is close enough for us to visit? v. 26

From Matthew 26:26-27:

Are we to drink from a shared cup? (Which some churches do teach)

Should we, by example, all be seated at a dinner table?

Should we be celebrating Passover?

"That's absurd!" some would say. Of course it is, and such are the problems with an interpretative method like "command, example, plain inference." You are left with deciding WHICH examples, and declaring what constitutes a "clear inference."

When it comes to Scripture, you can, and should, only be dogmatic where Scripture is dogmatic. There are several COMMANDS about Communion but none involve frequency, special day of observance, location or how many cups:

Bread and wine are both necessary - Matt 26:27; 1Cor 11:26

Self-examination and the right attitude of mind is necessary when partaking - 1Cor 11:28-29

Purifying of sin from one's life is required - 1Cor 5:7-8

We are to continue observing the Lords Supper until He returns - Matt 26:29; 1Cor 11:26

Notice that none of these commands are concerned with superficial externals, legalistic regulation or sacramentalism (a topic for another day).

These specifics of communion are clearly COMMANDED, not implied or "exampled."

There is nothing wrong with taking examples from Scripture and using them to help guide us in the practice of our faith... but to make this method a way to develop DOCTRINE - and consequently label differing view or

practice "sin" - is fraught with concern and danger.

Who decides WHICH examples are to be followed? By what measurement is something "clearly implied?" This opens up the door for legalism, denominationalism, Pharisaism and at it's far end, cultism.

Frequency, location and logistics concerning Communion are a matter of liberty, not something God outlined like a Levitical procedure. To turn this into a matter of salvation, fellowship or sin is "religion" - not Christianity. It is a matter of conscience and liberty in the absence of a clear Biblical command or instruction.

Here are a couple other significant problems with this teaching:

The Lord abolished the requirement of "special" days. To say that Communion can only be taken on Sunday certainly elevates that day to a "special" day when in fact for Christians, EVERY day is to be as holy, sanctified and dedicated to the Lord as Sunday is. (Romans 14:5). If the "First Day of the Week" was a special day, the only day communion could be observed, then Paul not only missed a great chance to inform us of this, but actually left the issue confused.

Communion was instituted on a Wednesday or Thursday - Matt 26 and similar Gospel accounts

Act 2:42-47 arguably indicates that the Lord's Supper was being observed DAILY

1Cor 11:26 says "WHENEVER" or "AS OFTEN" Communion is observed, not "on Sunday when you observe it."

When these events were occurring, "the first day of the week" started at sundown on SATURDAY, making Saturday evening "permissible" but Sunday AFTER sundown would not be.

There are many "patterns" in Scripture such as the pattern of blood sacrifice, atonement or justification. These "patterns" are real and are a great help in understanding Scripture.

However, when "patterns" are substantiated by selectively choosing examples or "clear inference," then it becomes what has been called "patternistic legalism"..... in other words, creating binding doctrine and practice based on selective use of examples and inferences.

God forbid. Jesus freed us from such bondage.

~~~~~

## Communion - Should It Be Given To Nonmembers?

**I would greatly appreciate your response to the following question I have. For a few years I was attending a church which I noticed after a period of time there was no 'Lord's Supper' service and asked about it. To my surprise I was told it was not served to non-members**

**of the church. Do you know if this is right in God's sight?**

It would be insightful to know which church you attend, but it will not affect the Scriptural accuracy of the answer.

First of all, Communion is obviously meant for those who have been truly saved through a saving faith in Jesus Christ because it is all about salvation. Communion is a memorial to Jesus demonstrating His broken body and spilled blood for our sins (1Cor 11.25).

There is no scriptural basis to restrict Communion to "members" of a given church; however, it could be somewhat supported Scripturally if an attempt was made to restrict it to professing Believers; but since the Scripture does not specifically apply this restriction, it is better to be silent where the Scripture is silent.

The Bible teaches us that we must examine our lives carefully and partake of Communion in a worthy manner or consequences can occur (sickness, even death; 1Cor 11.27). Communion is serious business.

It may be appropriate to restrict children who have professed salvation but who are not mature enough to understand what Communion really is because of the warnings in 1Corinthians; but this is my opinion only.

Communion is not Scripturally restricted to being administered by an "official" or "authority." Any Christian

may partake or have Communion as long as it is done according to the Biblical example (unleavened bread & fruit of the vine - 'grapes') because the Biblical examples are specific for a reason and represent truths about Christ.

"Membership" in a local church body is not mandated Scripturally to begin with; however, it has its obvious benefits by unifying the local congregation in common beliefs, commitment and standards. "Membership" is never given in Scripture as a reason to exclude or deny a professing, practicing Believer from a Christian activity.

What if you were new in town? What if you were visiting? What if you were working in town for a four month period and wanted to worship at a church temporarily? Does your lack of "membership" exclude you from Christian worship and activity? Your true "membership" in Christ's Body through your faith in Him entitles you to worship, Communion and participation with any group of Biblical Christians.

Communion is a VERY important part of our Christian experience. I am very timid to suggest people investigate changing churches (because I believe "church hopping" is a PLAGUE in modern Christianity), but if your current church refuses to serve Communion based on "membership" (not salvation), I would look for a church that is more dedicated to Scriptural adherence.

~~~~~

Compassion For Those Who Are Hurting

I have a friend whose husband was killed in a crash. He was 31, she is 28. She is 8 weeks pregnant and has a 2 yr old daughter. What words can I say to her?

This question falls more into the "advice" category than the "Bible answer" one; but I couldn't let it pass because I think it is good for people to know how to respond to others when they are suffering intensely.

Having said that, let me immediately preface my answer. This is my opinion based on my experience.

There are only two things I think you should say to your friend in the absence of her asking you to say something:

Is there anything that I can take care of for you?

Better yet; look around and see what needs to be taken care of and take the initiative to do it, i.e. don't ask if the grass needs mowed, just mow it; don't ask if the house needs cleaned, just clean it. Do these things being sensitive to her privacy and emotions; she may not want you around, or may need to do these things herself in order to have some "normalcy" back.

I am praying for you. Is there anything specific I can pray for?

Obviously, no answer is a blanket for every type of person or situation. In general though, we are too quick to offer empty clichés or nice sounding Scriptures that do more to make us feel good about our advice than it does to help the other person.

We feel helpless when people are suffering. We feel like we just **MUST** say something to "help." But the fact is, rarely can you significantly help with mere words (again, **UNLESS** they ask you something). She is hurting and will continue to hurt. She will hear enough platitudes and simple solutions.

It has been my experience that just having people there to listen and having people take care of the mundane daily burdens is a very effective way to help.

In my opinion, our words are only helpful and appreciated when they have been asked for. When your hurting friend wants some advice, wants some spiritual direction or needs some communication from you, she will probably let you know one way or another. Let her do the talking unless she specifically requests that you carry the conversation.

It is much harder to **BE THERE** for someone, than it is to express a few condolences and then get on with our busy lives. In a month or so, everyone around her will be "past" this tragedy and getting on with life. It might take months or years for your friend to get "past" it.

The most important thing you can "say" is that you are there for her, for

the long haul, and that as long as she is hurting, you will hurt with her (Rom 12.15).

That is my opinion only based on my experience.

~~~~~

## Compassion For Those We Don't Like

**My mother is 82 and in good health, but getting a little more confused all the time. I talk to her or see her every day, make sure all her bills are paid, and generally take care of everything she needs done. I have lunch or dinner with her several times a week and take her to see our grandkids almost every time I go. My problem is I really don't like her. She's not a nice person, although she professes to be a Christian, and every time I'm with her I realize how much I don't like her. I am almost always kind to her, but sometimes I just avoid her. Every time I think I have forgiven her for things in the past, she does something else that infuriates me. I don't argue with her any more, I just bite my tongue. But I can't seem to ever get to the point where I can honestly say I like being with her or even talking to her. HELP! I am probably going to have to move in with her if things**

**keep going the way they are and I don't know if I can stay kind and gentle in that case. Any advice?**

Your situation is not at all uncommon in this age where people are living longer and longer. It has become (even if most people are oblivious) one of the primary concerns of today: how will we care for our aging parents?

Alzheimer's, dementia and a host of illnesses, as well as just plain old not-too-sweet-dispositions often conspire to leave the elderly bitter, paranoid, angry or hateful. There's nothing easy about it.

I have personally helped care for an Alzheimer's patient who thought I was there to steal everything from him and to hurt him. He was combative, insulting and mean. He had also been a church leader for decades, and was known as one of the gentlest, kindest and most loving people the local church had ever known.

Why do these old-age illnesses transform people like this? I have no idea, and won't cloud the issue by speculating. Suffice to say, we can't change the reality of it, so we're left with contemplating how we should respond as Christians.

Here are a few of my own thoughts, hardly authoritative or definitive, but the best I can do from my own experience:

You honor the elderly, and especially your parents (Eph 6:2), when you care for them, no matter whether it's easy,

or horrible (Gal 6:2). God sees your sacrifice and knows YOUR heart regardless of the response or behavior of those you care for (1Pet 3:8).

Try to focus on, and remember, the kind of person they WERE before they transformed into the person you now struggle with. If they have always been unkind or difficult, then your task is doubly hard, but will be even more rewarded by your Heavenly Father who sees all (1John 3:17; Matt 10:42; 1Pet 1:4).

Rehearse your reactions ahead of time so that you are not caught up in the emotion of the moment. Know how you will respond to the typical and predictable unkind comment or combative behavior.

Say to yourself over and over, "I will not take it personally." Unless the person has always been "not nice," it would probably break their hearts to realize how they are acting.

Remind yourself frequently that it is old age and illness talking. Remind yourself that soon, when you are both in heaven, that a perfect relationship will be restored, and the difficulties you are experiencing now will be instantly forgotten (Rev 21:4).

Now, in the particular situation described in our question today, it would appear that there have been relationship troubles all along given that "the past" is mentioned. This makes the circumstances even tougher.

You feel like there are past wrongs that have not been made right. On top of that, you now feel like you are being

treated poorly when all you are doing is sacrificially giving and caring for the other person.

All I can say is: YOU ARE ONE BLESSED PERSON!

Oh, that's not sarcastic or facetious. I really mean it. God only gives us what he knows we can handle (1Cor 10:13). He refines us, purifies us, blesses us, and rewards us according to where we are at spiritually. He has laid on you a situation where you can exhibit self-sacrifice, pure love and Godly compassion (Phil 3:10).

Think of the example you are living out for your children! (Rom 12:1)

Think of the glory you are bringing to God by your sacrifice!

Think of the joy you are providing your Savior through your love for others even when you aren't being loved back! (He knows a little something about that too).

Think of the reward you are storing up in heaven! (Matt 6:20)

Think of the reception and thanks you will get from your mother when you finally see her in heaven! She will have a clear, perfect mind again, and will fully realize the sacrifice you made for her!

My dear sister, God has allowed you the honor and treasure of purification that is uniquely found in sacrificial service to others... made even more priceless through its current "thanklessness" and "difficulty" and "hardship." You are storing up so



much treasure in heaven it will take ETERNITY just to fathom it all!

This is what is known as an "eternal perspective." The difficulties of this life are often transformed into opportunities and blessings when we view them from the other side of eternity.

Does that make it easy? No! Does that change the other person? Not usually. Does it instantly heal all your hurt and change your frustrations? Nope and nope.

Should it cause you embrace the trial and find purpose in it? Yes. Should it eventually be a source of joy as you meditate on GOD'S PERSPECTIVE of the situation? Absolutely.

~~~~~

Compassion For What Jesus Did For Us

I love the Lord with all my heart, soul, and mind. The problem is that I can't seem to feel compassion anymore for what He went through for us. He was tortured beyond belief for us. When I used to think about this, tears would flow freely. Now it's like there are no feelings, only indifference. Can you help?

What you are experiencing is not uncommon. As life digs at us, robs us, and disappoints us, we become

desensitized (loss of deep heart feeling).

As our hopes are unrealized, tragedies buffet us and people let us down, we become desensitized. As are dreams fade, our health wanes and pain frequents us, we become desensitized.

As the years go by, and pretty much all we are concerned with is "me"... my life, my time, my money, my success, my happiness, my home, my job, my kids, my wants, my, my, my..... we become desensitized.

For those of us who live in relative abundance, comfort, ease and prosperity... we become desensitized to anything but our type of easy life. Comfort breeds complacency, complacency desensitizes.

When we are inundated with "Christianity" in all forms - from the genuine to the watered-down ear-tickling to experiential foolishness to clownish televangelism - we become desensitized.

The cares of our materialistic life desensitize us. The distractions of a sin cursed world desensitize us.

Truth is, in abundant countries like America, many (most?) Christians are just simply so caught up in improving their own lifestyle, except for an occasional conscience-soothing charitable act or moment of sympathy, we just have too many wants, too many cares, too much stuff breeding too much discontentment to be too awfully concerned about others.

I'll admit it. If I look at how I spend my time, my money, my energy, my talents and my effort... it is primarily on what I WANT. This smothers compassion because we do not take ENOUGH time to step out of our life and into the lives of others.

Like a callous that keeps getting rubbed and grinded, our spiritual skin grows thick and numb. Through emotional pain, spiritual short circuiting, spiritual lethargy and spiritual neglect, we become thoroughly desensitized.

Then one day, we wake up and realize that the suffering of others doesn't really affect us that much anymore. We aren't moved by the fact that tens of thousands of Christians around the world are imprisoned, persecuted and killed every year. We realize that we can think about how Jesus was brutalized and murdered... and it's little more than a story we go over every year at Easter time.

Is it all doom and gloom, or is there a way to regain spiritual sensitivity? I believe there is. Now if you're looking for some new, novel, really cool and trendy answer... sorry to disappoint. What is called for is some good old fashioned spiritual discipline, evaluating your life, and making some changes.

Ask God to soften your heart.

Ask God to give you plenty of opportunity to show compassion to suffering and hurting people.

Ask God to open your eyes to new and deeper understanding of the suffering of others.

Ask God to refresh and deepen your love for Christ and your understanding of His suffering.

Study what God's word says about compassion to renew your heart and mind, aligning it with God's perspective.

Jesus displayed compassion and wept over those he loved:

Luke 19:41 - Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it. (NKJV)

Have compassion on those who suffer for Christ knowing it can happen to you too:

Hebrews 13:3 - Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also. (NKJV)

Seek out those who are truly poor and help them, invest time in them, rather than spending all your time enjoying or chasing more "lifestyle":

Proverbs 19:17 - He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord, And He will pay back what he has given. (NKJV)

God has blessed you with strength and resources so that you can have compassion on those who are weak and hurting:

Galatians 6:2 - Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. (NKJV)

Have compassion on those who are weak, straying and lack knowledge just as the Lord did for you, and I, when we were lost and blind: Hebrews 5:2 - He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. (NKJV)

Have compassion on the lost masses who have no hope and no leader: Matthew 9:36 - But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. (NKJV)

Have compassion on the weaknesses of others, since Jesus has compassion on your weakness: Hebrews 4:15 - For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. (NKJV)

We can't have compassion and be moved by what Jesus did for us if we do not have compassion in general. It cannot be compartmentalized or segmented. You're either a compassionate person, or you're not, to whatever degree.

To regain and rejuvenate our compassion for the Lord, we need to cultivate our compassion within the world God gave us to live and the people of that world.

As we exercise and gain compassion for other people, then that compassion naturally spills over and flows into our compassion for what Jesus did for us.

If you have grown cold towards the Lord, and the story of His suffering no longer moves you, then perhaps it is time to evaluate your compassion towards other people... not just those close to you, but the lost of the world, the truly poor and needy, and suffering Saints from every nation.

Compassion breeds compassion. Compassion is learned and cultivated by choice - the choice to turn from the pursuit of our own life and lifestyle, to the attention and love for the life of others. Jesus had the greatest compassion of all:

Romans 5:8 - But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (NKJV)

~~~~~

## Confession Of Sin To Others?

**Are we to confess our sins to a Priest, such as how the Catholic Church teaches?**

Depends on what you believe is the supreme authority. If you believe it to be a church or an organization, then there are some that teach this. I don't put my faith in a church or religion. I put it in Jesus Christ and His revealed, written Word. If you believe the final authority to be the Bible, then let's see what the Bible says about confession:

Every person will eventually confess on bended knee to God: Romans 14:11 - For it is written: "As I

live, says the Lord, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God." (NKJV)

We should confess our sins to each other as Christians:

James 5:16 - Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. (NKJV)

We should confess our sins to God:  
1 John 1:9 - If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (NKJV)

We should confess our sins to receive mercy and blessing:  
Proverbs 28:13 - He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy. (NKJV)

I took the long way around, but the short answer is NO... the Bible does not command us to confess to a Priest (other than in the sense that ALL Christians are priests; 1Pet 2.5).

The Bible gives no command to set apart certain Christians as "priests," somehow a greater status (more holy; more called) than other Christians (this holds true for the term 'saint' as well). The Priest, in the Roman Catholic sense is not found in the New Testament, nor is any commandment to confess to him, nor is any special ability or commission to be the hearer/forgiver of sins on God's behalf.

There is certainly no man, by any name or title, who has the power to forgive sins. Any man who claims such power invades the sole realm of God Himself. Those who use John 20:23 as a basis for that commit a great heretical distortion of Scripture.

## Conscience - Should I Enlist In The Military?

**I feel like God wants me to re-enlist in the Army so I can witness for Him there. Some Christians are telling me it's wrong. Is it?**

While there are religious groups that claim that any government service is wrong and that taking life for any reason is wrong, they all have one problem: they lack clear Biblical support.

How do I know that? Because if there was clear Scripture for either, there wouldn't be any debate.

So let me start first by saying that there is NO clear Scripture that I can present to you about whether serving in the military is right or wrong in all situations, and I believe that there are several reasons why God-ordained authority is justified in taking life, but that's another issue for another time.

Of course, I might get accused of being biased since I am a veteran and ex-Drill Sergeant.

I would be curious what reasons your Christian friends are giving. I'm sorry

they are telling you it's wrong rather than presenting it as their opinion.

Is it wrong to re-enlist? Given the information you've given me, I can only say it would be wrong for the following reason: violating your conscience.

If you are praying and asking for God's direction, and your spiritual life is reasonably healthy, I would say that you make the decision based on how your conscience leads you, and trust God.

As well, you might forego friends your age, and ask the counsel of a few mature Godly older Christians who have been around the block a couple of times. God will often use the advice of spiritually mature Christians to confirm His will in our lives.

~~~~~

Conscience – Should I Give If My Spouse Does Not Want Me To?

My husband is not a church goer. For the last couple of years I have not tithed consistently. I did for years but my husband would complain because we didn't have enough money to pay everything. He always says that I don't have the money to tithe. Am I bringing curses upon myself for not consistently tithing? I do give offerings when I can. My husband

has never directly told me not to tithe. Do I disregard what he says concerning this. I have asked for us to give a set amount every week but he hasn't agreed to it. What should I do?

You have a matter of conscience that involves two apparently conflicting Christian principles.

Giving (commonly called tithing):

2 Corinthians 9:7 - So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. (NKJV)

Submission in marriage:

Ephesians 5:22-23 - Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. (NKJV)

If you were simply not giving because you didn't want to, then "curses" might not be the right word, but you certainly would be in line for discipline or chastisement from God (certainly you would not be blessed).

However, you have a problem to reconcile. As a Christian, you are to give, and you are to honor your husband. You can't do both because your husband doesn't want you to give.

Some will argue that you should give because honoring God is a higher priority than honoring your husband. They would say that disobeying God

to obey your husband means you are placing him above God.

Another might say that your husband is not honoring God, so you should not honor him.

Others will say that you should honor your husband because the marriage is a picture of Christ and His Church, so it has a higher priority than giving. They would save that by honoring your husband, you show him your obedience to God's word through submission, and possibly he might come to know the Lord through your example.

Still others might say that you should talk to your husband, and tell him that you are going to go against his wishes and give to God, but only because you believe that you cannot disobey God, not because you don't care about what your husband says.

When we face a choice like this, we are blessed to have a merciful and loving God who will give us the right answer (James 1.5) and accept our decision made with a good conscience (1John 3.20; 1Tim 1.5).

My answer? Pray, follow the Spirit's leading with a clear conscience, and make every choice one that will honor God to the very best that you are able to determine. After that, rejoice in our loving and merciful, understanding God.

Remember, God is not so much concerned about your choice, as He is knowing that you want your choice to glorify Him through your obedience.

~~~~~

## Counseling – Is A Christian Counselor The Answer?

**Should I go see a Christian counselor about my problems in life?**

I have some specific and strong opinions on this topic which tend to cause me much grief the day after I publish them. So I'll answer now, and get the Excedrin ready for tomorrow...

Much, if not most, of "christian counseling" today is little more than humanistic counseling dressed up in Christian vocabulary. Like humanist psychology, it's foundation is "self" (self-love, self-esteem, self-forgiveness, self-focus, etc.) and the Christian version is every bit as dangerous and non-productive as it's worldly twin.

Many, if not the vast majority, of "christian" psychologists and counselors are trained by the same curriculum, same philosophies and the same basic principles as any secular psychologist or psychiatrist.

It is even all the more insidious for Christians because it comes disguised in Christian language and cloaked in Biblical proof-text (taking verses out of context to support an idea).

UnBiblical, humanistic counseling ideas and techniques have infiltrated the Church almost completely to the degree now that Biblical Pastoral Scripture-based counselors find

themselves outcast, ridiculed as "simpletons" and pretty much on the defensive all the time trying to convince people that the Bible is sufficient for the life of the Christian, something the Bible is abundantly clear about:

2 Timothy 3:16-17 - All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (NKJV)

2 Peter 1:1 - Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: (NKJV)

So my first advice, is that if anyone chooses to seek out Christian counseling, make sure that you are getting a Biblical, pastoral, Scripture-based counselor who bases their advice and direction on God's Word, who seeks to evaluate your situation based on Biblical principle and who understands that it is the sinful heart, human pride and selfishness that is the foundation of suffering and turmoil.

The general tendency in modern counseling is to dig up the past, process it, analyze it and then attempt to apply it as "reason" or "cause" for present behavior. The Bible emphasizes that as Christians, we live in the present, and the future. We make Godly choices now based on His Word and our Holy Spirit led conscience, and we look forward to

the future and becoming more like Christ.

Philippians 3:12-14 - Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (NKJV)

Simply putting the past behind is considered childish and ignorant today. We are encouraged to dissect the past, evaluate it and figure out how the past is making us weak, sinful failures today.

Simply putting the past behind and moving on is considered childish and "psychologically ignorant" today.

Modern "Christian psychology" and its humanist counterpart, would have us live in the past, and assign some reason or circumstance to all our sin rather than simply calling it what it is - SIN - and determining to choose God's way regardless of our feelings. And move on.

Barring a genuinely extreme and traumatic past (as opposed to the common difficulties and troubles most people have), my personal opinion is that the world is far too quick to assume and assign blame for past events concerning present sin (and even those genuinely traumatic pasts can be Biblically counseled).

Are there lessons to be learned from the past? Of course! But lessons learned are not excuses or justification for present behavior. Nor is a constant dwelling on the past productive or necessary.

If counseling is sought, then my emphatic advice is to make sure you find a Biblical, Pastoral counselor (sometimes called "nouethic" counseling; though I've seen counselors by that label not stick to Scripture at times but hopefully these were individual examples and not indicative of all:

<https://www.nanc.org/>).

A counselor doesn't have to be a "professional." Seek out a Godly, spiritually mature couple or person who has demonstrated faithfulness to God's Word. The qualifications are a demonstrably faithful and mature life, Bible knowledge, wisdom and compassion, not necessarily a piece of paper or a yellow pages ad.

Being the Biblical simpleton that I am, I believe there is one short passage in Scripture that, if lived out, would spell the end to the vast majority of "counseling need" as it is manifested in our world today (good counselors are hopefully leading people towards this anyway):

Philippians 4:5-9 - Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ

Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you. (NKJV)

~~~~~

Covenant - Are We To Follow The Old Testament Law?

Are unbelievers under the law since Christ abolished the law on the cross?

The question typically is a result of John 1:17 - "For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." (NKJV)

The problem is that most people have a misunderstanding of what "law" and "grace" mean here. It is a reference to, and way of saying "Old Covenant" and "New Covenant" - the two primary ways that divine revelation has come from God.

The Old Covenant was established by the Mosaic Law and served the purpose to define what separated man from God; to demonstrate that God's requirements could be violated and thus required a punishment and it showed that a written law was needed to define what sin is (Isa 59.1-2; Rom 7.7; Rom 3.26).

The New Covenant revealed the redeeming purpose of Jesus Christ and that He is the only path to salvation (1Cor 15.3; Matt 26.28). Grace is the fact that man could do nothing to merit His salvation and is "poor in spirit" (Matt 5.3). Man is incapable of doing anything to change His lost condition without God and is in need of being rescued.

So Moses brought "law" by which we are able to know that we have violated God's will and deserve to be penalized. And Jesus brought "grace" by which our penalty is now capable of being paid.

So we are all "under law" in the sense that the law condemns us justly for our sin. We are all also "under grace" in the sense that the opportunity for salvation was procured for all mankind by Jesus Christ (John 3.16).

But only those who accept Jesus Christ by faith, and respond in obedience to the Gospel call are explicit beneficiaries of God's grace.

Law and grace represent two parts of the divine revelation from God related to reconciling man to Himself.

Consider this as well: there was grace under the "law" age. Noah found Grace in God's eyes (Gen 6.8). God poured out grace on many responded to Him in the Old Testament (Ex. 33.13; Dt. 7.12; Jer. 31.3).

Under the New Covenant, the Law still serves to be a measure of what is sinful. Jesus is the "King of Kings".... what King does not rule by law? Also, "the law" still exists in the New Testament in new forms: the law of the Spirit (Rom 8.2) and the law of

love (Rom 13.8,10; Gal 5.14; James 2.8).

As well, Paul said he was under the law of Christ (1 Cor 9.21; Gal 6.2).

So there was grace in the "law" age, and law in the "grace" era. The Bible does not make this distinction of "who is under what law at what time?" but if I had to answer your original question in one sentence I would say that "all men are under law; all men today have access to grace; but only those who respond to Christ will receive it."

~~~~~

## Creation – Was Adam A Caveman?

**Did God create Adam as a "caveman?" Or did sin make humans digress to that point? I get confused about the Bible version of man versus what science teaches us. How does it fit?**

The confusion is coming because you are trying to mix the world's version of human history with the Bible. They DO NOT MIX.

The idea that God created us and then used evolution to get us to this point is simply impossible, and those who profess to believe it are simply ignorant of both evolution and creationism. They are incompatible, period. Neither a true Evolutionist, nor an educated Genesis believer will ever propose that silly notion. It's a

nice sounding compromise meant to appease both sides.

Your confusion is understandable. You are bombarded all day long with the "facts" of: millions of years, evolution, cavemen, monkeys to man, etc. Then you read the Genesis account in the Bible and you're left wondering: Where do the dinosaurs fit? What about cavemen? How can seven days fit into millions of years?

It can't. That's why it is confusing.

Though the declaration is met with much derision, condescension and sanctimonious rhetoric, the FACT is, there are no FACTS to support evolution. Evolution is a theory. It is a theory based on the interpretation of evidence that starts with a foundational principle through which the various theories are filtered: there is NO creator, no supernatural realm, and the material universe is all that exists.

Creationists start with the foundational premise that God exists, He created us and there is an eternal spirit realm. God is our God, and His Word is our "religion."

The ugly truth (for evolutionists), that is suppressed at all costs by the government, the ACLU, the liberal talk shows, Hollywood and the Godless academia, is that Evolution is simply a collection of absurd concepts and the only "facts" are evidence that has to be TORTURED to even remotely fit. Then when this twisting and distortion of the evidence (or most of the time, LACK of evidence) is

exposed, they simply move on to new theory and new "facts."

Evolutionists state that "blind faith in God" is the foundation of Creationism, and that is patently absurd. There is voluminous amounts of evidence that naturally and perfectly fits God's revealed story of creation.

TRUCKLOADS, HEAPS, MOUNTAINS, TONS, GOBS of evidence. The fact that you don't hear about it, and our kids are denied knowledge of it publicly, is testament to how important it is to the anti-God crowd that everyone believe we came from goo which became a glob which became a fish which become a bird, then eventually a monkey, and finally YOU. Who needs God if we can explain human life without Him?

Even "blind faith in God" is quintessentially more logical than blind faith in a bunch of statistically IMPOSSIBLE and laughably hopeless conjectures that make up the "fact" of Evolution. Blind faith is not needed though. To the open minded and open hearted, the evidence that proves an Intelligent Designer and Creator is irrefutable.

Then why doesn't everyone believe it if it is irrefutable? Oh, that's easy. To admit the obvious truth about creation means you have to answer to God, and we can't have that now, can we?

Those who deny a Creator, worship the CREATION rather than the CREATOR, and that is exactly what evolution is all about.

The Universe becomes God, and Evolution the religion.

The Bible is clear about why men do this:

Romans 1:18-25 - For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. (NKJV)

So to answer your question, there were no "cavemen" as is the common understanding. Yes, there have been peoples who have lived in caves, but there were never these half-men, half-ape, partially evolved, no-brained brutes running around grunting as they clubbed things and tried to invent the wheel.

Man was created fully formed, and because there were no genetic defects, was super intelligent compared to us. Don't confuse TECHNOLOGY with intelligence. Technology is layer upon layer of advancement in design and production. Intelligence is the innate ability and power to think, solve, analyze and be creative.

Intelligence is why past civilizations could build things that amaze us today. People run around claiming that "space aliens" had to have given ancient people this ability because man wasn't "evolved" enough to do it. See how SILLY men become in their efforts to deny God? Did you know that ancient civilizations spread their culture all over the world and were marvelous global navigators?

My friend, Jim Nienhuis, does research on ancient civilizations and produces a variety Biblically sound, creation and world history books and DVD's (<http://www.genesisveracity.com/>, <http://www.iceagecivilizations.com/>).

His research on the lost cities and civilizations (that existed after the Flood but were lost in at the end of the Ice Age) provide irrefutable evidence contradicting the notion of "cavemen" and "millions of years." His discovery and publication of the advanced scientific and navigation knowledge of ancient civilizations turns the academic world on its head - and so with it comes the predictable attacks on his work as well as the complete ignoring of it (even surprisingly by some Creationist organizations which remains a puzzle to this day).

Think about it. When was the last time you saw a documentary or read in a school textbook about the existence of entire, advanced, complex submerged cities that lie in a few hundred feet of water just off the coasts all around the world (the source of the "myths" about Atlantis)?

Why don't you read and hear about them? Because they don't fit the evolutionary and uniformitarian timelines that have mankind as "monkey-like cavemen" inventing fire and the wheel instead of engineering cities and mapping the globe. These cities prove that civilizations were advanced and complex. They had mapped and navigated the whole world thousands of years ago using a sophisticated measurement system based on star movement ("star mappers").

If Christians would spend some time seriously educating themselves about the Bible version of creation and history, it would go a long way to offset the affects of decades of passive indoctrination into Evolution.

By the way, you're starting to understand the fallacy of evolution. Are you doing anything to counter the "Evolution education" your children are receiving in public schools, television programs, advertisements, talk shows and all kinds of media? Jim's book and DVD's would be a great start. After that, mosey on over to Ray Comfort's site:

<http://www.livingwaters.com/>

Evolution causes doubt or disbelief in God. If Genesis is not true, then how can the rest of the Bible be trusted?

~~~~~

Creation – Can You Believe In An Uncreated Creator?

I worked with two atheists for a while and they liked to debate God and creation with me. One thing they said and it was a good argument, is that if all things demand that there be a creator, that means that God, being more complex than all of creation, also was a design that needed a creator... and that if I believed that God just existed without a creator then why shouldn't they believe that the world exists without a creator? Do you have an explanation for this good argument?

It's not really a good argument at all. Just finite men, thinking in finite terms.

Every "designed" thing comes from a designer. Think of the ridiculous extremes we go to in order to avoid that reality. No one would argue that a modern PENCIL could EVER just "fall together" by random chance no matter how many billions of years you gave it or how much "raw" material was available. And yet, that same "logical person" turns right around and says that an almost infinitely complex human being "just happened" by accident. When it comes to Creation by a Designer, we just check our brains at the door.

Any honest person has to admit that every design must have a Designer; but this cannot step backwards infinitely. No matter how far back you take the question "well then, who designed that?" you have to come to a point where the Designer becomes the self-existent originator of all design.

It's absurd to think that anything with design requires no designer. It's also absurd to believe that the FIRST design came about from nothing which is the foundation of the so-called atheist and humanist belief: "first there was nothing, and it became something."

So no matter how far back you go, at some point logically there must be a First Cause, a First Designer, who is Self Existent and beyond our comprehension. Man, in his arrogance, believes that if he can't understand God, and can't reduce God to his logical terms, then of course, God doesn't exist. That makes no more sense than saying a toothpick can't exist unless it can figure out and understand the machine that made it, or the engineer that made the machine that makes toothpicks. It's like saying a computer can't exist unless the computer can fully comprehend, understand and "prove" the existence of the human engineers.

And God is infinitely greater and higher than man compared to toothpick/machine, computer/engineer.

Your two atheist friends show a blatant bias and huge flaw in their powers of reason and deduction, as well as shallow and poor grasp of

what "God" has to be. To believe that God "exists without a creator" is to believe the obvious TRUTH about what MUST be the nature of an eternal, transcendent God MUST be.... that He is First, Eternal, the Original, unCreated, Self Existent and beyond human comprehension. Yet your friends believe that they are so intelligent and self-dependent, that NOTHING can possibly exist that they don't know about or comprehend (which is a logical absurdity given the fact that countless things in science, the universe, the human body, history, etc. exist without their knowledge or understanding of it).

Your atheist co-workers drag God down into the realm of our existence. To believe God must be "created" just like everything else in our known existence, is to like dragging the creator of a toothpick down to the level of the toothpick rather than recognizing the transcendent nature of the creator of the toothpick (when comparing the creator-of-the-toothpick to the toothpick itself).

Using their logic, then we would have to conclude that the engineer who made the machine that makes the toothpicks must have been created and made the exact way, and of the same elements, and by the same known process that toothpicks were made. Measure the gap in complexity, design and power between a toothpick and the human engineer..... that gap is but a speck compared to the gap that separates a human from God, the Ultimate and First Engineer.

Romans is very clear about how men will deny God in the face of

overwhelming evidence. Remember that it is not your job to change their minds, only to present the truth. Don't be frustrated when they ridicule you and throw up all sorts of silly arguments; they are only acting in accord with their darkened minds and sinful nature.

Romans 1:20-25 - For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. (NKJV)

~~~~~

## Creation –The Purpose Of Man

**God created this earth and nature. But for what purpose was mankind (human beings) created?**

The granddaddy of all questions: why are we here?

Why were we created? Why do we exist? Could a more important or a more-often-asked question exist (even more often than "who left their dirty dish in the sink?" when you have three teens in the house)?

There are many lesser questions that I have absolutely no clue how to answer. But this question, I know the exact answer - not because I'm smart, or clever, or special; but because God has chosen to tell all of us. Ready?

We were created to fear and obey God.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil. (NKJV)

Why? Because God is glorified by our fear (respect) and obedience. Those who fear and obey God acknowledge His authority and superiority. Each time we honor God with our respect, He is glorified. Each time we obey what He says, He is glorified.

We were created to take care of God's creation.

Psalm 8:6 - You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet. (NKJV)

Why? Because our care for God's creation brings glory to Him. When we care for the land, we honor God. When we care for and use animals for their intended purpose, we honor God. When we take care of and use God's creation for His purpose, He receives glory.

We were created to praise God.

Psalm 150:6 - Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD. (KJV)

When God is praised, God is glorified.

We were created to worship Jesus.

Revelation 5:12-13 - Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. (KJV)

When Jesus is worshipped, God is glorified.

If you had to sum up why we exist, why you were born, why God created us, what is our purpose in life... it can be summed up accurately, completely and concisely in three words:

To Glorify God.

Now you know.

~~~~~

Creation – Explaining To Children About The Creator

How can you explain to a 10 year old that there must be a Creator?

The question is actually a distillation of this much longer question that I'll let you read, then I'll answer:

"Regarding your answer about "everything comes from something," part of your answer was: Once we reach God, there is no need to ask "where did God come from" because God has existed UNCREATED eternally. He did not come from anything. He has always been. Only something that was not created can exist eternally. Everything material thing must have a cause. God is not material. God is Spirit. Eternal Spirit.

God is the First Cause. He is the Source. He is the Creator. It is natural that we cannot fathom this because the CREATED is never equal to the CREATOR.

Brent, Please write an answer on this wonderful article you wrote for our 10 year old granddaughter. She is extremely intelligent and has given her precious heart to the Lord. She is asking me and I told her that you wrote a great answer for older folks but it might not be on her level. Thank you for your help and daily devotionals. They are much appreciated."

I can only tell you how I would attempt to explain it to one of my own six children. A lot of it would depend on their own demonstrated level of maturity and understanding, but I would engage them in conversations similar to these:

I would begin to point out to them simple to understand examples of "created things" - objects that have design - and allow them to easily see that all things that are "made" must have a Maker.

Then show them examples of this same design about humans, about the earth, and about the heavens.

The principle that design (made) requires a designer (Maker) is easily understood then and transferred to the principles of Creation.

The next step is a little harder. You have to get them to understand that the Maker/Creator is always greater than the created. The pie doesn't have to understand why/how/when the Cook created the pie. The computer cannot think and reason and understand why the Engineer designed and created the computer.

Man can't understand or grasp how God can be "forever" or "eternal," but we CAN, by association, understand that the Person who created us is great than us, and the "buck stops" there.

Remember, you asked me how I might explain these things to a 10 year old. So the point is not to get them to understand quantum physics or

theology; the goal is to begin to teach them Godly principles, sound logic and the ability to critically think for themselves.

People say that belief in God is "blind faith" and that science is "fact." Hogwash! Belief in God is fully support by evidences of every kind, both scientific and experiential. That all science is "fact" ignores the bias their materialistic worldview brings to the table.

Our youngsters need to be given sound principles and taught to think logically and critically. Only then can they stand up to the onslaught of this world's religion of humanism.

~~~~~

## Creation - Is The Earth Billions Of Years Old?

**Do you believe that this world is millions and millions of years old?**

No, I do not.

It is beyond the scope of this forum to debate and cover all the arguments from both sides, so let me give you one fundamental principle that is the bedrock for my conviction.

The Bible has withstood the vicious and unrelenting attacks of critics and skeptics for centuries. At every turn, the Bible is proven right, and the antagonists proven wrong. No matter what angle - historical, scientific,



geographical, societal, legal, chronological, political - every time throughout history someone has said, "Aha! The Bible must be wrong, look what we've discovered," or "The Bible says such and such and we have never found evidence to support that"... when those types of declarations are made, they are most often disproven entirely by the very science that produced the original "facts."

Of course the entire world trumpets the news that, "The Bible is wrong! Scientific proof!" But when the Bible is vindicated over and over and over, you hear crickets chirping.

The Bible has stood unwavering and unchanging in the face of man's best attempts to discredit, disprove and deny it. This is one of the strongest - among many - proofs of its divine origin.

Name one other holy book (religious or science; and yes, there are many "holy books" [theories, concepts, beliefs] in science) that can make the same claims... there are NONE. Not even close.

Now, given these facts:

The Bible has withstood all critics and skeptics and at every turn has been show true, unchanging and accurate.

Science is in constant flux with its "theories" being revised on an almost daily basis in order to somehow fit the holy grail "a priori" assumption that is dominate today: GOD DOES NOT EXIST.

Evolution, uniformitarianism, theories about the beginnings of the universe, theories about how life came to be... they have changed countless times. (When I say "evolution" I mean Darwinism, the theory of "life came from nothing by chance.")

The more we discover about the infinite complexity and design of life and the universe, the more obvious it becomes that evolution is simply an absurd statistical joke.

So what about "millions of years?" Aren't there lots of honest Christians who believe in it?

Yes, so my answer does not impugn or question their faith or sincerity. Let's just make that clear up front.

However, here is the primary point I want to make: **WHENEVER THE CLEAR AND OBVIOUS MEANING OF SCRIPTURE MUST BE CHANGED TO FIT SCIENCE OR MAN'S CONCLUSIONS, THEN THE FIRST SUSPECT IS ALWAYS MAN, NOT SCRIPTURE.**

Take away the creation debate, take away Hugh Ross, take away all the bias and predisposition and simply read the Genesis account. A child, a simple person, a regular Joe... anyone who reads the Genesis account comes away with one simple story: God created the earth, heavens and man in six normal days.

Why? **BECAUSE THAT IS WHAT IT CLEARLY AND PLAINLY SAYS.** It's only because of "science" and the declarations of man that we must go in and say that Genesis 1 says

something other than what it clearly says.

It takes all sorts of textual gymnastics, mental redefining and literary tap dancing to make Genesis 1 say something other than "in six days, marked by the morning and evening of each, God created."

When I study the preponderance of evidence which simply and naturally fits the "six days of creation" and "young earth" implication of Scripture, it is even more evident.

When I study "long age evidence" - and I have - I'm left with the same thing that drives EVOLUTION: if you start with a predetermined bias that "long age" is true, you interpret all the evidence (and the Bible) to fit accordingly. When you start with a predetermined bias that "evolution" is true, you filter all the evidence through that bias.

But wait a minute!! "Brent, aren't you doing the same thing??" ABSOLUTELY. I start with a predetermined bias that Genesis 1 is true and that the simple historical narrative that clearly and plainly tells us God's story of creation is absolutely true. Why? Again, because of the overwhelming and irrefutable evidence that the Bible is true, accurate and divinely inspired.

Starting with that conviction based on insurmountable facts and intelligent deduction, I go to Genesis and read "God created the heavens and earth in six normal days [morning and evening] and rested on the seventh day."

Then with unapologetic bias I interpret all the evidence of creation - scientific, logical, design, philosophy - through that filter of "six days, young earth."

Again, it is a matter of trust. Science changes to fit personal agendas, political correctness and voracious personal animosity against God. The Bible stands strong and uncorrupted against centuries of attacks and attempts to disprove and discredit it.

I'm not the sharpest knife in the kitchen, but it is obvious to me that the Word of God deserves my faith and trust more than sinful human scientists, no matter how sincere.

The plain, simple and undeniable fact is GENESIS CAN BE PLAINLY UNDERSTOOD BY EVEN A CHILD TO CLAIM SIX NORMAL DAYS OF CREATIVE ACTIVITY. The unavoidable conclusion then is this happened in recent past unless you want to hang on to an illogical and irrelevant belief that the Earth was around for billions of years before "void and without form." The only reason the plain account of Scripture is in question is because fallible men say, "It can't mean that."

The Bible has proven trustworthy on all counts. Scientists have not in ways too numerous to explain here. Any time the Bible must be re-interpreted because science declares the Bible is wrong, I will side with the Bible.

The Bible is clear about the six normal days of creation and the relatively young age of the earth. All of the evidence of creation - filtered through

this bias - fits comfortably and naturally with the Bible's claims.

On the other hand, "long agers" - Christian or not - are forced to explain away or reinterpret plain Scripture, and the preponderance of creation evidence is "crammed" in to the view, rather than fitting naturally.

Why? Because the view is wrong. Of course the evidence doesn't easily fit.

Finally, I also believe that holding the "long age" view has other down sides:

It's dangerously close to the uniformitarian evolutionary views, and in fact is only a comfortable step away from it.

It casts doubt on the rest of Scripture.

If the simple story of creation in Genesis isn't what it plainly appears to be, what else in Scripture isn't what it plainly appears to be? The resurrection? The virgin birth? Miracles?

Turn on the History or Discovery Channel. They are constantly parading "scientists" on screen to tell you why a miracle can't be true, OR give a naturalistic explanation ("the burning bush was a tree with bright red flowers").

Why? The underlying and clear message is, "The Bible cannot be true, accurate and complete because it appears to say one thing, when in fact it means another as we have 'proven' by giving naturalistic explanation to what the Bible calls supernatural, and

'proving' with science that the plain text is not plain after all."

I believe "long age" theories serve the same purpose to cast doubt on Scripture. Think about it. If you believe Genesis doesn't simply mean what it says, what other plain parts of Scripture don't mean what they seem to be plainly saying?

In closing, if God wanted us to think that creation took millions of years or that the universe is billions of years old, He would have communicated that rather than giving us what appears to be a story about "six normal days of creation in the relatively recent past." God is more than capable of communicating the clear and simple truth – WHICH HE DID IN GENESIS ONE.

If you are forced to change the simple and obvious meaning of Scripture to fit man's conclusions, then you are placing man's intelligence and authority over God's. Let the Bible be our source of TRUTH, and filter man's opinions, discoveries and findings through what God has declared.

If I am wrong, then I'm wrong simply trusting God over man.

-----

Follow-up based on some reader feedback:

If the simple narrative of Genesis 1 means something other than what it simply and plainly says, then consider this:

If Genesis 1 is about "millions of years" then where does the Bible account turn LITERAL? Genesis 1 seems to be plainly literal as does the following chapters. So do the scientists and academics get the freedom to question the literal accounts past Genesis 1? Why not? If Genesis 1 is not literal (when it is written and presented in a plainly literal manner) then why is Genesis 2 literal? Why can't ANY Scripture that appears literal be questioned if "facts" from man seem to say, "The Bible can't be true here?" If Genesis 1 is not literal and clear, then what part of Genesis is, and on what basis can we deny someone who says, "I don't think it is?"

Maybe "Adam and Eve" were fictitious symbols of an entire race or population of people. Did they really exist? Did they really have kids? Was there really a Cain who killed Abel? Science has proven that man has existed for much longer than several thousands of years, so maybe sin did NOT come through the first human, and if so, then it doesn't make sense that salvation comes through "the second Adam." If the Genesis account of creation is not literal, then obviously that one verse about creating man on one day can't be literal either, turning the Bible upside down concerning sin and salvation.

What about Noah's flood? Maybe it was local or regional like "scientists" say. Maybe only a portion of people were killed as a symbolic act of judgment. Science has "proven" that there could not have possibly been a worldwide flood, and the earth's geological features are easily explained in "millions of years" terms. Maybe that means that God won't judge the

entire earth in the future, since it didn't really mean worldwide judgment in Genesis concerning the Flood. The Flood must now be redefined to fit uniformitarianism and long age (when all the geological evidence fits perfectly and comfortably with a young earth and a global flood).

"Scientists" have put forth many reasons why Jesus could not have actually died because "science proves that people don't come back from the dead." Why is this "science" wrong, and the "science" of "long age" right? True Christians who believe in "long age" would recoil at someone attempting to prove scientifically that Jesus didn't rise from the dead. Why? Because the Bible plainly teaches it... AS PLAINLY AS IT TEACHES THE SIX NORMAL DAYS OF CREATION.

Again, the logical question is: IF GENESIS 1 IS NOT SIMPLE AND LITERAL, AT WHAT POINT, AND ON WHAT BASIS CAN WE BEGIN TO CLAIM THAT ANYTHING IN THE BIBLE IS PLAIN AND LITERAL? Adam and Eve? Noah? The Flood? Moses? Miracles? Jesus? Every one of these things can be explained away, explained in "naturalistic terms," symbolized, allegorized or otherwise questioned and doubted by "scientists" and "academia."

Attacking the foundation of the Bible - GENESIS 1 - creates the perfect fissure for questioning EVERYTHING in the Bible. If the opening historical narrative of the Bible (and the premise upon which humankind and salvation rests) does not mean what it clearly says, then what other "clear

and plain" Scripture doesn't mean what it plainly says?

~~~~~

Creation – Was The Earth Created In Six Days?

What do you believe about the creation of the earth? Do you think that God created it in 6 days as defined by man or in 6 *days* as defined by God that were not necessarily 24 hours?

In Genesis or any other passage where "day" is used in normal context, God never defines "day" as anything different than "day" has always been defined... as a day. Where the word "day" means something generic or symbolic, that meaning is made perfectly clear such as "the day of the Lord" or "in that day" (mean during that time). In Genesis one, no such alternative meaning is defined, and to the contrary, "day" is specifically defined as "the morning and the evening" - just like we would describe a single "day" in our life.

I have studied, taught and wrote about Origins, Creation and Genesis for about 20 years. The evidence for Biblical creation is undeniable and overwhelming for any person actually seeking the truth and not simply trying to prove their already determined viewpoint. In other words, if you have already decided Darwinism is true by default, then no amount of evidence will change your mind. Ironically, and sometimes

humorously, the fact is: THERE IS ABSOLUTELY ZERO, ZILCH, NADA, NO EVIDENCE THAT SUPPORTS THE IDEA OF 'MOLECULES TO MAN' DARWINIAN EVOLUTION, and even LESS evidence (less than zero?) that "something came from nothing" which is the inevitable and unavoidable leap of purely blind faith that a person must make if they do not believe that "the Creator created something."

As for the six literal days question, of course I believe the universe and all creation was created in six literal days. The Genesis narrative is simple, concise, unmistakable and unambiguous about this. It only becomes a "question" when humans come along and INSERT "MILLIONS OF YEARS" into the Scripture based on a humanistic viewpoint. The MILLIONS (or billions) OF YEARS, does not exist until "science" introduces it into the simple statements of Scriptures. Predictably, science "proves" MILLIONS OF YEARS in its finding because it already BELIEVES and ASSUMES this to be true. So Science starts with this presumption and interprets the information to fit, thus "proving" what they already believed to be true. That's not science... that's a religion called Materialism using circular reasoning to prove itself true. Only in "religion" can you get away with that, and make no mistake, Darwinism (materialistic origins) IS A RELIGION.

Volumes have been written on the topic, but for those Christians who really struggle honestly with the six day question, let me ask you the only question that matters: at what point does Genesis become literal if the entire chapter on creation and origins

is not? Where does the narrative become literal? Adam? Cain? The tower of Babel? Noah?

Here is the crux that cannot be avoided: EVERY SINGLE FACT, EVENT AND TRUTH IN THE BIBLE DEPENDS ON THE NARRATIVE AND HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF GENESIS CHAPTER ONE TO BE TRUE AND LITERAL. Don't believe me? I challenge any person to present a Bible character, event, fact, truth or doctrine to me that they think DOES NOT rely on the literal truth of Genesis 1 for it to be true itself.

"Oh, well everything in Genesis chapter one is literal except six 24 hour days. That's symbolic." How convenient. And wrong.

The Bible states that death came into creation by Adam's sin making it impossible for evolution to have been at work for millions of years "before God created Adam." It also makes a confusing mess of the Creation account because you have to believe that God created it all, let evolution take over, then stepped in and breathed an eternal spirit into an evolved ape-human, then lied about death having entered creation at that point. Or you have to accept that plants and animals "evolved" but God stepped in and created humans, which makes absolutely no sense and also causes the Creation narrative to be confusing and deceitful.

The unavoidable fact is, Genesis One is simple and clear. It only becomes unclear when "science" tries to inject its bias into it. However, if you start with Genesis One as literal and true,

then what we see in science makes perfect sense and the evidence of Science is in perfect harmony with Scripture including a young creation, Noah's flood, etc. You cannot, nor can anyone, find any speck of observable science (as opposed to Darwinian theory) that disproves or even disagrees with Scripture.

Darwinism and Biblical Creationism are wholly incompatible. Christians who straddle the fence are either ignorant of the facts (Biblical or as taught by Evolutionists), have succumbed to cultural pressure, or think it doesn't matter (it does). To choose Darwinism is to deny the Bible and the Creator. To choose the Genesis creation account is to incur the wrath of the pop culture, academia and liberal religionists, and deny Darwinism. People want it both ways, but if intellectual honesty is in play, you can't.

Make no mistake. If you entertain some compromise that claims Christianity but allows for Darwinism, you deny BOTH... for they are utterly incompatible with each other no matter how many \$12 words and fancy explanations people want to dream up. Why? Here's just a nibble of things totally incompatible:

Darwinism relies on materialism: there is no God, all things have a materialistic origin and explanation.

The Bible teaches that death came through one man's choice to sin, not billions of years of trial and error.

The Bible teaches that man has an eternal soul, is unique from animals, and created after and above animals.

Darwinism teaches that "once there was nothing, and then there was something" which any honest person knows is utterly impossible (talk about blind faith).

The Bible teaches that "once there was an eternal God, and He chose to create" - a reasonable proposal we see happen countless times a day (a designer/creator creating something that would not have existed without a higher intelligence choosing to create something of a lower form).

The Bible teaches that "kinds produce kinds" - i.e.. dogs create dogs, plants create plants, humans create humans.

Darwinism teaches that "kinds evolve into new kinds."

The Bible teaches that all creation disintegrates, including humans, without the infusion of an outside organizing force (we see this irrefutable fact in nature and society every day and is proclaimed by the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics).

Darwinism teaches that random chance and long periods of time introduce higher order and beneficial mutations, an occurrence that has NEVER been witnessed and flies in the face of centuries of established and irrefutable observation.

Anyway, I could go on and on, but the point is this: Christians need to quit being wishy-washy about this and

stop straddling the fence. You need to at least know the basic reasons why the Bible and Darwinism cannot coexist and take a stand for one or the other. Don't patronize the Evolutionist (and political correctness) and insult Scripture by pretending that the Bible is true but Genesis One is a fairy tale or symbolic or doesn't mean exactly what it clearly says. If the simple creation account in Genesis of six literal days and the Creator are not true, then the whole Bible is not true.

You don't build a House of Truth on a Foundation of Lies.

Other than that, I don't really have an opinion.

~~~~~

## Cremation - Is It Biblical?

### Is cremation Biblical? Are there any Scriptures about cremation?

Well this is one of those subjects that the Bible does not clearly define, yet you will find MANY of our brethren who insist the answer is PLAIN and CLEAR for all those who seek the truth as they do.

I never cease to be amazed at how dogmatic we are towards each other about things that God Himself is not dogmatic about.

So I will attempt to point out what the Bible implies about the subject (in no particular order), and refute a couple of poor arguments. I pray you will ask

God for wisdom (James 1:5) on the matter:

Cremation, while practiced in Biblical times, was not commonly practiced among Israelites. It was considered historically to be a "pagan" practice.

Some Christians believe that the destruction of the body will hinder the bodily resurrection that will occur (1Cor 15:35-58; 1Thes 4:16) which is hard to justify because you have a whole lot of bodies that are destroyed against their will. As well, given enough time, each and every body decomposes to dust (Gen. 3:19).

Holding to this idea that "a body must exist" limits God's power tying His ability to the existence of a "body." So while there may be other arguments against cremation, this one just doesn't stand up (pun intended).

Cremation is nothing more than an accelerated "return to dust" when it gets down to it.

There is no Scriptural prohibition against cremation, particularly in the New Testament for New Covenant Christians.

There are plenty of examples in the Bible, as well as in secular history of God's people burying their dead, not cremating:

"And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age." (Genesis 15:15)

Abraham buried Sarah. (Genesis 23:19)

Abraham was buried (Genesis 25:9,10) as well as Rachel, Leah, Isaac,

Rebekah, Jacob, Miriam, Aaron, Joshua, Gideon, Samson, Samuel, David, Solomon, Elisha, and many others.

Joseph was buried - "So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt." (Genesis 50:26)

God buried Moses. (Deuteronomy 34:5,6)

John the Baptist was buried (Matthew 27:58-60), although if you hold to the "resurrected body" argument, his missing head could be a problem! (John 19:38-41)

Verses such as these probably make the best support for burial over cremation.

A verse in Amos is often used to support a prohibition against cremation: "Thus saith the Lord; for three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof: because he burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime." (Amos 2:1)

But reading in historical, the context shows that God's displeasure was over the disrespect and desecration of the Moabites was the cause of God's anger (by digging up the Edomite dead, specifically royal graves, and burning them in contempt) - not a violation of a prohibition concerning cremation.

This verse is also used as an example that God opposes cremation:

Ecclesiastes 6:3 - If a man begets a hundred children and lives many years, so that the days of his years are



many, but his soul is not satisfied with goodness, or indeed he has no burial, I say that a stillborn child is better than he— (NKJV)

This is supposedly a CLEAR reference against cremation because "no burial" was worse than being stillborn.

However, this is a case of gross proof texting and horrible Biblical interpretation. In context of the Scripture, the Teacher (Solomon) is proclaiming that to DIE ALONE after living a selfish or destructive life, is worse than ever having been born and has nothing to do with stating God's opinion on cremation OR burial rites.

Another unfortunate butchering of Scripture concerns Matthew 27:53 where it says after Christ's crucifixion bodies of the saints "came out of the graves" (Matthew 27:53). This supposedly "proves" that when the BODY is resurrected to glory, a bodily remains (or a "place" where they were laid) is required. Too bad for all the poor Christian martyrs who sealed their faith chained to a stake and burned to ashes. I guess they just lose out on the resurrection (according to this logic).

It amazes me the amount of ridiculous proof texting that is used to prove an already predetermined opinion!

My personal opinion, worthless as it is, is the dead body that returns to the dust of this sin cursed world is irrelevant in all aspects to the resurrection. All things will be made new (Rev 21), including our bodies and the earth, and the "former" will be gone forever.

However the burial (or cremation) of the dead is handled, is a matter of personal choice, clear conscience and respect. God has left us with liberty in this area.

(another refusal on my part to be dogmatic where Scripture is not; let the beatings begin....)

~~~~~

Criticism - Why Do Christians Criticize Others?

I have always struggled with being critical about others. I have often regretted the things I say about other people that have then hurt my relationships. Why do I criticize others? What makes a person have that "personality"?

Ephesians 4:29 - Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. (NASB)

There are many ways to answer this including giving you verses that talk about our speech and what is considered Godly communication. Our opening verse pretty much sums it up in words you have heard before, "If you can't say something good, keep your mouth shut."

What I want to share is what I believe is the root cause of a critical spirit. Let me preface my comments with two

things: 1) of course our sinful nature is THE root cause; and 2) I don't present my thoughts as definitive in any way. No doubt there are many considerations in determining why a person is "critical by nature" or even why anyone of any personality chooses to criticize another at any given time.

For the sake of this answer, I want to leave out of the discussion the idea of "constructive criticism." That is just another way of saying that we should "present the truth in love," and when that is our true motivation, it is certainly profitable and Godly. So let's leave out all of the hypotheticals and "what ifs" and rare exceptions.

For this answer, I am defining criticism as pointing out a fault about someone; taking an opportunity to diminish someone in the eyes of another; or relaying some negative "fact" about another person in such a way that when honestly evaluated, is not edifying to that person (and criticism will rarely if ever fall into the category of "edifying").

We're talking about the down-home, every-day, run-of-the-mill, everybody-knows-what-we're-talking-about... critical comment.

Let me start by giving you the nutshell version: a person criticizes because they care too much about "self." That's the short and sweet.

Here's what I mean by that... A personal criticism is a negative proclamation about someone meant to diminish that person because something about my "self" has been

offended, ignored, let down or neglected; therefore in some twisted way the criticism reclaims what we feel has been robbed of our "self."

I criticize, complain or bad mouth because "I" am offended; because "I" am not getting what "I" deserve; because "I" am not getting the recognition "I" feel "I" am due. If you are a person who criticizes or is offended easily, and can't see the connection between "self-love" and your critical spirit, try asking yourself these questions next time you criticize someone:

Why am I criticizing this person?

Are they getting recognition I feel I deserve? (Self-love)

Have they been elevated over me in talent or skill and I need to point out something negative to equalize their status with mine? (Self-love)

Are they getting attention while I'm being ignored? (Self-love)

Do I feel like I've been wronged by this person and people need to know the truth? (Self-love)

Have my feelings been hurt and it's not fair if they are not in some way punished for it? (Self-love)

Am I pointing out a fault in someone else to divert attention from a fault in me? (Self-love)

Does criticizing them result in some benefit, perceived or real, for me in the long run? (Self-love)

Those are very tough questions to ask yourself, and it takes a Spirit-

empowered honest look. I may not have hit on every possible reason, but I'm convinced of one thing: if you are someone who routinely criticizes others, complains, or is easily offended... it will most certainly come back to a motivation of self-love:

Love of your own way

Love of recognition

Love of your own opinion

Love of your own popularity

Love of your own reputation

Love of something that is SELF centered and not "others" centered

We hear a lot today of "loving yourself," and accepting yourself, being comfortable with yourself and "forgiving" yourself (which makes absolutely no sense theologically; how can we forgive ourselves when sin is always a violation of God's law and/or the law of love towards others?).

Christians, let's be clear about one thing: WE DON'T NEED TO LEARN TO LOVE OURSELVES. We are born with a bondage to self-love; that is the essence of the sin nature. Watch a room full of toddlers and tell me if they have any problem loving "self." Look at the entire world both saved and unsaved and tell me that we don't live in a world of people consumed with their own self-interest?

The Christian life is about denying self, mortifying self and crucifying self. SELF is the problem. And "self-love" is the foundation of our sin. Choosing to

love "self" rather than love God, is THE definition of sin.

Think about it. What possible reason could a Christian have to be critical of another person except from a motive of self-love? God doesn't cause criticism. The Spirit doesn't guide you to it. Jesus certainly is not the reason, He was crucified for your criticism. Who does that leave? Self.

If you truly love the other person more than you love yourself, how can you be critical of them? How can you complain? How can you be offended?

The life of a Christian is DEATH to self. How can you care about your DEAD self? Don't let today's SELF-LOVE industry trip you up. Tell me what self-love (or "self" centered anything) has to do with:

Matthew 10:38 - And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me .

Luke 14:26 - If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple .

Romans 12:1 - Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice , acceptable to God, {which is} your spiritual service of worship.

Ro 6:11 - Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1Corinthians 7:22 - For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave.

The Christian life is the death, giving up, sacrifice and rejection of everything about ME for the slavery of living for Christ. Salvation is a destructive, violent transaction (death first, then life) that involves the crucifixion of our own life in exchange for a life of humility and submission to God. Salvation can NOT be earned in any way, but salvation is not easy or comfortable. Is it worth it?

2 Corinthians 4:8-18 - {we are} afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. 11 For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. 12 So death works in us, but life in you. 13 But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I BELIEVED, THEREFORE I SPOKE," we also believe, therefore we also speak, 14 knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you. 15 For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God. 16 Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. 17 For momentary, light affliction is

producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, 18 while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

This is the life of sacrifice, the giving up of everything about "self" which leaves no room for being critical of others. What is the real reason for criticism and complaint? Someone has somehow fallen short of what "I" want; what "I" deserve; what "I" expect.... someone did not live up to MY standards or expectations. I am being robbed of what I deserve and I'm going to tell someone about it because I love myself and it will somehow make me feel vindicated.

The degree to which you are critical betrays the degree to which you are consumed with SELF.

The critical person has not truly sacrificed "self" yet. They have not truly grasped their unworthiness but rather fought to see the "good" in themselves not wanting to admit how truly sinful they really are. They have not learned a proper self "hate" - that is to say a proper loathing of how sinful the human heart really is and how easily it is deceived about sin.

Romans 7:15-20 - For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for

to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

This holy "self-hate" of sin and our natural tendency to sin is the true response to the Gospel. Self-esteem, self-love, self-acceptance and self-forgiveness are the stuff of human wisdom that does great damage to the true message of the Gospel: death to self! Life in Christ!

The more we recognize our predisposition for self-love, the more we will run to God to rescue "me" from "myself." And when we truly come to the place where self-love has been vanquished, then we will have no cause to ever criticize another person, complain about life or be offended at another.

~~~~~

## Curse - Is There A Generational Curse?

### Is there really a generational curse in families due to sin?

Numbers 14:18 - The Lord is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation. (NKJV)

Without getting into all sorts of theological premises and implications, let's just take a look at a practical aspect.

Is there a "generational curse?" In other words, does the sin of parents automatically get forced or visited upon the children and grandchildren as an unavoidable punishment/consequence?

Forced, no. Predisposed, yes.  
Inevitable, no. Probable, yes.

FACT: No Christian is in bondage to, or helpless in the face of the sinful environment created by the generations before them.

John 8:36 - Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed. (NKJV)

Romans 8:1 - There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. (NKJV)

No person who is truly saved is enslaved by any sin they don't CHOOSE to be enslaved by. Every Christian has available to them the power of the Holy Spirit and the righteousness of Christ that will break the power of any sinful tendency passed on by the parents.

So the "generational curse" CAN be broken EVERY time in the life of a Christian.

Is the "generational curse" real? Sure it is. Human experience proves this

beyond a doubt. We reap what we sow and pass it to our children as a matter of practical example.

Divorce, drug addiction, adultery, abuse, dishonesty... how often a pattern of sinfulness is repeated from parents to children, many times for several generations in a row. Children learn what they see. And even when parents try hard to scam the kids and hide their sin, the children aren't fooled at all. They know; they feel, they perceive. And the sin is passed on.

The generational curse is practically inevitable without Christ; but stands no chance of survival in His presence.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Dating – Christian women and worldly men

**I'm a single mom and I'm praying for a Godly husband. How do I handle the unwanted approaches of worldly men?**

I might be smarter to simply tell you to ask a woman that question, but I'll give it a shot.

It is unfortunately true that a lot of men are somewhat "predatory" nowadays, and if you poor women show a little bit of attention to them, you do it at your own peril. I'm embarrassed for my male species that any show of kindness, attention or politeness MUST be (in our minds) a

signal that a woman wants more (or more accurately, wants what most men are after).

It is a shameful statement about our culture that male/female interaction in general is reduced down to "Do I want to sleep with them?" and "How can I get them to sleep with me?" That use to be a male dominated mindset, but more and more women pride themselves on having the same mindset.

Most of all, I would say, keep praying for the Godly man you seek. That is first and foremost.

Here's the Catch 22... in order to somehow meet this Godly man, some sort of interaction must occur. So to simply develop a method by which to shoo men away before having any chance to communicate would be somewhat counterproductive.

However, your question specifically states "worldly" men, so I'll answer along those lines. First, you should always be polite because your Christian testimony is paramount. Given that men often mistake politeness for "interest" - you must also be clear and firm.

If the fellow at hand seems to be a gentleman but you are not interested for whatever reason, you should have a pre-planned statement. From a guy's point of view, I would not be offended by something like, "I'm flattered by your interest in me but I need to let you know that I'm not interested in a date right now for my own personal reasons." This statement is of course true because you will not have any

interest in dating until you feel like the Lord has sent the man you are praying for.

If the man is being aggressive or inappropriate, then that's a whole other response. With guys like that, you just have to be blunt and tell them you are not interested and would they please stop talking to you about personal things.

I feel sorry for you ladies. Married or not, that doesn't seem to slow down any male with a lustful mind. I've known single women who would wear a wedding ring just to cut the number of unwanted advances down (not stop them! just reduce the number).

This whole situation is not just a matter of natural male/female attraction... it is a result of our sex-mad culture.

Be polite, be firm and don't be embarrassed to tell men that you simply are not interested. "Good" guys will understand and appreciate your forthrightness. The other guys hopefully will get the hint and look elsewhere.

~~~~~

Dating – Proper Boundaries Before Marriage

I have been dating a guy for about 6 months. He and I have been struggling with drawing dating boundaries in the physical aspect

of our relationship. What is your advice?

There are no verses in the Bible that say what you can do physically before marriage. Now, before I get bombarded with emails, let me say that THERE ARE plenty of verses that give principles and standards by which two people can determine what is appropriate before marriage.

It would be very easy to answer "do this, don't do that" but 1) that doesn't teach people to think for themselves and learn to be discerning, 2) all standards don't apply to all people (age, spiritual maturity, place in life, depth of Christian life, surety of marriage all play a role in determining what is pleasing to God) and 3) a checklist of do's and don'ts can't cover every situation and variable.

It is far too easy and spiritually ineffective to simply state: "don't you hold hands, hug, kiss or show any affection until the preacher says 'I do!'" That kind of approach, while may seem "safe" on the surface", is more prone to be legalism than practicing Godly purity (which is physical, mental and spiritual, not just physical).

So I want to give you some principles that you can consider and then allow you as a couple to decide. What is important is that YOU HAVE BOUNDARIES AND A PLAN. If you attempt "purity on the fly" you are destined to let the boundaries slide, and failure is a great possibility.

Learn to ask the right question if you're looking for a Godly answer. When it comes to lifestyle and behavior issues the right question is, "What can I do to most glorify God?" - not "What can I get away with and still be a Christian?"

Purity is something you determine to have. Plan for it, set limits, seek God's direction.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-4 - For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; (NKJV)

1 Corinthians 6:18-19 - Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? (NKJV)

Let me close with an excerpt from a lesson I did on moral purity. It has to do with not "falling off the cliff.". As it relates to this advice, the "cliff" would be fornication:

I tell my kids - if you don't want to end up having sex before marriage (fornication; falling off the cliff) then stay as far away from the edge of the cliff as possible; which means being careful about things that lead to the cliff's edge: holding hands, body contact, lustful eyes, immodest clothing, making out, petting and overtly sexual behavior. There is a trend today with kids that

EVERYTHING except actual intercourse is not actually having sex and somehow that makes it okay (perhaps we can thank a certain ex-president for helping to clarify that for our kids).

I go on to explain to them, "If you aren't CLOSE to the cliff, a stumble or a gust of wind won't blow you over the edge." If you stay a safe distance away from the cliff, then you have margin, you have room for error, you have a buffer zone for mistakes or failures. I tell them over and over that you cannot be shocked and surprised to lose your virginity when you have spent several weeks progressing the amount and intensity of physical contact to the point of finding yourself alone, in the dark, unsupervised, clothes off, doing "everything" physically possible except intercourse. At that point you are teetering on the edge of the cliff, balancing on one leg, with a hurricane force wind blowing behind you. Don't act shocked when you get blown off.

Here is a link to that lesson:
<http://www.seriousfaith.com/dvo/devotion.asp?teachingnumber=452>

~~~~~

## Dating - Marrying Into Another Religion

**I need your advice on a question. I am a practicing Christian and met a woman who is not and professed her faith to be Buddhist. I want to marry and settle and have prayed**



**several times but not sure whether God is answering or not. Please let me know your take on this.**

This is the full question:

I need your advice on a question. I am a practicing Christian and met a woman who is not and professed her faith to be Buddhist. My flesh led me to ignore the warnings from the Scripture and inside of me. I continued the relationship and found myself not being very happy because we argued continually about everything and I found myself sacrificing a lot; however, I made it clear that my faith was not for negotiation. I finally decided after several prayers and fasting to break the relationship because I could not go out with a non-Christian. To my amazement after several agonizing discussions, she decided she will convert because she did not want to lose me. I made it clear that this was a personal choice and I will not accept a light hearted commitment. I consulted several Christian people on this and decided to stay. She has since bought the Bible and is studying it slowly with some commitment. She prays with me now, etc. We still have some of the old problems; however, things are getting better. My question is, I still do not know whether she is the one God has prepared for me. I want to marry and settle and have prayed several times but not sure whether God is answering or not. Please let me know your take on this.

Part of my answer will be directly Biblical, and part of it will be my own opinion from experience. I am going

to interlace my answers with your question for clarity:

"Dear Brent, I need your advice on a question. I am a practicing Christian and met a woman who is not and professed her faith to be Buddhist. My flesh led me to ignore the warnings from the Scripture and inside of me."

You are correct that it was your flesh that led you to ignore clear warnings in Scripture. The "warnings" inside of you were the Holy Spirit trying to get your attention, which you ignored. There are several Scriptural principles that make dating a non-Christian the wrong choice:

It is an "unequal yoke" - a yoke is a harness used to connect to oxen together so that they may combine their strength together. Unequally yoked oxen create a conflict instead of cooperation. This inequality can be from size, strength, health, training, deformity or even will power. For Christians, the "yoke" is from God and allows a husband and wife to work together for God's purpose. When you date or marry a non-Christian, it's like a strong ox hooked to a feeble, sickly animal. You will do all the spiritual work, and it will eventually cause a lack of results, and conflict.

2 Corinthians 6:14 - Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? (NKJV)

A Christian is to guard their heart; and becoming intimate or married to an

unbeliever is like letting the enemy inside the gates of your city.

Philippians 4:7 - and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (NKJV)

Bad company (which unbelieving company is) corrupts good Christian character.

1 Corinthians 15:33 - Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits." (NKJV)

It is incompatible with the principle of "light and dark." There is no compatibility with the two; one will destroy the other.

2 Corinthians 6:14 - Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? (NKJV)

The Holy Spirit indwells each Believer to guide, protect and counsel them. When you purposely ignore the "warnings", you can be assured that what you are about to do is going to end up troubled.

"I continued the relationship and found myself not being very happy because we argued continually about everything and I found myself sacrificing a lot; however, I made it clear that my faith was not for negotiation."

The fact that you were not happy is the usual result of ignoring God's

warnings. A Christian who ignores the Holy Spirit has already begun the process of "sacrificing a lot" - but not in a good way. They are sacrificing their Godly integrity and Holy Spirit led conscience.

No matter how "clear" you stated that your "faith is not negotiable," your words rang hollow because your actions had already plainly stated that your faith was at least partially for sale and the price was a "relationship."

"I finally decided after several prayers and fasting to break the relationship because I could not go out with a non-Christian. To my amazement after several agonizing discussions, she decided she will convert because she did not want to lose me. I made it clear that this was a personal choice and I will not accept a light hearted commitment."

Why did it take "prayer and fasting?" The Bible is clear. You did not need confirmation about what God plainly states. Now, if the prayer and fasting helped you to gain the spiritual courage you needed, then it was a good thing.

My point is, we don't need to "seek God's face" and struggle over "God's will" when it is clearly stated in Scripture. We need simply to repent, acknowledge and obey. The Lord told Joshua (Josh 7) to "Get up! Quit praying!" because the answer was already obvious. Sometimes we just need to get about doing what God has clearly revealed.

There should be sirens, warning flags and alarms resounding in your head when a person converts to Christianity because they don't want to "lose" a relationship. Don't get me wrong... if this results in her ultimate salvation, to God be the glory.

My overwhelming experience (and apparently other Pastor/teachers as well) is that "conversions for love" - i.e.. wanting to hold on to a relationship - almost never are genuine or lasting. You say you will not "accept a light hearted commitment" but you have already demonstrated to a large degree that you will, because you have compromised your own commitment to God by violating your conscience and dating an unbeliever.

I'm not trying to be unnecessarily hard on you, but there is a lot FOR OTHERS to learn from your choices. So I'm giving it to you straight up. If you are serious about not accepting a "light hearted commitment," then tell her that you will start dating her again in two years if she is still a faithful Christian at that time.

This is my opinion; I am not presenting this as a Biblical command.

"I consulted several Christian people on this and decided to stay. She has since bought the Bible and is studying it slowly with some commitment. She prays with me now etc. We still have some of the old problems however things are getting better."

In a multitude of counsel, there is wisdom:

Proverbs 15:22 - Without counsel, plans go awry, But in the multitude of counselors they are established. (NKJV)

It is good that you continue to seek counsel, but it concerns me that you "consulted several Christian people" and the consensus was for you to stay in the relationship. Make sure that you are seeking the counsel of mature, disciplined and faithful Christians who know God's Word rather than rely on feelings or opinion.

"My question is, I still do not know whether she is the one God has prepared for me. I want to marry and settle and have prayed several times but not sure whether God is answering or not. Please let me know your take on this."

I've never been of the opinion that God prepares ONE person for us, and if we "miss" that person, somehow we will just have to suffer with something less. The Bible does not support this idea.

God's only directive is that we marry another Believer. He will guide, protect, bless and honor a marriage between any two Christians who marry under God's terms.

So whether or not "she is the one" is still a question and may remain question. My counsel to you is not to even date her, or consider her "the one" until she has shown by faithful commitment that her conversion to Christian is genuine. And that takes TIME. There is no shortcut or easy way out.

If you are "not sure God is answering" then you can BE SURE that God is not saying "go ahead, marry her."

My answer in summary is this:

Biblically - do not marry or date an unbeliever.

My personal advice - if you really love this person, then become her "Christian friend" for a couple of years and help disciple her, but don't be her primary mentor; she should have Godly women around her to help her grow spiritually; don't date her. If her conversion and commitment is still intact after that, then I would think it safe to consider a relationship at that point.

~~~~~

Death - What Happens When We Die?

I was wondering what happens when you die? Do you go directly to heaven if you believe, or do we have to wait to see the Lord until Judgment Day when he comes again? I've heard people swear both ways and am confused on the matter myself.

They are definitely competing doctrinal positions on this topic. Some folks say we go directly into heaven, some folks believe we're in some temporary holding area, and others believe that we are in some sort of sleep until Judgment Day.

It really depends on what mood you're in, what argument you're listening to and who you trust on any given day to sway you towards one position or another. What this proves, is that there is no absolutely 100% perfectly clear black and white simple straightforward explanation in Scripture. Now of course everyone who has an opinion will believe that it is 100% perfectly clear in Scripture but this is just human nature. How often we have a firm conviction about something and think, "The answer is obvious, why can't you see it like I see it?"

If there was a verse that explicitly stated exactly what happens the moment after you die, then I would simply show you that verse. So what I can offer you is what I believe to be the most clear indicators in Scripture and let you decide for yourself.

My personal belief is that we are immediately in God's presence the moment we die (Christians, that is). Now, how all that plays out with Judgment Day I'm not sure. My personal belief is that Judgment Day will occur in the future for those who die before that Day. In other words, if I were to die today, I believe I would be in heaven with Jesus awaiting the future Judgment Day. I base that personal conviction on these two verses:

Luke 23:43 - And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." (NKJV)

2 Corinthians 5:8 - We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent

from the body and to be present with the Lord. (NKJV)

Jesus told the thief on the cross who had demonstrated saving faith that TODAY he would be in Paradise with Jesus. That would be a strange comment to make if there were going to be any delay for any reason. There is also no compelling reason to think that Jesus made a special exception for this one person rather than matter-of-factly declaring what happens to all believers the moment they die.

The verse in 2nd Corinthians again states matter-of-factly that to be absent from the body is to be in the Lord's presence. This verse was written to believers so to draw the conclusion that we are immediately with the Lord when we die is not much of a stretch.

Those two verses are not sufficient for dogmatic doctrine but for me they are more than compelling enough to have the opinion that when we die we are either immediately in heaven, or for the lost, immediately in hell.

~~~~~

## Death – Organ Donation

**Do you believe in donating ones organs once they are deceased? If a person does donate their organs, will they have them in heaven? For example, if a person donates their eyes - will they be able to see in heaven? I want a really straightforward answer. I am**

### **young and don't understand a lot of what you write.**

Our fleshly bodies, just like this entire earth and universe, will be destroyed and re-created. We will have what the Bible calls a "glorified" body just like Jesus had when he rose from the dead.

That is why the questions about organ donations, cremation or people who die violent deaths that destroy the body all fall into the same category. What happens to our flesh here in this life is utterly irrelevant to what happens in the next. So cremation is a matter of conviction as is organ donation. No Christian should spend a second of concern about what happens to the body when it dies on this earth. It is a temporary housing that, thank the Lord, will be completely replaced in the next life.

Given that, I would highly encourage people to donate their organs which could result in blessings that we will never know about until God reveals them to us in heaven. Who knows what life and generations you could have an influence on by improving the quality of life or length of life of another person.

2 Peter 3:10-13 - But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the

heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (NKJV)

~~~~~

Difficult Verses – You Are God's

What did Jesus mean in John 10:34 saying, "I said, 'You are gods.'"

John 10:34 Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, "You are gods"'? (NKJV)

Jesus was quoting:

Psalms 82:5-6 - They do not know, nor do they understand; They walk about in darkness; All the foundations of the earth are unstable. I said, "You are gods, And all of you are children of the Most High." (NKJV)

In Psalms, God is calling unjust judges "gods" (because they think they are in their own mind, or at least act like it). The next verse (7) pronounces judgment on them declaring their death like ordinary men, not "gods."

Jesus was using this verse in Psalms to point out to the Jews that there are legitimate reasons to call others "god" other than it only applying to the Almighty God. He accurately showed that they themselves "in their law" had called others "god."

He was responding to their declaration that they wanted to kill him, not for His good works, but because Jesus had made Himself "God" (so much for people who say that Jesus never claimed to be God).

He is basically saying, "You guys call other people 'god', why do you object my title as 'Son of God'?"

Like Jesus often did, He was clearly pointing out the never ending hypocrisies the Jewish religious establishment engaged in concerning Him.

~~~~~

## Dinosaurs In The Bible

**Are dinosaurs found in the bible and how could they have been on earth before the biblical explanation of creation?**

Yes, there appears to be several references to Dinosaurs in the Bible, and obviously if the Biblical account of Creation is correct, they could not have existed before Creation.

So either the Bible is wrong, or evolution is wrong. That is why you CANNOT honestly be a "Christian evolutionist" who believes the God "created" things, then let "evolution" take over. That is the MOST absurd position you can hold. Pick one or the other... but give up this nonsense about the Bible and evolution fitting together in ANY way. They are mutually exclusive, you can NOT be

intellectually honest and believe in both.

We have become so brainwashed by TV, cartoons and public schools about dinosaurs "who roamed the earth 70 million years ago" that even true Christians don't give it a second thought... until they are challenged to evaluate the consequences of that belief. These "millions of years" statements are now just made "matter-of-factly" as if it is a proven fact of science... WHICH IT IS NOT; and that is easily discovered by anyone who wants to take the time to research it.

EVOLUTION IS A THEORY, A RELIGIOUS FAITH THAT LACKS ONE SINGLE PIECE OF UNDISPUTED PROOF OR EVIDENCE DESPITE A HUNDRED YEARS OF DESPERATE ATTEMPTS TO FIND SOME.

No matter how much you "just know" that "science has proven" evolution... the dirty little secret is, it HAS NOT. You have just been told that so much, you believe it on "faith." Go ahead, try to find the "scientific proof" - it doesn't exist. (And proof is not textbooks full evolutionary theory.)

Not only is there NO proof, not one single shred of proof - evolutionists are constantly changing, revising and postulating NEW theory as modern science & technology continues to render IMPOSSIBLE many of the original ideas of evolution and uniformitarianism.

So, the second half of your question is answered: if the Bible is true, then

dinosaurs could not have existed before Creation.

Let's look at some probable references to dinosaurs in the Bible:

Job 40:15-18 - "Look now at the behemoth, which I made along with you; He eats grass like an ox. See now, his strength is in his hips, And his power is in his stomach muscles. He moves his tail like a cedar; The sinews of his thighs are tightly knit. His bones are like beams of bronze, His ribs like bars of iron. (NKJV)

Liberal scholars declare this to be a hippo or elephant. Ever seen a hippo's tail? Is it a "cedar?" More like a twig. Elephants legs are stubby and their stomachs round. Verse 19 says no man can "bring the sword." There is no land animal alive today that man cannot capture and kill.

No, this is not a hippo or elephant or crocodile (as some suggest). This is a reference to the fact that dinosaurs were contemporary with man before the flood of Noah exactly as the Bible account of creation suggests.

Psalms 104:26 - There the ships sail about; There is that Leviathan Which You have made to play there. (NKJV)

Job, David and Isaiah (Psalm 104:25,26 and Isaiah 27:1) all speak of the Leviathan. There lives cover a span up to fairly recent times. The Leviathan was a sea monster, probably what we call the Kronosaurus. Some have suggested it was a crocodile.

But a crocodile is not so "fierce" none

would dare stir him (ask the Croc Hunter). The Leviathan also had "rows of scales", breathed and sneezed FIRE, yes, fire; could not be pierced by sword, arrow or spear; and "played" in the depths of the sea.

Hardly the description of a crocodile. It is interesting to note that all cultures, Godly or not, have fairly modern accounts of "fire breathing dragons." So it would appear that Dinosaurs haven't been gone from the earth all that long.

It would appear that many of the Bible characters and cultures accepted Dinosaurs as a matter of fact.... long before evolution and archeology dated them "70 million years old."

~~~~~

Dinosaurs On The Ark

How did Noah get a pair of T-rexes on the Ark? What did carnivores eat on the Ark?

Since the Bible doesn't answer this question specifically, we can only theorize based on what the Bible does tell us, and what the various sciences have unearthed.

We know from various evidence, proofs and prophesy that the Bible is authentic and trustworthy. We also know from overwhelming geographical, archeological and paleontological evidence that a worldwide hydro-cataclysm occurred in the recent Earth past.

Given that, we have no RATIONAL reason to doubt the Biblical account of Creation and the Flood. There are RELIGIOUS reasons to deny it, but not tangible reasons.

Based on Biblical integrity and authenticity, we can safely conclude that Dinosaurs were present on the ark with representatives of each "kind" present. So how could you get all those monstrous animals on one boat?

A few facts:

Given the dimensions of the ark, all the known families of animals could have easily fit on the ark with generous room to spare. It is estimated conservatively that only about 40% of the space of the ark would have been needed for the animals.

The average size of the dinosaurs was only that of a sheep. Only a comparative few of the dinosaurs were the giants we see glamorized in modern movies.

There is no reason not to believe that a YOUNG pair of the giant dinosaurs would have been taken on the ark; in fact, it makes perfect sense.

What did carnivores eat? Well the question presupposes that there WERE carnivores, which may or may not have been true. It also presupposes that carnivores MUST eat flesh. There are plenty of examples of carnivores today that can live quite healthily on vegetation. In fact, I'm unaware of any land animal that cannot survive on a vegetation diet

(let me know if you are aware of any...BR).

Still, with plenty of room to spare, there is no reason to believe that animals could not have been brought on board for food, or that quickly multiplying animals such as rabbits and mice did not provide some carnivorous snacks as well.

It's all educated guesswork, admittedly, but the IMPORTANT POINT is... that everything the Bible says happened was EASILY within the realm of physical possibility and doesn't even need a "miraculous" reason to believe even if it involves Dinosaurs.

The Ark story and dinosaurs are often cited as reasons to call the Bible a "fairy tale." WRONG.

~~~~~

## Discernment – God's Voice Or Mind Tricks

**My question is, how do we discern when God is talking to us? How do we know if it is our own ego and or the devil playing tricks on us? There have been many circumstances which I thought God was telling me what to do, but later find out it obviously was not.**

There are several ways to determine if we are "hearing God's voice" or just our own flesh.

The first and most definitive is to search the Scriptures. Is there a Bible verse that commands or genuinely supports the idea or direction you think God is leading you to? If yes, then you can be confident of God's leading.

Conversely, if a verse is found that contradicts what you are "hearing" - or specifically commands something different - then you can be sure that what you are hearing is your own flesh, or the Enemy - or perhaps you have misinterpreted something.

Lacking a clear verse that supports or contradicts what you feel God might be saying to you, there are some other considerations.

Proverbs 15:22 - Without counsel, plans go awry, But in the multitude of counselors they are established. (NKJV)

Find several Godly people to evaluate what you are "hearing from God." If you are genuinely seeking the honest truth, there will be few times that a group of mature Christians will not help you come to a confident determination.

James 1:5-6 - If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. (NKJV)

This verse applies directly to your question. Without Godly wisdom, we make the wrong choices; we follow

our flesh; we are "tossed about" chasing our own "voice" and not God's. The verse also gives the plain and simple solution: ask God for wisdom and He will give it. That's the easy part. The hard part is that once you GET wisdom, you will have to LIVE by that wisdom. That's means that often we won't get OUR way.

One last thought...

If you come to a point where you cannot truly decide, be sure that God will honor a decision that is made from a clear conscience and earnest prayer. That doesn't mean everything will be easy or "successful", but it does mean that God is always faithful to walk with us.

We don't need to fear that God will abandon us if we "accidentally" make a poor choice. He may correct us, chasten us or redirect us, but God will not abandon us. It is a BONDAGE to see God as someone who says "too bad" every time we make a bad choice.

God is our FATHER, not an evil, sadistic taskmaster.

~~~~~

Divine Judgment - Are Catastrophes God's Judgment?

Do you think that the reason Asia had those earthquake/tsunamis resulting in such a catastrophic loss

of life is because of God's wrath? They are mostly Hindu, Muslim, and Buddhist countries who don't recognize the Bible as His Divine Word, and don't recognize Christ as God's Son, or Lord and Savior of their lives?

You ask an age old question that the wisest of men have trouble answering. That makes it about impossible for me!

Divine judgment is a certainty. Where, when, who and how is God's business. We can only guess. We can make good guesses based on Biblical principle, but in the end, it is for God alone to know.

A few years back the big earthquake in California hit the pornography industry bulls eye. Divine judgment? One could certainly argue the point.

Tragedy and catastrophe happen all over the world consistently to both Christians and unbelievers. When it happens on a large scale it seems to get our attention more.

Does a tornado that destroys and kills a Christian family mean that they were hiding some secret sin that God "got them" for? Maybe. Maybe not. Only God knows.

Deuteronomy 29:27-29 - Then the anger of the Lord was aroused against this land, to bring on it every curse that is written in this book. And the Lord uprooted them from their land in anger, in wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into

another land, as it is this day.' "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law. (NKJV)

My main point is that this is knowledge only God can know for sure. Just because a large scale natural disaster hit a non-Christian nation doesn't necessarily mean God was judging them. Maybe, maybe not. One could rightly argue that "christian" America is just as guilty and in need of "judgment" as any other non-christian nation - we have the blood of millions of innocents on our hands, gross immorality and rampant hedonism.

Were the hurricanes in America this year a judgment? Maybe, maybe not. 9-11, the west coast fires, tornadoes, floods, drought... judgments? Maybe, maybe not. Only God knows.

What we need to keep in mind is a larger principle:

The world "groans" because of the curse of sin - so in a sense all natural disaster, catastrophe and tragedy is a sort of "judgment." We would not have any of it if we were not by nature sinful, which "infects" all of God's creation.

Romans 8:22 - For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. (NKJV)

I think these disasters should certainly serve to have us sit up and take notice of God. There is a "judgment" coming that NO one will

escape. These earthly catastrophes will seem like spring rain showers compared to standing at the Judgment before a Holy God who WILL pour out His wrath in full on all those who have not responded to Him in obedience.

Romans 2:5 - But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, (NKJV)

Read Ecclesiastes. Solomon teaches us that the rain falls on all, the sun rises and sets on all indiscriminately. Yes, there can be no doubt that God executes judgment even now in various forms, but it is beyond us to declare with certainty something like "God send that tsunami to punish those unChristian people."

Again, all tragedy is due our cursed earth, (Gen 3.17) so in a GENERAL sense, all our of pain and suffering is "judgment" for the sin nature of the human race. However, we cannot extend that to picking out specific disasters and declaring them to be the hand of God.

1 Chronicles 16:14 - He is the Lord our God; His judgments are in all the earth. (NKJV)

~~~~~

## Divine Revelation - People Visiting Heaven Or Hell

**What do you think of these books and accounts of people going to heaven or hell, then God tells them to come back tell everyone about it?**

I will tell you from study and research, that ALL the books of this type I've looked into end up having one or more of the following: metaphysical and occult ideas/imagery, extra-Biblical revelation and unScriptural (typically man-centered) descriptions, as well as Biblical error. Granted, you have to wade through all the sensational, Biblical sounding scenarios and descriptions, but they never stand up to Scriptural scrutiny.

Acts 17:11 ...they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. (NKJV)

Unfortunately, most of these books are accepted by Christians with little or no hesitation because of the same reason MOST error is accepted: PRAGMATISM. Pragmatism is the idea that something MUST be okay or Godly because 1) it gets good results, and adding an emotional component: 2) it feels right, 3) it helped me or 4) it didn't seem to be against God. Pragmatism (with emotionalism and experientialism) has allowed the Church to embrace all manners of error ranging from humanistic theory, marketing techniques, seeker-friendly compromise, positive thinking, books like 'The Shack' and 'The Secret', the prosperity gospel and a seeking of sensational experience (just to name a few).

So Christians (and non-Christians) casually digest these types of books

applying little or no discernment - books like Mary Baxter's "A Divine Revelation of Heaven", "90 Minutes in Heaven" by Don Piper or Todd Bentley's absurd claims of being "beamed" to heaven and chit-chatting with Jesus (or pick any number of Word Faith big names who claim heavenly visits).

There is no way (nor is it our duty) to judge a person's heart or sincerity, but we can make sensible evaluations about the source by observing their life, writing, teaching or public persona. Baxter is new-age, a fact made clear by her writings. Todd Bentley is a showboating, tale-bearing false prophet, an indisputable fact proven by his public activity. Don Piper however, by all accounts, seems to be someone who appears to truly love God.

Regardless, all these accounts have to be judged STRICTLY by Scripture, and they all fall short, some more than others. The bigger question is: does God want us NOW to know more about heaven than He chose to reveal in his inspired Word?

Acts 17:11 ...they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. (NKJV)

Think about it... the Apostle Paul went to heaven, and God told him, "Don't talk about it." The Apostle John saw many wondrous things in heaven that God told Him not to write down, leaving us only with the information we need to know about the final events of God's plan for mankind (the book of Revelation). Are we then to believe that God came along and told Mary Baxter or Benny Hinn to reveal

Heaven to us? As I often say to my kids, "I don't think so, Scooter."

God revealed what He wants us to know about heaven in the Bible. When a person "comes back" from heaven (or hell) with a story and description, they are in essence introducing NEW divine revelation, revelation that even Paul was not allowed to share. Mary Baxter makes no bones about the fact that Jesus TOLD HER to tell us what she saw. This is tantamount to divine revelation (exactly what she calls it), and SHOULD be every bit as authoritative and sacred as the Bible itself. Same source, same inspiration, same mission to write down God's message.

Any time a human teaches something "new" or proclaims something that God did not choose to reveal in the Bible (as it pertains to the nature of God and His message to us as Christians), that person is claiming divine inspiration equal to Scripture. Anytime someone writes or tells a story that says "God said to me, to tell you..." and it cannot be found in Scripture, they are making a statement of theology and by default, a claim of divine inspiration.

Therefore, assuming God would even give any "new" revelation today, they MUST be perfectly accurate and in line with what God has already given us in the Bible because God cannot contradict Himself. However, God is NOT giving new revelation today, but that is a lesson for another time, even though the emails rebuking me for saying that will come immediately.

For this reason alone, we should AUTOMATICALLY be skeptical

(dismiss?) of anyone "visiting" heaven or hell, either in a vision or a "near death" experience. I would go so far as to say we should assume the accounts are a deception of some sort or a product of imagination, regardless of the sincerity of the person. We are ALL capable of succumbing to a deception or emotion, so sincerity is not a credible standard.

So far, EVERY extra-Biblical account of this nature, when evaluated carefully against Scripture, is found to be in error, and almost all have common elements of new age and demonic deception which of course makes perfect sense. If these "next life" or "heavenly" experiences are not from God, they are from someone or something other than God. Most likely, it is a common demonic deception or influence that is leading people from the pure Word of God into sensationalism and false teaching.

Acts 17:11 ...they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. (NKJV)

We should simply depend on God's Word as our revelation and not some "divine encounter" written by man, no matter how interesting or "heavenly" it may sound. My personal opinion is that we Christians are TOO distracted by this type of story or account. There is a SERIOUS and wide spread lack of discernment in the Christian body today. We have no obligation to read and accept any claim of divine experience or revelation knowledge. To the contrary, we have duty to be skeptical, alert and cautious about these things.

In fact, given the warnings of Scripture about the last days deception, we would do well to simply ignore all of it and keep our nose buried in God's Word.

Acts 17:11 ...they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. (NKJV)

~~~~~

Divorce – Will God Forgive Me?

I really want to get divorced. I don't have a "Biblical" reason, but I know that God doesn't want me to be unhappy and He will forgive me for my sin. Don't you agree?

No, I do not agree.

First of all, God DOES want us to be happy, but He promises happiness as a by-product of our obedience and living life the way He wants. Read the Beatitudes (Matt 5) which say "Blessed are..." meaning "Happy are..." (actually that is just one part of the meaning of the phrase; but that is what is applicable here).

There are times when God DOES want us to be unhappy, and that is when we are sinning or out of fellowship with Him. If we are happy" (superficially anyway) during those times, then we are in real trouble spiritually.

Will God forgive you? God will forgive any Christian of any sin, any time that

Christian genuinely asks (1John 1:9). No doubt about that. But there are two problems with your "plan":

Playing fast and loose with God's forgiveness and grace is both dangerous and insulting to the sacrifice Jesus made. The Apostle Paul warns us that we are not to commit sin simply because we know God will forgive us:

Romans 6:1-2 - What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? (NKJV)

Being forgiven of sin is not the same thing as being relieved of its consequences.

I have personally known many people who have chosen this route both concerning divorce, sexual sin or other obvious wrongs. They convince themselves, with no small help from Satan's buddies, that God understands their situation and because God feels sorry for them, He will forgive them or worse, excuse them.

People with this mindset aren't really saying, "God will forgive of this obvious wrong I'm going to commit." What they are really saying is, "What I'm about to do isn't really wrong in this situation because of the circumstances, and I know God will understand and say 'it's okay.'" It's relativism cloaked in the Christian language of "forgiveness."

However, will God forgive someone who chooses divorce unBiblically and

then repents later? Of course. Will they escape the consequences and "live happily ever after?" Doubt it.

And here's where I finish with some practical and simple advice: **DON'T DO IT! YOU WILL REGRET IT!**

I know people who chose this route 10 or 20 years ago, and today their life is still a mess, still in turmoil, and now they are MUCH more unhappy and miserable than they thought they were before.

I know people who have left their spouse and married "the person God really meant for me to have." I have known people who have actually said that "God put us together" talking about the "new" person, WHILE still married to the first! How shameful to give God credit for such wickedness. Let's throw a little blasphemy in with our adultery (which is not too much different from "I'll go ahead and sin, God will excuse me because He understands").

I cannot tell you ONE example of a person who chose the "it's easier to get forgiveness than permission" approach who ended up happy and fulfilled. So from a practical standpoint, **DON'T DO IT!** You will NOT find the happiness you think is around the corner. You will hurt yourself, your spouse, your kids, your parents, your extended family and the generations to come.

But hey, your personal "happiness" is most important... right? More important than your faith. More important than your marriage vows. More important than your children's

right to an unbroken home. More important than your influence on them. More important than both of your extended families. More important than every other person's feelings and happiness. Right? **WOW!!!** Your personal happiness is **REALLY** the **MOST** important thing to consider, isn't it....

I once knew of a situation where one ready-to-divorce-spouse asked a "Christian counselor": Should I stay married just because it's the right thing to do? Doesn't God want me to be happy?

Shockingly (or not so shocking I guess), the Christian counselor responded with the "God will forgive you. He wants you to be happy. He doesn't expect you to live the rest of your life unhappy" routine. I propose that the "Christian counselor" will be held just as guilty for that divorce and subsequent adultery as the person who did it.

It is time for clarity and courage in the face of this kind of nonsense concerning the most important institution in God's creation.

Of course, there is a Biblical principle here that screams for our attention:

Galatians 6:7 - Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. (NKJV)

You are fooling yourself if you think you are going to ride off into the sunset because "God will forgive me." The very best, in my opinion, you can

hope for is that God WILL forgive you in the event of your genuine repentance BUT you can expect severe consequence for the long term in the form of unhappiness, turmoil, broken hearts, confusion, resentment and family chaos.

Don't fool yourself. God IS NOT mocked.

~~~~~

## Divorce - Biblical Reasons

**Are there really any grounds for divorce in the Bible? I've read so many different opinions on this. If you are a Christian and you have gotten a divorce and remarried a non-Christian, how do you make it right with God beyond asking for forgiveness?**

You are correct, there are all sorts of opinions, twists and man-made ideas about what God says concerning divorce. So let's cut through all that and just see what the Bible says. Let it simply speak for itself and resist all the double speak and twelve dollar explanations that want to convince people that the Bible doesn't really mean what it says.

God's original idea for marriage:

Matthew 19:5-6 - and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh' ? So then, they are no longer two but

one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." (NKJV)

God hates divorce:

Malachi 2:16 - "For the Lord God of Israel says That He hates divorce, For it covers one's garment with violence," Says the Lord of hosts. Therefore take heed to your spirit, That you do not deal treacherously." (NKJV)

Jesus says:

Matthew 5:32 - But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery. (NKJV)

Adultery destroys the covenant of marriage, and anyone who marries someone who is divorced except for Jesus' exclusion of adultery, commits adultery (literally fornication).

Even in the case of adultery, divorce is not automatic, and should not be a first choice. But because of the hardness of the sinful human heart who has destroyed the marriage covenant with infidelity:

Matthew 19:8 - He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so." (NKJV)

The Apostle Paul, inspired by God, allowed one other reason for divorce:



1 Corinthians 7:13-15 - And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. (NKJV)

If you are abandoned by an unbelieving spouse, divorce is allowed.

In all cases, divorce should be a last resort and the marriage covenant restored when possible.

It's as simple as that. The Bible could not be clearer on the subject, and is PERFECTLY clear... until people get a hold of it with a predetermined agenda.

As for what you can do if you have sinned in this area OTHER than asking for forgiveness. Nothing. Once you are forgiven, then it is as if the sin never happened.

Psalms 103:11-12 - For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. (NKJV)

However, Jesus gives the repentant sinner one final piece of advice:

John 8:11 - She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." (NKJV)

~~~~~

Divorce - Legal Issues

My husband left for another woman and then sued me for divorce nine years ago. He has failed to pay what he owes me for the settlement and is in contempt of court. Is it OK for me to press charges and get what is due me? Thank you for taking the time with all of these questions. I am sure many people, including myself, are helped with reading the answers to these issues.

Let me begin by telling you this is strictly my opinion because I do not know enough about the facts to answer further.

If you currently and honestly need the money at this point to care for children, then I would maintain it is not only okay, but necessary for you to pursue the funds you speak of.

If there are no children involved at this point, and it is not needed to support them, I would urge you to put the past behind, forgive your ex-husband (Matt 5:43-46) and trust the Lord to be your provision.

I know that is probably not the answer you want to hear, and believe

me, there will be TEN GILLION people who will disagree with me... that is the most honest and objective answer the Lord has impressed me with.

~~~~~

## Divorce – Physical And Mental Abuse

### Is divorcing my husband due to physical and mental abuse a sin?

Well, here we go. Divorce is one of those topics that every time I have a psychotic episode and talk about it, readers bail out, I'm headed straight for the fires of hell, and the rhetoric is like an atomic fallout. Which of course couldn't be more fun, so I never overlook a chance to jump in with both feet!

First, before answering the direct question, let's talk about this issue of "abuse." Abuse has become the pet word for pretty much anything we don't like. "Mental or emotional abuse" is even more foggy and over used.

Of course, true physical abuse is hideous and men who abuse women ought to be horse whipped and dragged through the streets behind a N.O.W. parade float loaded with raging hairy feminists.

Nowadays though, "abuse" can be anything we deem uncomfortable or annoying. Okay, it may even be a grab, push or slap which is still very wrong and shameful, but it's not like

the old days when everyone understood that an "abused spouse" meant black eyes, busted lips and trips to the emergency room.

"Emotional abuse" is the most overrated and ABUSED phrase in marriage today. It has now become probably the most offered "reason" for personal unhappiness in a marriage. Sorry ladies, by a long shot in my experience, you are the one leveling this nebulous accusation at husbands; although the softer and less macho men are getting, you are now hearing it from them too.

Regardless of who says it, what exactly is "emotional abuse?" Okay, in its most extreme form, which I've personally seen (not from my wife!), it can be a spouse who is simply unrelenting and shameless with insults, cursing, belittling or berating the marriage partner. The couple of times I've witnessed this, I've wondered how the victim didn't turn to physical abuse to end it. It was one of the most miserable sights I've ever witnessed.

In all but rare extreme cases like that, I'm of the opinion that "emotional abuse" has been nothing more than a convenient label for normal arguing, uncaring communication or simply two people who are just fighting in the age old way married couples fight.

"Abuse" has sacred protected status in our world of "victimhood" today making "emotional abuse" an ace-in-the-hole because the accused has no recourse, defense or excuse. Once an abuser, always an "abuser"; do not pass "go", do not collect \$200. No

amount of defense or logic can reduce or erase the stigma once a spouse has been labeled abuser.

Emotional abuse is so gray, so undefined and so popular today that it has become the excuse of choice to bail out on a marriage. There is no proof, no physical evidence, no definitive criteria... you simply just have to claim you "feel" emotionally abused.

It ranges from feeling insulted, to neglected, to misunderstood, to not "validated", to not loved, to not happy. Simply not feeling happy about the marriage with a spouse who won't make things happy evidently has now warranted the label of "emotional abuse."

How convenient.

As you can tell, I'm not exactly a fan. Emotional abuse, 99% of the time in my opinion, is leveled as the reason for wanting a divorce BECAUSE THERE SIMPLY IS NOT ANY REAL BIBLICAL REASON AND "ABUSE" IS THE ONE WORD THAT SOUNDS SO HORRIBLE THAT NO REASONABLE PERSON COULD TELL SOMEONE IT'S NOT GROUNDS FOR DIVORCE.

I guess I'm unreasonable. "Emotional abuse" is not Biblical grounds for divorce EVEN IF IT IS the extreme version I talked about above.

Well I didn't leave much wiggle room there, so I won't belabor the point. But what if there is true PHYSICAL abuse?

That question is always more problematic. Divorce? The Bible does not offer a specific exception that allows for divorce for physical abuse such as for adultery (Matt 19.9). There are some who would argue that physical abuse constitutes abandonment and anyone who would physically abuse their spouse must not be a Christian. Based on that they cite 1Corinthians 7:15 as grounds for divorce. While it has logical merit, that's seriously stretching both the context and meaning to the point of alarm.

No one wants to tell a woman she's stuck with a husband that is literally abusing her physically (or sadly, it is common to hear of wife-to-husband physical abuse too). At a minimum, other Christians should help the victim separate safely from the violence as the situation is dealt with.

My advice? If you are truly being physically abused, I would immediately seek refuge and the counsel of Godly mature Christians.

If you are "emotionally abused" and what it really is, is arguing & unkindness, or even significant verbal altercations... that is not a grounds for a Biblical divorce and you should immediately seek serious BIBLICAL PASTORAL counseling and accountability.

If you are saying "emotionally abused" because it's the holy grail of divorce excuses and the reality is you are simply unhappy and selfish, then you best remember that God will hold you accountable for your decision to

decide you can ammend the Bible with your own reasons for divorce.

You should also consider the damage you are doing to your spouse announcing they are "abusive"... a label not easily shed. Run, don't walk and find some mature Godly Christians who will hold you accountable, help you with your marriage, and support you as you honor the vows of lifelong fidelity and loyalty to your spouse.

~~~~~

Divorce – Will God Allow Me To Remarry?

Hi Brent, ** and I have been dating for several years off and on. He can fill you in on the details if needed, but he told me of your website and after reading some of your very insightful answers, I would like to ask you a few questions in regards to **** and myself. I am divorced from a mentally abusive ex-husband and have been for over 3 years. **** is divorced due to infidelity on his ex-wife's part. Will God ever 'approve' if I was to remarry? Would ***** and I be in God's grace if we were to marry? Please let me know if you need any more information. Thank you so much for your time as this is weighing very heavily on my heart and soul.**

(This question contained personal names which I have edited out). Before I give my answer to this question, I want to preface it.

Divorce has become the modern day "leprosy" in many churches, especially fundamental churches. A person would often be treated better if they were a repentant murderer, than a repentant divorcee. They would be assured of God's forgiveness and mercy if they had killed their spouse and repented, but quickly informed they are "living in adultery" (a phrase nowhere found in Scripture) if they divorced a spouse and repented. Okay, that may be an unfair stretch, but it makes the point.

This is a shame, especially given how prevalent divorce is. Most of the blame for the high divorce rate certainly falls on society's selfish and worldly approach to marriage in general, but we cannot ignore the culpability of the Church in the matter due to:

weak moral standards which lead to poor personal and corporate standards inside the Church

missing healthy Christian peer pressure on those who contemplate divorce for flimsy reasons

poor Biblical teaching and training about marriage and divorce

increasing worldliness and conformation to societal norms in the Church

lack of effective and consistent church discipline

lack of compassion, support and discipleship for those who do find themselves dealing with divorce

I know of a man whose wife was unfaithful multiple times and finally ran off with another man. After turning to his church for help, he immediately started getting messages and comments like, "You know you can't get remarried don't you?" - "You just need to pull yourself up by your bootstraps." - "If you do get remarried, you can't do it at church." And, "Until you know she's actually committed adultery, you know you can't get remarried." That was EXACTLY what that hurting and devastated Christian needed to hear within days of his wife leaving him and taking his children. And this was from a solid, Bible-teaching evangelical church.

In my experience, I have found two extremes over and over in the modern American church. One extreme is along the lines of the comments above. Uncompassionate responses that beat down an already beaten down Christians. Many of those comments come from folks who may themselves have miserable marriages, but they haven't committed the unpardonable sin of divorce. I have been told on more than one occasion that a person's UNbelieving, non-Christian friends were far more compassionate and supportive than the hurting person's church was. And this was for people going through a "Biblical" divorce or remarriage.

The other extreme I have seen much of, and it is just as bad (probably worse), is the one of "just love" when it comes to divorce and remarriage.

No Bible, no standards, no Church discipline, no pressure to conform to God's Word... just do whatever makes you happy; because "God doesn't want us to be unhappy.". This ignores God's hatred for divorce (Mal 2:16), the importance of marriage as the foundational unit of society, a symbol of Christ's relationship to the Church, and the basis for life-long commitment.

Now, in the interest of disclosure, I have been divorced ("Biblically" for those who must know). Many readers will stop right there and immediately dismiss me as unqualified to give an objective opinion on divorce. That makes as much sense as saying that a repented adulterer can't give a Biblical answer on adultery, or a former UNBELIEVER can't give a Biblical answer on salvation. So for those of you who are still reading....

The reason for the long preface to the answer I'm going to give is because I believe that divorce has become the one thing that it is easy for CHRISTIANS to pick on and have legalistic, almost hypocritical reactions to. For those who have never been divorced, it's easy and convenient to apply hardcore, cold standards - devoid of the compassion and discipleship that is needed in the midst of such a confusing and tragic time of a person's life.

For those who have been divorced, it's often far too easy and convenient to claim "God's forgiveness" while choosing a divorce or new marriage that clearly ignores God's Word on the issue. It's a sad state that has come about as the result incremental

increases in worldliness within the Church - we have become more concerned about appealing to the world's "needs" than we are about appealing to their need for holiness.

I believe in absolute adherence to all God's principles and commands. I'm not making excuses or paving the way for mediocrity concerning divorce. However, the pendulum has swung too far to the other end and the divorced have become the modern day "unclean" in their own evangelical, fundamental churches.

The balance? A genuine and honest striving to conform to God's Word, then the generous application of mercy and compassion on those who have failed or been victim.

With that in mind, here is my answer to the original question:

First, "dating." Dating, American style, is often "marriage light" with only the official and inconvenient step of a marriage license missing. Many Christians who realize they are not Biblically free to remarry still "date" as if that legalistic approach honors the spirit of God's standard. I would propose that any Christian who clearly is not free to remarry, should not be putting themselves through the frustration and compromise of dating and should instead devote themselves to God's Word, service and a holy life. But that is an opinion, and I would only appeal to each person's conscience for guidance from God.

"Dating" - as practiced today - is a whole other issue itself, but for the sake of this answer we will call

"dating" the process of getting to know someone you might be interested in marrying (although that's a far cry from what it typically is today).

So according to your question, you have been dating, but you are not sure if you can remarry. If you cannot remarry, why date? God is not legalistic. You cannot play "technical games" with His Word. If God says you cannot remarry, then you should not be engaged in relationships that could possibly lead to marriage or that are meant to give you what marriage provides. Again, my opinion.

Next, you say you've been divorced for three years because your husband was "emotionally abusive." There are HUGE problems with that comment.

First, the only Biblical grounds for divorce are adultery (Matt 5:32) and abandonment by an unbelieving spouse (1Cor 7:15) (there are many different arguments surrounding that statement; but it will suffice for this answer). There is no mention of the concept of "emotional abuse" in Scripture and it certainly is not given as a reason for God allowing divorce. That is a modern day invention on humanist psychology.

Additionally, "emotional abuse" has increasingly become the catch-all excuse in divorce. Any phrase with the word "abuse" in it sounds really "bad" but in reality "emotional abuse" covers anything from non-stop verbal berating to "My spouse says things I don't want to hear." More and more it appears that the latter is the case.

"My wife tells me I play too much golf; she's emotionally abusive." - "My husband says I nag too much; he's emotionally abusive." - "My husband calls me fat; he's emotionally abuses me." - "My wife's says her friend's husband is what a real husband should be like; she is emotionally abusing me."

While unfortunate, even if a spouse is emotionally abusive (insulting, name-calling, berating, etc.) there is still no Biblical exception for divorce because of it.

I've heard much when it comes to "emotional abuse." What it typically boils down to is two people who argue, nag, fight, fuss or call each other names and that is "emotional abuse." Or it's one spouse who tells the other wrongdoing spouse about their wrongdoing - and that's emotional abuse. In other words, one spouse says, "You should not stay out until 3am drinking and flirting with other women." The offending spouse claims that the other is "controlling and emotionally abusive" for getting mad about them staying out and drinking. Don't laugh. I've heard that kind of nonsense many times. That's what we've come to in America where everything I do wrong is someone else's fault. And everything that doesn't feel good is "abusive."

Emotional "abuse" is anything we don't like to hear that makes us feel bad - whether it's insults, nagging, or the truth. The word "abuse" makes it sound like an intolerable situation which we have no control over and MUST respond in a certain way. "Abuse" gives something an air of

severity that makes it seem like the recipient has no choice but to "end the abuse."

Emotional abuse has become a favorite reason, especially for females but increasingly for men as well, to seek divorce. Throwing in the word "abuse" is meant to lend credibility to the idea that divorce was inevitable and only fair so that the victim could escape the "abuse" because no one should have to live in "abuse."

This would be a different discussion if we were talking about true physical or sexual abuse. But "emotional abuse" is far too convenient, far too nebulous, and frankly, usually nothing more than a cop out for two people who selfishly and verbally mistreat each other. Regardless, "emotional abuse" is an invention of the world, and not recognized in Scripture, and certainly not as a Biblical exception for divorce.

So the short answer is that "no" - based on what you have told me - you are not free to remarry, and God would not bless your choice to marry.

There is a big difference between the person who is already remarried "unbiblically" who is seeking to bring their convictions in line with Scripture, versus the person who knows full well what God's Word says on a subject and blatantly choose to ignore it - and go ahead remarry anyway. I have personally seen people on numerous occasions do something directly against God's Word and claim that "God will forgive me."

Remarriage seems to be particularly popular for the idea of doing what you

want and getting "forgiveness" later. "It's easier to get forgiveness than permission" seems to be the rule, and it is a shameful true abuse of God's mercy.

You know what? He will forgive you, if a true Christian truly seeks forgiveness. But the person with this type of mentality is a long ways from understanding true repentance and plays a dangerous game with sin. At the very least, it shows an immature understanding of sin and forgiveness. As well, God's forgiveness does not necessarily, nor typically, mean that you will still not face the CONSEQUENCES of your choice.

We tend to confuse consequences with forgiveness. God can forgive us for fornication, but that doesn't mean the pregnancy that has resulted will go away, or the emotional consequences, or the inevitable relationship problems will disappear. The "consequences of sin" are a separate matter from "forgiveness of sin." God will not be mocked. If we sow the seeds of sin, we will reap the harvest of sin - even if God forgives us of that sin (Gal 6:7). (There may be occasions when God chooses to loose us even from the consequence of sin, but that is the exception, not the rule)

From the information you have given me, my "insightful" answer, but probably not a "welcome" answer, is that you should not be dating; you are not free to remarry and no, you would not be in "God's graces" if you were to marry the Christian friend you mention. It is my humble, and often flawed opinion, that you should devote yourself to prayer, fasting,

Bible study, good works and holiness... honoring God's standards that clearly apply to your past choices.

Now, it would take about 30 seconds for you to find a dozen different "Christian authorities" who will tell you it's okay to get remarried and do what you want. So if you're seeking "permission" - you can easily find it. There are always endless sources that will tell us what we want to hear (2 Tim 4:3).

So it all boils down to whether or not you are looking for "permission" or looking for truth. If you are looking for truth, then don't take my word for it, or anyone else's, and get your Bible out. Ask God for wisdom (James 1:5) and He will show you from His Word exactly what you should do. Read what God has to say on the matter and trust Him alone to show you what you should do. Only following Him will result in the happiness you seek.

~~~~~

## Doctrine - Are There Apostles Today?

**Why don't you believe in Apostles operating today? Why should the verses about "some being Apostles" be split up into "that was for then" and "this is for today?"**

I could give you a long theological answer about "cessationism" but many people have written about that already. What I want to do is give the



logical options we face and then let the reader progress from there.

The crux of the matter is: "that was for then" and "this is for today" which we hear a lot concerning many Christian issues: miracles, spiritual gifts, tongues, certain offices like Apostle, hair covering, customs, etc.

You can't answer any of these questions until you answer the foundational question:

**WERE SOME THINGS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT FOR "THEN" AND NOT FOR "NOW"?**

(We will limit this consideration for New Testament only as the context of the Old Testament opens up a whole other issue.)

To answer that question, we must decide on one of two options:

Option 1: Nothing in the New Testament can be categorized as "that was for then" and "this is for today." All things are equally for all times.

Option 2: Some things are meant for certain times, and not for others.

Note: Of course we could say there is a third option that notes that only supernatural things are for "then" and "now" but NOT customs (or vice versa), but by what authority can we then make another distinction like that? Once you go down that road, then you can say "some supernatural" or "some customs." In any case, you've chosen Option 2 already if you do not say "all things."

Choosing Option 1 opens up a WHOLE lot of confusion, questions and opportunity for absurdness as well as inconsistency. Consider some things that were done, demonstrated or wrote about in the New Testament that obviously do NOT occur today (though there are some sects that practice portions of this list):

Hair coverings

Holy kisses

Churches meet in homes

Why aren't Apostles today ACTUALLY (not claiming) doing what the Apostles did then with irrefutable supernatural power demonstrated countless times in public?

Why aren't there ACTUAL (not claimed) "Pentecosts" with tongues of fire and mass speaking in the Biblical version of tongues?

ACTUAL divine revelation (not claimed) that becomes canonized into Scripture

Why don't we dress the way they did?

Why don't we follow EVERY custom, example and manner shown in the New Testament Scripture?

Why aren't we always baptizing in rivers and lakes instead of "baptistries?"

If everything that happened in the New Testament is a still a valid practice, office and experience for today, then we have no choice but to practice EVERYTHING we see in the New Testament. Who are we to pick

and choose if the Bible doesn't tell us specifically?

We cannot pick and choose what suits us IF we choose Option 1. We can't say "tongues are for today but hair covering was a custom" or "we still have Apostles" but have chosen to build church buildings instead of meeting in homes... or using the exact same kind of bread in Communion, or selling our all our possessions and giving it to our modern "Apostles" to help the poor, or.... (pick one of countless other examples).

Option TWO allows us to apply some Biblical logic to the obvious fact that there ARE some things that were "for then" and some "for now" and some "for all times" or "any time."

Option 2 allows us to make sense of not only these doctrinal questions (tongues, miracles, Apostles, etc.) but also of things like customs (meeting places, clothing, hair coverings, etc.).

But how can you tell? Who gets to decide? Of course, the Bible decides for us, but it takes a correct understanding of the one book in the Bible where most of the "support" for these ideas come from: ACTS.

ACTS is a book of "transition."

Acts cannot be read properly without an understanding of its place in Scripture, it's context and its purpose. Acts is a book of transitions from the "old" to the "new." God used many things during that transition that fulfilled the transition and no longer have the need for operation nor were

they necessarily meant as example or specific instruction for what would become the established church.

ACTS is a transition from the old to the new, from the synagogue to the church, from the Jewish leadership to the Apostles, from the Law to Grace, from externals to internals, from compliance to indwelling (Holy Spirit).

ACTS takes us from the Old Testament and the Gospels.. then bridges... over to the Epistles. ACTS is the history and record of how God made the transition from Moses to Jesus, from the Jews to the Church.

There were many needs, situations and things that had to happen between the time of Jesus' ascension and the establishment of His Church as we know it.

We tend to think this was instantaneous, or at best, don't contemplate the COMPLETE OVERHAUL this represented to early Believers in Christ.

In light of this understanding of ACTS, now consider: the Apostles were a specific group of commissioned men for a specific purpose anointed by Jesus.

"Apostle" is not a "general term" Biblically. It refers to a very specific group of men who fulfilled a very specific role and purpose. It is only today's doctrinal confusion that attempts to redefine "apostle" as some general purpose office or gift ("church planters" or "missionary

frontiersman" or "father of a church movement") still in operation today. The churches today who WANT "apostles" redefine the meaning of Biblical Apostle completely divorced from the context of ACTS as a "book of transitions."

The plain fact is, while some men (and a few women) today CLAIM Apostolic authority and the accompanying supernatural power, NO MAN can be irrefutably proven to be doing anything even remotely similar to what the Apostles did with respect to miracles and divine revelation from God. Yes, many claim this, but if the proof was available or public, it would be plastered in a million places in this day and age of instant media.

However, that's beside the point. I don't "disbelieve" in Biblical Apostles today because of lack of "proof" - they don't exist because God only appointed only 14 men to that role/office and they fulfilled their purpose and are waiting in heaven for us. Nor has any else fulfilled the qualification of being personal, literal witnesses of the resurrected Christ (again, though many CLAIM this today).

This misunderstanding of Acts as book of "transition" leads too much of our incorrect teaching today on these matters.

No, Apostles do not exist today. They were "for then" - not "now."

~~~~~

Doctrine - Replacement Theology

Do you believe in Replacement Theology?

For those who are unsure, "Replacement Theology" is the doctrine that states the Church has replaced the nation of Israel and the many promises made to Israel are either fulfilled in, or now apply to the Christian Church. This is also called "Covenant Theology."

Dispensationalists or Literalists hold that Israel in the Bible is always the nation of Israel unless the context is clear that something broader is being symbolized (but this is the rare exception).

There is MUCH already written for both sides of this question, and typically a person convinced of one viewpoint is rarely persuaded of the other.

I will say that for about 25 years, I firmly held to one position because it was what I was taught growing up. After a decade of my own open-minded study, I changed my belief much to the chagrin of my friends and family.

Most people who ask me this aren't genuinely curious or wanting to learn, they are either picking a fight, or using it as a test of fellowship. I have found this to be generally the case over the years.

I do not think that holding one view or the other is a "Gospel-changing" issue and does not preclude someone from having a saving faith in Jesus Christ. It is not a test of salvation or fellowship.

However, one's belief on this issue dramatically affects how you interpret major portions of the Bible, specifically Scripture that deals with prophecy and eschatology (the "end times").

Generally speaking, those who choose Replacement Theology believe that prophecy in the Old Testament and Revelation has been fulfilled in historical events that have already occurred to the Church. That is a broad generalization but accurate enough for this answer. They hold an "amillennial" position, that is, there will be no thousand year earthly reign of Christ or a rapture of the church.

Therefore, verses that speak of the Kingdom, Christ's reign, the everlasting reign of David's throne and promises of Israel's blessing all apply to the Church... according to Replacement Theology. This view necessitates much of the Bible being viewed as symbolism or analogy (thus the opposite view being termed occasionally as being "Literalist").

The "end of days" for Replacement Theology believers can be summed up as: Jesus returns, the earth and heavens are burned up, the Judgment and then eternity begins. Again, broad generalizations, but enough to give the picture.

Dispensationalists believe that all through Scripture, including

Revelation, when Israel is spoken of, the physical nation of Israel, and the literal Jews are still specifically the meaning.

Therefore, promises made about a future kingdom ruled from David's throne for 1000 years are taken literally. The promises of the land of Israel being restored, and the Jews turning to God are taken literally. The events of Revelation - 1000 year reign, the Rapture, the antiChrist, Armageddon, 144000 Jewish witnesses - are all taken literally.

Again, broad generalizations, but for this answer, enough to understand the difference in the two positions.

I'll ask readers not to bombard me with their arguments on this topic because 1) I'm well studied about both sides, and 2) the point of this answer is not to argue either side but to emphasize this:

WHICHEVER SIDE YOU TAKE, YOU MUST REALIZE IT BECOMES A FOUNDATIONAL FILTER THROUGH WHICH YOU UNDERSTAND AND INTERPRET A VERY LARGE PORTION OF THE BIBLE.

What I want to teach you today is that we must be aware of these "macro filters" when we read the Bible. We all hold certain primary views that affect how we see Scripture whether you realize it or not.

For example, whatever you believe about Calvinism-Arminianism or some varying degree of sovereignty - causes you to filter hundreds of verses

through that belief even if you don't realize you are doing it. What you believe about "eternal security vs. you can lose your salvation" is another example. What you believe about the inerrancy of Scripture is yet another "macro filter" that affects how you interpret passages.

And that's the point I want you to get. People need to realize they are FILTERING verses through these "macro filters" of belief. Realizing this allows you 1) to more clearly understand why you believe what you believe, and 2) allows you to understand and be patient about what others believe without having the thought in the back of your mind "you must be an idiot to believe that".... or at best, you think they are just Scripturally ignorant. Of course I realize that NO ONE has ever thought "you must be an idiot to believe that..."

Folks, often Biblical ignorance is the reason, but just as often it is because someone holds a basic foundational view that is the opposite of yours. It's not because someone is dumb or unenlightened. They hold a different belief because their foundation is different.

You will find yourself more patient with other Believers if you understand and recognize this reality. You will also find your own Bible study to be more productive if you understand the differing view and conduct an open minded study of the "other side" and THEN make up your mind which you believe.

To summarize: be aware of your foundational views that are "macro

filters." They have very great effect on how you interpret Scripture, and being able to understand why your Brothers and Sisters in Christ may hold a different view on things like the End Times, Eternal Security and Israel.

~~~~~

## Doing Good - Covering Up Sin For My Friend

**I have a female friend who has a serious boyfriend that she wants to get engaged to, but she cheats on him repeatedly and I know about it. Should I tell him, or just stay out of her business? I'm feeling guilty about not telling him.**

There is a reason you feel guilty. God gives us a conscience so that when we witness something that is wrong we are not able to just ignore it without bothering us.

We live in a culture today that protects the wrongdoer because we are afraid of being accused of being judgmental or "holier than thou." Too often we hear the excuse, "It's none of my business" while the wicked person goes unchallenged and the victim is shown no compassion.

The real reason for this is simply a lack of moral courage. It's easier to ignore the situation and not get involved. So we make up excuses such as it's none of my business.

Not only is this wrong from the aspect of protecting the person who is being hurt, this is wrong from a biblical standpoint as well:

James 4:17 - Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin. (NKJV)

We know that it is a good thing to expose sin and protect the innocent. Your immoral and cheating friend should be confronted. The innocent boyfriend who is unaware of her unfaithfulness to the relationship should be informed.

This is the good thing to do. Not to do it, according to Scripture, would be sinful.

From a practical standpoint here is my advice on how to handle it: tell your friend that she has 24 hours to tell her boyfriend the truth about the situation. Tell her that if you cannot confirm that she has been truthful to him, you will have no choice but to call him and tell him yourself.

You owe this to the innocent party because of the fact that you know what's going on, and it is your duty to confront sin with courage (and compassion).

Your friend will likely express that she will hate you for doing this, that it's none of your business, that you are self-righteous and perhaps she will threaten you in some other way. That is why it takes moral COURAGE to do the right thing. It is not fun and it is not comfortable.

To know that you should do this good thing and not to do it, would be wrong on your part - not loving to the innocent party and being cowardly concerning your friend's sinful behavior.

~~~~~

Drinking – Is It Wrong To Have A Drink?

I work with people who drink. We occasionally have office parties or events where alcohol is served. As a Christian, is it a sin for me to have a drink?

Well, first of all let's answer the age-old obvious question: is it a sin for a Christian to consume alcohol?

While there are plenty of good and practical reasons it is smart, and safer, NOT to drink at all, it cannot be stated that the Bible says it is categorically a sin to drink alcohol. In fact, the Bible lists wine as one of God's blessings to man:

Psalm 104:13-15 - He waters the hills from His upper chambers; The earth is satisfied with the fruit of Your works. He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, And vegetation for the service of man, That he may bring forth food from the earth, And wine that makes glad the heart of man, Oil to make his face shine, And bread which strengthens man's heart. (NKJV)

It's hard to miss the context. Water is good, grass is good, vegetation is good,

oil is good, bread is good... wine is a sin. No, wine makes glad the heart of man.

Like countless other things in creation, there is a universally known pleasant effect derived from alcohol. Evidently, when consumed with self-control and moderation, God recognizes this and allowed it to be listed in His Word right smack dab in the middle of several other undeniably good things (and notice all those other things are BAD TOO if abused).

Okay, that part will get me thoroughly rebuked, so lest I fail to offend everyone, let me now address the other side.

Is drinking a sin? No. Is getting drunk a sin? Always. (Eph 5:8)

What's my advice to you about drinking at "events"? I would advise you to choose NOT to. It could range from being a "less than the best" decision all the way to being a totally stupid and destructive mistake.

First, it is a matter of asking, "How can I most glorify God?" In today's world of partying, drinking and revelry, the person who ABSTAINS WITHOUT PRONOUNCING "HELL BOUND" ON THOSE WHO DO NOT is a person who will stand out.

Why would you want to stand out? Perhaps God has prepared a heart who will see your example and it will become an open door for you to talk about God with them.

Choosing not to drink is also the safest choice. If you don't drink, then you will never have the chance of getting drunk. If you don't drink, you'll never suffer from impaired judgment or decreased inhibitions that could lead to bad decisions or acts.

Choosing not to drink will never cause a weaker Christian to stumble (1Cor 8:9). The mature Christian will look to be an example and leader for other Christians who may not have the same strength or maturity.

In summary, it would not be a sin for you to have a drink at the office party (assuming it does not violate your conscience) but my advice to you is to choose NOT to for all the reasons I've stated.

My advice is that if you want to enjoy a glass of wine, do it in the privacy of your own home in extreme moderation.

~~~~~

## Drinking - Is It Ever Okay?

**Is it wrong for a Christian to take alcohol for medicinal purposes? Is it ever okay for Christians to drink? Where do we find the balance?**

First let's give the answer we do know. It is always wrong and sinful to get drunk, period.

Galatians 5:19-21 - Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness,

lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (NKJV)

Ephesians 5:18 - And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, (NKJV)

So that leaves us with the age-old question of whether or not it is WRONG for a Christian to drink. Like most things in the Christian life this boils down to many variables that have to do with the condition of a person's heart, not one specific act.

I know that I will be hammered for stating this so matter-of-factly, but here goes: there is nothing innately or inherently sinful about a Christian who takes a drink of alcohol, even on a routine basis. Now remember, I'm speaking of the actual physical act, not the motives, not the condition of the person's heart, and not whether or not they are being a "stumbling block."

So when is it a sin to drink alcohol? It is a sin if you get drunk (Ephesians 5:18). It is a sin if you violate your conscience (Romans 14:1-23). It is a sin if you cause a weaker brother to stumble (Romans 14:21; 1 Corinthians 8:9). It is a sin if in any way it shames Christ, if it robs God of glory or if it brings reproach on the church.

We have to be very careful about making a list of times, places and

circumstances in which taking a drink of alcohol is okay or wrong because there are many considerations of the heart that have to be taken into account. It depends on the person's motivation, their use of liberty, their conscience, and their spiritual state at the time. The minute we make a checklist, it becomes legalist and we sinful humans ALWAYS find the loopholes.

Given that, I think it is a wise admonition that to avoid alcohol is probably the smart thing to do, but we cannot definitively call something "sin" when the Bible does not call it such. The Bible has many warnings about alcohol use, and that is another good reason to consider it the wiser choice to severely limit or abstain from its use:

Lev. 10:9; Num. 6:3; Judg. 13:4; Prov. 20:1; Prov. 21:17; Prov. 23:29-32; Prov. 31:4, 5; Isa. 5:11, 22; Isa. 24:9; Isa. 28:1, 3, 7; Jer. 23:9; Jer. 35:2-10, 14, 18, 19; Ezek. 44:21; Hos. 4:11; Luke 1:15; Rom. 14:21; Eph. 5:18; Tit. 2:3.

To close, let me give my favorite advice for these types of questions. Instead of asking, "What can I do, and it not be wrong?"; try asking, "What can I do to bring the most glory to Christ?"

That will answer most questions of this nature for the honest seeker.

~~~~~


Elders – Accusations Against Elders

On dealing with accusations against an elder, what does it mean that the elder is to be rebuked before all? What if the accusers are not willing to confront their Pastor/Elder?

1 Timothy 5:19-20 - Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear. (NKJV)

An Elder holds a public position of authority and responsibility within God's Body. So an accusation is not to be taken lightly, nor can it be considered unless 2-3 witnesses can testify.

This keeps an individual disgruntled church member from ruining an Elder with accusations alone. For example, say a woman's sexual approaches were rebuked by an Elder (like Joseph and Potiphar's wife) and the woman wanted revenge.

In today's culture, a female could destroy an Elder by accusing him of sexual misconduct. But because of Scripture, she is going to have to have 1-2 witnesses to support her accusation.

"That's not fair!" comes the cries, "What if he is really guilty?"

Take it up with God; He instituted the rule to protect the Shepherds of His church. If that accusation is true, I have no doubt that God will take care of business; no Elder will escape "reaping" what he has "sown."

Why in public? Because the Elder is a public position of responsibility. The purpose is not to destroy him, or even humiliate him for humiliation's sake; the purpose is to expose sin and let it be known that wickedness will not be tolerated at any level in God's body.

An Elder should know better. He is a public leader and if he chooses to shame the Body he shepherds, then it is appropriate that the accusation be public. As serious as this situation would be, it also cuts down on the rumor mill and divisiveness. It's all out in the open. God knows what He is doing.

If the 2-3 witnesses are unwilling to confront the Elder in question, then they are sinning and risking further injury to the Body by not revealing the truth. Godly, wise men should counsel them to take courage and obey God's Word.

~~~~~

## Elders – Requirements And Divorce

**Brent, one of the requirements of a church Elder is he has to be married to one woman. Does this mean people who have been**

**divorced and remarried, that have become mature Christians in their walk with Christ are not qualified to be elders? Or, does it mean we have to be men of integrity faithful to one wife, with no wiggle room for immoral behavior? I personally have been married to my one and only wife for 36 years, but we have elders in the church that have been divorced and remarried.**

The qualifications in question (and found in other verses) is:

1 Timothy 3:2 - A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach;

We hear much debate over the "one wife" issue, while the other qualifications are often treated loosely. Notice that each qualification concerns character and the way the Elder is to think and live his life.

For example, it doesn't say "shall teach once a week" or "does kind acts three times a day." The qualifications address character, worldview, and convictions, not a checklist. The reason why the "one wife" qualification is easy to target is because it has been singled out as legalistic "fact" to be evaluated, rather than a mindset to be lived out. Let me explain.

First, if "one wife" actually means "one physical wife, one marriage for one Elder period" and that is your conviction, then you cannot grant exceptions for Elders who never

married; Elders who are widowed; or Elders who have remarried because of divorce or widowhood. All of those violate the "rule" of "count'em, one wife" (if taken as a checklist fact to be determined) no matter how many hoops you want to jump through to make exceptions.

Who would argue that Paul was not qualified to be an Elder? Who would argue that the day after an Elder's wife dies, he is no longer qualified? Who would argue that no single man, devoting his life to God, ala Paul's admonition, could NOT be an Elder because he doesn't have "one wife"? No one would argue those things because we know they don't violate the spirit of God's mindset about marriage.

Ah, but then there is divorce. It's easy to pick on the remarried or divorced, especially by those "pickers" who aren't remarried or divorced. Now maybe it's just my personal experience, but I've seen the other qualifications applied very lightly, almost ignored many times while the "one wife" is often made THE primary qualification.

If the qualification of one wife is about a physical number, a legalistic checklist fact, then 1) it's the only qualification in that list that is, and 2) you have to apply it consistently which rules out singles, widowed, divorced or remarried.

If it doesn't mean that, what does "one wife" mean? Space here does not permit a full study, but I can make the point and you can follow up with your own evaluation.

The verse means that the Elder is to have the conviction about marriage that God has: one wife for life. That is God's way, God's ideal arrangement. However, God knows that wives die. God allows people to remain single, and in fact through Paul, encouraged it. God also allowed for divorce because of adultery and abandonment, then remarriage only to another Christian.

Why? Because God knew that a remarriage should result in that person returning to the place of having a "one wife" conviction and worldview.

Elders oversee others. They have to agree with and teach their flock GOD's WAY about marriage. Thus, at the time they are Elders, or being considered, they should be 100% committed to "one wife for life" as God's plan for marriage. As a practical matter, if the Elder was remarried or divorced, sufficient time should pass until that man establishes the fact that he does indeed have God's mind about marriage through his faithful life, service and teaching.

The Elder might be a lifelong single who believes God's plan for marriage but was called to be single for the Lord's service. They might be widowed and believe God's plan for marriage. They might be Biblically divorced and remarried and be 100% committed to "one wife."

When you read the verse in context; when you realize that all the qualifications are about character and mindset, and not a legalistic checklist; when you take into account the

overall Biblical teaching about Elders, marriage, character, shepherding and divorce, it becomes clear that the meaning here is something along the lines of "marriage is fundamental to Christianity, and an Elder should believe, practice and teach only what God says about it."

But, people will INSIST "it says right there 'one wife'" so if that has EVER been NOT true, then that man is disqualified. Okay... then if a man has EVER NOT been able to teach, ever NOT been temperate, ever NOT been serious, ever NOT been hospitable... then they are disqualified.

You have to be consistent. If you mean "one wife" in a "count the number of wives" interpretation.... then you MUST agree that no single, no one widowed and no one divorced or remarried can be an Elder. Again, you have to be consistent. If "one wife = FALSE" disqualifies you, then "inhospitable = TRUE" at any point in their life disqualifies them too. Or any other violation of any other qualification at any point in time.

Do you see? The qualifications are about what the Elder believes, teaches, practices and is convicted about at the time they are Elders or going to become Elders. If you apply a lifelong "rule" about "one physical wife," then you have to look in their past and apply a lifelong rule about "temperance" and "able to teach."

The qualifications are either about what the Elder believes and practices AS AN ELDER, or ALL the qualifications are a checklist that apply to his whole life and any

violation disqualifies him. You can't just take one qualification out of the list and apply it arbitrarily.

Men are arbitrary and inconsistent.  
Not God.

The "husband of one wife" means that when a man becomes an Elder, he must believe, teach, practice and uphold God's plan for marriage which ideally is (and is to be strived for) "one wife for life."

Note:

Let the UNSUBSCRIBING begin. I'll get hammered from all sides on this one. The "one physical wife" folks will call me "soft" and "compromising.". The soft and compromising brethren will call me judgmental. The feminists will call me sexist. The traditionalists will call me a false teacher. And those who are just now finding out in this sentence that I was Biblically divorced, and remarried, will call me self-serving. You'd be shocked to know how many people unsubscribe or uninvited me to teach or speak when they find out I'm divorced. I could be a former drug addict, or felon or murderer and people would applaud me and get teary-eyed that God saved me from such a life. But for much of Christendom, being divorced with Scriptural grounds is instant disqualification and uselessness concerning all things related to Christian ministry. Either that, or the exact opposite: divorce isn't even a concern at all. What a mess....

UPDATE:

My friend, Steve Cummings, sent me some excellent observations on this

question. Here they are with his permission:

1. I BELIEVE EVERY CHURCH SHOULD HAVE ELDERS. Statistically, at least half of all churches of Christ do not have elders because they believe they either do not have men qualified, or they do not have men who will accept the responsibility to serve in that capacity. God expects for every church to have elders. "Go and appoint elders in every city."

2. EVERY CHURCH COULD HAVE ELDERS. I believe every church has men who are qualified to serve as elders. I do not look at the lists of "qualifications" in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 as "qualifications," but rather as QUALITIES. The two texts do not contain a checklist of qualifications to be rigidly adhered to. If they were intended to be checklists then both of the lists in the two different books would be exactly alike, but they're not. Instead of viewing them as a "lists of qualifications," I think of them as lists of QUALITIES--a CHARACTER SKETCH if you will. Paul is basically saying, "Choose men kind of like this." And then he gives a character sketch. Otherwise, no one can truly qualify, because no one has all these "qualifications," all the time. And if they do right now, in time they will inevitably lose some of them, and will thus become disqualified based on the generally accepted rules of the game. Therefore it would be possible to be "qualified" and "disqualified" a dozen times a day if we really adhered to the generally accepted rules. Interestingly, most churches take the Supreme Court approach once a man gets in the "office." He's there for life and there is no appeal. He could

become disqualified (based on the rules) once he gets in "office" but staying qualified doesn't seem to be nearly as important as the initial qualification process. A man will have to go through tremendous scrutiny ("If you have any scriptural reasons you think this man is not qualified, then turn your objections in in writing to one of the present elders within two weeks...") in order to become an elder. However, once he's in there, he's there till the Lord comes back. Many good men who could have been very effective elders were never allowed to serve as elders simply because of the checklist mentality. It's a mess and very subjective.

3. The character sketches contained in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1 address four particular principles: 1) Reputation. 2) Character. 3) Experience. 4) Ability. The question that has to be asked is WHY? Why does a man need these qualities in order to be qualified? It's because if he does not have these general qualities then he will not have the ability to do the work of an elder.

4. The typical eldership in the typical church today is nothing more than a self-perpetuating body. It's mostly elders who select elders. However, I believe it should be the congregation that selects elders, not the existing elders.

5. Concerning the "one wife" thing. The only thing I would differ with you on is that I do believe a man must have been married, or that he must be, or must have been "Scripturally married" to one wife at a time. Again, this goes back to the why. I admit this is subjective, and might even sound a

little judgmental, but I don't think a man who has not led a family has the wisdom or experience to lead a church family.

6. You are right when you say: "I've seen the other qualifications applied very lightly, almost ignored many times while the "one wife" is often made THE primary qualification." And it is sickening. However, I think the #1 deal breaking "qualification" used today, at least in my experience is "Have his kids been baptized?" And it is sad. Many children of would be elders have had to endure the guilt the church has put on them by making them feel like, "If I would just get baptized then daddy could be the elder he's always wanted to be." And then those who are dunked live under a microscope and the first time they do something really stupid instead of ministering to the young man or woman, the elder is attacked for not doing a better job raising his "riotous and unruly" children.

7. You said, "But people will INSIST ""it says right there 'one wife.'" So if that has EVER been NOT true, then that man is disqualified. Okay...then if a man has EVER NOT been able to teach, ever NOT been temperate, ever NOT been serious, ever NOT been hospitable...then they are disqualified." YOU NAILED IT MY FRIEND!

I thought your answer was exceptionally good.

~~~~~

Employment – Working For Unbelievers

I work for a company that is owned by an Indian that converted to Christianity. My Operations Manager, also an Indian, however is Moslem. He runs the operations according to the Muslim Faith. I am a senior Manager, & for me as a Christian, this creates problems. How do I handle this without offending him, or create problems for myself?

As Christians, we are not a part of the world, but we most certainly live in the world.

If your employer were to require you to learn about his religion or to practice it in order to be employed there, then of course you would have to draw the line and refuse.

Otherwise, you have the perfect opportunity to open the door to sharing the Gospel with him. You would do well to learn the basic tenets of Islam and how to address them from a Christian faith. You could ask him questions about his faith and show interest in how he practices it.

Ask him how he can know that the Koran is truly a holy book, but make sure you are prepared to give him reason why the Bible is the only true inspired holy book.

Ask him how he can know for sure that Allah is really God; but make sure you are prepared to adequately explain to him how that you can know without a doubt that Jehovah God of the Bible is the one and only true God, and is not the same God as Allah.

Ask him how he can know for sure that Allah has forgiven his sins and will except him when he dies, but make sure that you are prepared to share the true Gospel with him starting with the Law to convict him of his sin and finishing with Christ who is the only answer to his sin.

Ask him why Mohammed is worthy of his worship, but Jesus the Christ is not as worthy; but make sure you are prepared to show him through prophetic and historical evidence that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is an undeniable fact.

Don't see his religion as an obstacle, see it as an opportunity.

~~~~~

## Eternal Life

**I'm confused by a seemingly contradictory set of verses. There are MANY verses that talk about Jesus giving us eternal life. Here are a few: Matthew 19:29; John 3:15; John 3:16; 1 Timothy 6:12... all these verses talk about mankind having eternal life. But then, there's this verse: 1 Timothy 6:15-16 "...God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of**

**lords, who alone is immortal..."**  
**The word 'immortal' does mean everlasting (or eternal) life. So, according to that last verse, God is the ONLY being who will have eternal life. What then, happens to the rest of us Christians? Can you explain this apparent contradiction?**

Scripture contains nothing TRULY contradictory; there are mistranslations, difficulties and things we don't yet understand, but the honest Bible student will never have to worry that God has contradicted Himself. He is incapable of doing so!

You have lifted the phrase from context, which tends to get us in trouble:

1 Timothy 6:15-16 - which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen. (NKJV)

First, the Scriptural evidence that man is created to live eternally (either in heaven or hell) is plain and abundant, so I won't deal with that. The fact that the human spirit, once created, will exist forever, is assumed for the sake of this answer.

We also know that God is eternal as well, but how does God's "eternal" differ from man's "eternal?" God's "eternal" is both past AND future, while man has a finite beginning. God is eternal in ALL directions, whereas

man is eternal only moving towards the future.

Now take that and add it to the other descriptions that apply only to God in this verse: unapproachable light, no man has seen, everlasting power..... adding "who alone has immortality" speaks of the fact that God alone has no beginning and no end. He alone has always existed. All of the attributes in this verse apply to God alone and no other.

Remember, Scripture interprets Scripture. Look at the verse in context. Consider other verses that talk about the same topic. The Bible can't truly contradict itself, so throw out that possibility and look for alternative considerations that aren't so obvious on the surface.

~~~~~

Eternal Security

How do you would tell someone that salvation is conditional, and not eternally secured once saved. I ask for the benefit of those who may "tune" in to the website and see the questions section. Thanks! I like the web site, and you explain your subjects very well.

Thank you for your kind comments. I hope I don't "lose" you as a reader when you find out we disagree on the issue of eternal security.

Before telling you why, let me tell you that I am outspoken against EASY

BELIEVISM and the very casual uncommitted Christianity that is so popular today. The idea of "once saved, do whatever you want" is dreadful.

I believe that once TRUE, AUTHENTIC regeneration ("born again"; saved) occurs, that a person's sins are washed in Jesus blood; you are sealed with promise of the Holy Spirit (Eph 4.30) and become children of God, heirs (Rom 8.17) to eternal life.

Only God knows for sure when REAL salvation occurs vs. an emotional profession or impulsive decision not accompanied with genuine faith, repentance and belief.

Most of my life I believed you could "lose" your salvation. After very intense, deep study of the issue, I changed my mind in accordance with what I think is substantial Scriptural support.

If Jesus sacrifice didn't pay for ALL your sins, which ones aren't covered? How many? How often? Does each and every sin after conversion cost you your salvation until confessed? If not, again, which ones and how many and how often?

And if salvation can be lost, then we can never have REAL assurance of it despite an entire book saying we can (1John).

How can you become NOT children once you are children (1John 3.1-3)? My daughter can NOT announce she's NOT my daughter and make it true (though she might want to

sometimes!). Now that analogy does not build a doctrine, but it's part of the overall consideration.

Saved, not saved, saved, not saved... that's simply not in the Bible. It makes Christ's atonement incomplete because it doesn't cover future, unconfessed sin, and has to be "re-applied" every time sin is confessed, and in effect makes "confession" our salvation, after the first salvation that was through faith.....???!!!
Conclusions you logically MUST come to if you believe that TRUE salvation can be lost or forfeited.

In essence you would have to say "Paid in full" when saved (speaking of sin; justification); THEN "oops, not all paid, some more debt came in" - "okay, now paid in full" - "oops, more sin, sorry" - "okay, paid now..." and on and on.

The popular verse in Hebrews used to "prove" you can lose your salvation also says you can't regain it either (Heb 6.4). So the "obvious" interpretation appears to not be so obvious after all.

I used to say, "Well, it's only willful unrepented of sin" that a person consciously commits that "forfeits" his salvation by his own choice.

That's sounds logical, but the problem is, that's just a conclusion I HAD to come to, and it's simply not taught plainly in Scripture. That's called theological drift: coming to logical conclusions not found in Scripture and calling it "doctrine." (Calvinism, agree with it or not, is an example of

logical conclusions, not specifically found in Scripture.)

In light of what occurs at the point of salvation: my sin paid for by Christ (propitiation, 1Jo 2.2); and Christ's righteousness imparted to me (imputation, Rom 4.6,23); my sins declared "paid in full" (justification, Rom 5.9; 8:30); name written in the Book of Life (Rev. Chap. 20-21); and given the gift of eternal life (1John 5.11)... it becomes clear that TRUE salvation is eternally secure.

If not, which sin forfeits it? How many? When? Who decides? If God went to such great lengths to secure our salvation, and tells us exactly how to obtain it, it stands to reason that He would have warned us exactly what sin would forfeit our salvation and how to get it back. He does not ever speak of the concept of being "re-saved."

Also eternal life is no longer eternal if it can be lost or forfeited. It only becomes eternal the day you die, if you haven't missed confessing sin or had some willful sin. You can't escape the conclusion that it becomes the gift of "conditional eternal life;" or "eternal life the day you die" if you can lose it.

As you know, proper interpretation requires that a plain doctrine is not overturned by a difficult to understand and disputed verse of Scripture. If that were not consistently held to, you could prove just about ANY doctrine.

Given what God HAS revealed, it would stand to reason that He would

have made it very clear true salvation could be lost (if that was true); instead only a few difficult-to-interpret verses seem to indicate it. And I do NOT deny those verses exist and are hard to explain. But a very plain doctrine cannot be overruled by a few hard to explain verses that are far from being very plain.

Let me close with this. It is my firm observation that we offer and assure CHEAP salvation now days. God never meant it that way. Salvation is FREE. Salvation is eternal. Salvation is SECURE. But true salvation results in a changed life, submission, obedience and good works.

Those things do NOT save you; they are evidence of genuine salvation.

I do NOT believe "once saved, always saved" if the meaning is "get saved & baptized; then live however you want." But I do without doubt believe that once true salvation is imparted by the grace of God to the repentant believer, that God secures that salvation for all eternity.

We may not ever agree, but I hope you will join me in deeply contemplating and praying over this difficult issue.

One thing we can agree on: for those of us who have placed our faith and trust in Christ, eternal life awaits us and no human nor demon can take it from us.

~~~~~

## Eternity – Can We See Those We've Left Behind?

**Can the dead see what is going on with their loved ones on earth? Can they intervene or make a plea to God on their behalf?**

Personally, I suspect that we are "seen" by those in heaven including Christians who are now there. However, that is MY OPINION. I think they do see what is going on here on earth, but God does not allow interaction, intervention between us and them.

Necromancy (trying to contact the "dead") is certainly forbidden even if it's Benny Hinn talking to Kathryn Kuhlman (Deut. 18:11; 26:14; Isa. 8:19; 29:4), but that's the reverse of the current question. Here's what the Bible does tell us:

We retain our knowledge/memory of people on earth as they were when we were alive.

Even if we could send an angel or Apostle to warn people, they won't listen. God has already engineering the perfect "warning plan" and the world rejects it. Nothing we can do, or think of, to add to God's warning will make any difference.

I've seen Heb. 12:1 used to support the idea of being "watched" from heaven:

Hebrews 12:1 - Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a

cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, (NKJV)

This "cloud of witnesses" is NOT accurately explicated as a "cloud of observers" but more like a group of people that testify to the results of living in faith. It's more like a witness in court who gives testimony about what they have seen and experienced.

Again, it is my personal OPINION (nothing more) that this "great cloud" of Christians who have passed on into the next life are indeed witnessing and observing those of us who are still in the race, but Heb 12:1 cannot be used to support it Biblically. I think they are watching, cheering us on, and joyfully awaiting our reunion. That's my intuition not Scripture, and I certainly could be wrong.

Let's look at the primary Bible example related to this question:

Luke 16:19-31 - "There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. "Then he cried

and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.'

"Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.' " (NKJV)

Since this is found in the Gospels in the midst of parables, many people mistake this for a parable, but it is not. Parables don't name names and recount specific identifiable events. This is a literal account of real people, in real places, in real situations.

Notice the facts we can be sure of relevant to today's question:

Everyone dies

Hell is real

Hell is torment

The tormented in hell could see someone "afar off" in comfort and paradise

The one in hell knew that his torment could be relieved momentarily by experiencing what the one in paradise was experiencing

An appeal was made for comfort, and for a warning to be sent to the tormented one's family

There is a "great gulf" between the torment of hell and the comfort of heaven that cannot be traversed

Any warning sent to "earth" would be useless as they are already ignoring God's Word, the prophets, the Apostles and the Risen Christ

Notice a verse here that is VERY intriguing:

Luke 16:26 - And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.' (NKJV)

The verse seems to imply that there may well be those in "Abraham's bosom" or Paradise that WANT to cross over to the place of torment. We can only assume it is because they can see the people who are lost, and being good and holy, have a desire to rescue them.

It's easy to imagine people in hell wanting to cross over to heaven. It's a bit more thought provoking to think about people in heaven wanting to cross over to hell. It makes sense to me though, because the righteous and

good always have pity on those who are lost.

Just as the lost in hell would want to warn their friends and family, it is natural to think those in heaven, who can see the lost in hell, would want to 1) warn their friends and family on earth, and 2) rescue those in hell if possible.

That's not some doctrinal position or anything - just an interesting verse that normally slips by without discussing why someone in heaven would want to pass over to hell.

To answer the question:

The Bible does not say for sure that humans in heaven can see us on earth

The Bible does say that humans in heaven and hell can see each other

The Bible does say that humans in heaven and hell retain their memory and knowledge of those still on earth

The Bible does say that a plea on their behalf is useless

One final thing: it is useful to clarify the following, although we do not have space here to teach a lesson about it:

In answering this question, I used the terms "heaven" and "hell" in sort of a loose generic way because it was not the right forum to get into the differences concerning the various terms.

Hades seems to be the "holding place" for those destined to be judged and sent to Hell (Gehenna) for all eternity

Abraham's bosom or Paradise is where those bound for eternal life in heaven are until God's plan with man is complete

This is important because there remains that question about whether or not those in Heaven for all eternity will be able to see those in Hell for all eternity (and vice versa)... or is this a temporary situation now before the final Judgment?

These are some complicated Biblical issues and topics. I point them out because I want the reader to know that Luke 16:19-23 is probably NOT talking about the eternal Heaven and Hell, but more likely the places that deceased people are temporarily are right now as God's plan is finishing up on earth.

~~~~~

Evangelism - What Is Too Pushy?

We are starting a new church and I would like to find ways to get people to come. Some of the members are afraid of going out for fear of being too pushy. Any ideas?

Well it depends on what you mean by "pushy..."

If you mean rude, boorish, arrogant or uncompassionate, then the leaders of

the church need to teach and train the members first, not worry about looking for new ones.

If by "pushy" you mean that people are going to experience confrontation, resistance and impatient people while presenting the Gospel, what exactly do you expect from the world?

As Christians we need to have a balance between presenting the Gospel with love, compassion and firmness without appearing self-righteous, haughty or angry. It's far too often we have relied on gimmicks, routines, step-by-step methods or inoffensive ways to present the Gospel to the world IN PLACE of a full individual understanding and effective delivery of the truths about heaven and hell, Jesus and Satan, love and punishment, mercy and consequences. Evangelistic training programs are an effective tool as long as they teach people to deliver the true Gospel and not just have as the goal to get people to say "yes" to a "good deal."

The problem with that is, THE GOSPEL IS OFFENSIVE. The unsaved could die at any second and be eternally in the torment and flames of hell. That's not exactly a message that evokes a pleasant and kind response from the hearer. We do a disservice to those whom we share the Gospel with by sugar-coating it into a pleasant sounding "deal" that is just too good to pass up.

That's just not reality, and it is uncompassionate. It is not the Lord's will that we hide the truth (all of it: heaven and hell; salvation and

punishment) from the lost and dying, but that we proclaim it to them. And the truth includes both the reality and awfulness of hell, and the love and mercy of Jesus Christ.

So what I'm saying is, if by "pushy" you mean that you're going to meet resistance while spreading the Gospel, that is a perfectly normal response; so don't worry about it. Also, do not let this idea of being afraid to be pushy simply be an excuse for not being bold and courageous. It takes guts to tell people about the terrible reality of hell and the exclusive, intolerant, merciful, loving solution to it: Jesus Christ.

As for ideas of how to get people to come, I have only one and it is the one you will find in Scripture: learn the Word of God, preach the Word of God, proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ from person to person in your community... And the Lord will bring the harvest.

I urge you not to turn towards nor desire gimmicks or marketing; nor try to make your church so attractive to the world ("seeker friendly") with programs and resources and "getting needs met" that people are drawn to your church simply by what they can get out of it, rather than because of the saving message of Jesus Christ.

~~~~~

## Evil – Why Does God Allow It To Exist?

## If God exists, why does He allow evil to exist?

Since this question has been answered countless times, let me just give an answer with a little different angle.

God's Holy character cannot abide evil in His presence. Every person has sinned (Rom 3.23), so every person is evil (before salvation). That is not arguable.

If God did not "allow evil" (mercy, patience) for a short time, giving us the opportunity to repent and be saved... then His only option would be to go ahead and destroy EVERY person and cast them into hell. And He would be right and just in doing so, because every person has sinned by their own choice.

So in a sense, God, in His mercy, allows evil, for now, in order to give us an opportunity to turn to Him and repent.

(There are many other theological issues that have been written about over and over; this is just one particular aspect to consider).

Here are some Bible verses about God's holiness:

1. Is incomparable. Exo 15:11; 1Sam 2:2.
2. Exhibited in his
  - a. Character. Psalms 22:3; John 17:11.
  - b. Name. Isaiah 57:15; Luke 1:49.
  - c. Words. Psalms 60:6; Jeremiah 23:9.
  - d. Works. Psalms 145:17.

e. Kingdom. Psalms 47:8; Matthew 13:41; Revelation 21:27; 1Corinthians 6:9,10.

3. Is pledged for the fulfillment of
  - a. His promises. Psalms 89:35.
  - b. His judgments. Amos 4:2.
4. Saints are commanded to imitate. Leviticus 11:44; 1Peter 1:15,16.
5. Saints should praise. Psalms 30:4.
6. Should produce reverential fear. Revelation 15:4.
7. Requires holy service. Joshua 24:19; Psalms 93:5.
8. Heavenly hosts adore. Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8.
9. Should be magnified. 1Chronicles 16:10; Psalms 48:1; 99:3,5; Revelation 15:4.

1Torrey, R. (1995, c1897). The new topical text book : A scriptural text book for the use of ministers, teachers, and all Christian workers. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos research Systems, Inc.

~~~~~

Evolution - Why Are You So Dogmatic?

(compiled from several questions)
Are you making Christians look bad by being so dogmatic about evolution? You can find EXPERTS and books everywhere that point

**out evidence for evolution.
Couldn't God use evolution and still
be Creator? What do you mean by
"evolution" exactly?**

When I say "evolution" I mean the commonly understood "goo to you" theory of how all life came from a primordial pool of biological soup and over eons of time, mixed with random chance "mutated" into all the diverse and intelligent kinds of life we have now.

Even as I write that I chuckle at the stupidity of the idea... I'm looking at Kleenex realizing that I would be considered an IDIOT to think that Kleenex evolved by chance, but we're supposed to believe that all the infinitely complex, incredibly well designed life all around us... just "happened."

THINK!..... if we are all just products of random biological processes and eons of times and chance... then how can the very THOUGHT of evolution (produced by these random, impersonal and purposeless processes) even be considered anything more than just random CHANCE thoughts?

The VERY FACT that you can develop the IDEA of evolution proves that INTELLIGENCE is behind our creation because "random process" COULD NOT, in any intellectually honest person's mind, create the ability to THINK, POSTULATE, CONCEPTUALIZE or THEORIZE.

Is there such thing as "evolution?" Sure, micro-evolution, which is one dog being bred into dozens of breeds of dogs. That occurs constantly. But a

DOG never turns into a BIRD never turns into a SNAKE never turns into a FISH... That is MACRO-evolution.

I have been a serious student of creationism for over 10 years. I make my decidedly unambiguous comments having diligently studied the evidence; full well knowing how many people I might offend (offending people is a daily occurrence for someone who writes publicly about controversial subjects). I am dogmatic and clear about evolution ON PURPOSE.

Evolution for MANY MANY reasons is UTTERLY incompatible with Christianity. The co-habitation of the two has caused great confusion in society and the Church, and has weakened the average Christian's ability to defend the Bible.

So I do not compromise nor hold back about it. Evolution is THE greatest plague of the last 500 years and has done more to harm society than all other theories or ideas of man combined in that time frame.

Strong words, yes. But based on evidence, facts, history, experience, and study both of Creation Science and the Bible.

What is so puzzling to me, is the amount of INTELLIGENT people (saved or not) that give ANY ground to a theory (really, a religious faith) that is DEVOID of absolutely ANY, yes ANY, scientific evidence... though the world and the media treat it as a "proven scientific fact." Evolutionists have been challenged for years, even offered large rewards for ONE SINGLE piece of irrefutable evolutionary evidence.

Theories aren't evidence. Books aren't evidence. Ideas aren't evidence. Constantly cramming evolution down the entire world's throat until it is accepted as "fact" is not evidence. The entire educational system bias is not evidence. Radio talk show hosts who belittle anyone who believes in Creation are not evidence.

Lining up a hundred "experts" to talk circles around people with 12-dollar words and reams of paper is not evidence.

Evidence is evidence... and there isn't any for evolution. There's talk, there's pressure, there's intimidation, there's smearing, there's bullying..... but no evidence.

There are drawings in books, movies, charts, graphs, statistics, hoaxes, manipulated results and tests and artifacts... but no evidence.

Please consider....

After 150 years of trying to PROVE evolution, do you not think that if ONE piece of empirical, undeniable, irrefutable and unquestioned evolutionary evidence existed, it would be put on a pedestal, enshrined, worship and trumpeted for all to see?

Of course it would. But it doesn't exist. Why? Because evolution is a RELIGIOUS FAITH, nothing more. It is a religion that allows man to deny God which is why it is held on to so voraciously despite the utterly absurd and ridiculous nature of it.

And that is why it is incompatible with Biblical Christianity. And that is why I will not sugarcoat my answers or commentary concerning it.

The evidence for the authenticity of God's Word is INSURMOUNTABLE. The evidence for evolution is NONEXISTENT.

This is a FACT for ANY person who examines the evidence with an open mind only seeking the truth.

~~~~~

## Faith – How Do You Get It?

**How does someone get faith? I have a friend who wants to believe. He says he prays to "God" (a higher power) and asks Him to protect his family and stuff like that. But he wants more faith... and I know he needs faith in Jesus, not just faith. How does he do that?**

Cool, an easy question!

Now my answer is not what you might find in a book on the top 10 best seller list at the Christian bookstore. But I have it on good authority that the answer is perfect, and accurate.

Romans 10.17 - So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

That's it. Sorry. Not very glamorous or revolutionary. Faith doesn't come by learning spiritual laws, or listening to certain preachers, or employing certain techniques. It doesn't come from your positive attitude or speech. It doesn't come from you at all despite a lot of current popular teaching.



No, faith comes by hearing. Hearing what? The word of God. The Bible contains the very WORDS of God, and the more we hear them, the more our faith has a REAL foundation.

There is so much entertaining, ear-tickling, crowd-pleasing, friendly, "social" preaching today that is devoid of the true rich Biblical content. That's why preaching for the most part is either boring, or entertaining, but powerless.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not someone who thinks that a sweaty, angry, hellfire and brimstone sermons is "real" preaching. Far from it.

Real preaching is taking the Bible and teaching exactly what it says without marketing, spinning, twisting or watering it down. If the Bible text calls for hellfire and brimstone truth, preach it. If the Scripture being taught from the Bible is about love, gentleness and compassion, then preach it. If the Scripture is about giving, preach about giving.

My point is that fewer and fewer churches and preachers are teaching the Bible - they are using the Bible to support what they are trying to teach.

Did you catch that? Most preaching is an exercise of taking Scripture to support what the preacher wants to say. What should it be? It should be the preacher supporting what God wants to say from His Word.

So, if you're friend wants faith, tell him it's as close as the nearest Bible.

~~~~~

False Religion - What Constitutes A False Religion?

You may have answered this before, maybe on your other blog. If so, could you point me to it? Anyway, here's my question. Can you explain, in your clear, concise, no nonsense way, about Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses and whether or not they are Christians or *saved.* I used to think I knew so clearly what to think about these religions. Yet I find myself wondering as I read blogs and talk to people of these faiths...who seem to love Jesus so much. Can you help me to understand? Thanks so much.

It's not about the appearance of "loving Jesus." It's about salvation on God's terms. It's about the TRUTH as GOD has revealed it. Consider the following:

Matthew 7:21-23 - "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (NKJV)

Obviously the people in these verses "seemed to love Jesus" but God declared "I never knew you!" Why? Because they failed to do good works? No. Because they didn't live like they

loved God (Jesus)? No. Because they didn't use Godly vocabulary and appear to be "of God?" No. Because they weren't devoted and religious? No.

God didn't know them because they didn't know God. They tried to serve God THEIR OWN WAY ON THEIR OWN TERMS. This is the root of why religions like Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses are not genuine Biblical, saving Christianity. They are cloaked in Christian terms, good works and exemplary lives which are commendable... but they approach God and salvation on terms and ideas originated by men like Joseph Smith and organizations like the Watchtower Society.

An examination of their publicly documented teaching (as opposed to what the average participant will tell you in a casual conversation or what cleverly design public marketing proclaims) reveals clearly that their understanding of salvation, Jesus Christ and man's lost condition are at odds, and indeed completely incompatible with the Bible.

We do ourselves, and them, a disservice by viewing what they DO (good works, morality, how they speak) instead of deeply understanding what they believe and teach. You have to go past the WORDS used, which have become thoroughly "Christianized" and discern how they define those words. Both of those organizations have created a very successful image of being orthodox Christianity on the surface, but when you dig past that veneer, you'll find that Christianity has little in common with either Mormonism or JW's

despite their laudable morality and the use of Biblical vocabulary.

Read the verses again above. They are absolutely the most astonishing and perfectly clear explanation of why certain religious groups can appear to "love Jesus" and yet God does not know them. It breaks my heart to see people totally devoted to these man-derived approaches to salvation knowing that they are in for a terrible, eternal disappointment.

There are many good websites which clearly lay out the differences between official Mormon and JW teaching compared to the Bible. Look past appearances and works and find out what is TAUGHT. Therein lies the clarity you are seeking.

Here is one answer I gave about Mormonism:

<http://www.seriousfaith2.com/asr/question.asp?questionid=3344>

~~~~~

## False Teaching – The Secret

**Have you heard of "The Secret" - The law of attraction that is so popular right now? It is a teaching (tapes, books, etc.) that sounds really good but I don't hear anything referencing the Bible.**

"The Secret" is all the rage right now presenting itself as some new and wonderful secret psychological teaching that will transform your life.

It was begun by a woman named Rhonda Byrne who "discovered" these

secrets in a book entitled, "The Science of Getting Rich" - a book you will often find listed right in the middle of other positive-thinking-personal-success-human-potential lists. While this book is actually written in a very professional, matter-of-fact, non-sensational way (giving it an air of non-religious credibility), when you boil it down, it's still the same message of human potential and metaphysics.

For example, in chapter 15, you find "God cannot help helping you, if you act in a Certain Way; He must do so in order to help Himself" which is a line that is restated over and over in any number of today's success teachers, or prosperity preachers. It is just one of the "laws" that supposedly runs the universe, and apparently runs God too (which is the undeniable logical conclusion any time we declare that God **MUST** do something because man has forced His hand according to a 'law.' God makes the laws. He is above them. No one can force God to act any time, anyway. This is occultism and humanism at its finest).

That "the Science of Getting Rich" teaches that man "creates" reality with his thoughts is clearly stated in the ending summary:

"THERE is a thinking stuff from which all things are made, and which, in its original state, permeates, penetrates, and fills the interspaces of the universe. A thought in this substance produces the thing that is imaged by the thought. Man can form things in his thought, and by impressing his thought upon formless substance can cause the thing he thinks about to be created."

Like most books and teaching of this type, there are some reasonable ideas, some good points, and there is nothing wrong overall with the idea of being positive and thinking proactively about what you want to achieve.

When it becomes MAN'S POWER, or comes UNDER MAN'S POWER to effect and create reality, then it has moved from simply teaching people good life skills to teaching them the oldest religion in history ("you can be like God") for GOD ALONE has creative power, can control circumstances and can bring about His Will by His Word and Thought.

"The Secret" is a Hollywood, Madison Avenue slick production but in reality, it is nothing more than the same old metaphysical, new age, health/wealth/prosperity, personal success message that has been around since Satan snookered Adam and Eve.

It's a dirty old pig in a new silk dress. Built around positive thinking, the eastern mystical ideas of life energies, and so-called laws and principles of the universe, it's an extreme makeover of Satan's garden lie, Oprah-style.

It is no coincidence that these very same "principles", "keys" and "secrets" have been dressed up several times in Christian vocabulary and for a several decades been preached ad nauseum in a large segment of Christianity.

No matter who, or how you dress it up, whether coming from Peale, Copeland, Robbins, Schuller or Oprah.... it's humanism at its best attempting to elevate man's abilities

and status to that of God... or as several leading Christian personalities boldly proclaim, you and I are "little gods."

This ancient idea started in the Garden of Eden when Satan lied to Eve telling her she could be like God. This is the essence of man's sinful pride... we want to replace God with SELF.

"The Secret" is not even a "Christian" version of this metaphysical nonsense. You should avoid it except for the purpose of knowing enough about it to warn the vast numbers of lukewarm and Biblically ignorant Christians who will ride this latest fad.

I PREDICT IT WILL ONLY BE A SHORT TIME BEFORE YOU WILL SEE A NEW "CHRISTIAN" VERSION OF THIS SWEEP THE AMERICAN CHURCH SCENE.

I'd like to finish with a piece of advice: we have God's Word. Any time you hear about some new "secret", "hidden" or "revealed" teaching (usually next to the words "key", "law" or "power"), don't get sucked in.

There are no new revelations or secrets waiting to be "mined" from the Bible, nor revealed by God to someone today having never been known before now.

TODAY'S CHRISTIANS WOULD DO WELL TO SPEND SOME TIME LEARNING WHAT THE BIBLE IN FRONT OF THEM SAYS RATHER THAN CONSTANTLY SEEKING OUT THE LATEST "SECRET" OR "REVELATION" FROM THE CURRENT MOST POPULAR PREACHER OR SUCCESS GURU.

Other than that, I don't really have an opinion. :)

~~~~~

Family Problems – Disrespectful And Hurtful Family Members

Our 27 year old son has pursued his ministry calling for 15 years. He got married and since a short time after, he has not been the same son. A lot has happened but bottom line is, we feel he now says and does hurtful and disrespectful things to the rest of our family. We have not spoken with him in 6 months. He attends a Christian graduate school. I have sent presents and cards to try to mend the situation. Should we try to contact him or just keep praying that God will do His work in their lives. We are ready and willing to forgive their behavior. I want my family to be whole again. What's your advice?

Having ongoing family discord is always tough. It's something that you are constantly reminded of every minute of the day. It can really eat at you, and I'm sorry you're dealing with it.

First, other than extreme situations, it's never wrong or bad to continue to be kind (sending gifts and cards), to try and contact the disenfranchised family member (as long as it is not

aggressive, comes with strings attached, or for the purpose of continually rebuking them or putting them on a guilt trip) and to gently and consistently try to restore the relationship.

I would continue to try and contact him at the same times you would NORMALLY contact him if things were normal and happy. If he sees that you still continue to love him and treat him as a son even though he is not reciprocating, perhaps he will be convicted of his unloving behavior.

Now, it may very well be that there are things going on in their marital relationship that are causing him to avoid you. It might be embarrassment over the state of the marriage; it might be pressure from the spouse or spouse's family; it might be some sin or situation you are unaware of that affecting his behavior.

It could also be that in his mind YOU are the problem. Obviously I don't know anything more about you than what is in your question, so I urge you and your spouse to be very honest about your own contribution to the situation and make sure that you are not at fault somehow as well.

Assuming you are not, I would continue to treat them as if you would treat any of your children in a normal situation. Let him, and her, know that you love them, you miss them and you are there for them if they need you.

Human nature being what it is though, you must emotionally prepare yourself to accept that he is an adult, he struggles with sin, he has pressures and stresses... just like you, just like me.

So he may not be responsive. It may get worse. It may never resolve.

You are not in control and no matter how much you long for the restoration of your family, your children are not robots. Just like we do all the time with God, your children may not choose to be "good" to us.

My advice is to continue to call just to say you love them and are thinking about them. Send cards, send gifts. Expect nothing in return knowing that God will honor your loving sacrifice. Trust that God will get into their hearts and restore the relationship with you BUT know that even if that doesn't happen, God will cause the situation to work for your good and His glory. He promises that (Rom 8.28).

Should you keep praying? Well of course you know that answer to that.

~~~~~

## Fasting

**Would you tell me please how, when, and why should we fast? (Matt 6:16) Jesus says 'When you fast' not 'if you fast.' I've been a child of God's for a long time and so has my husband. Neither of us fast nor do we teach our children to fast. Please give us some guidance.**

There is lots of writing and speculation in the Christian world about fasting. So I don't want to offer you anything more than what Scripture says and let you decide how

to apply that to your own life by praying and asking God.

First, there is no "how, when and why" for New Testament Believers. There is a command for one fast a year for Old Testament saints (Lev. 23:28-32, 16:1-34). Other than that, we have examples of people fasting, situations where people fasted and accounts of people fasting... but no specific command.

That leads me to believe it is a matter of liberty and conscience. So we should educate ourselves about what the Bible says about fasting, particularly the New Testament since that is the age we live in. Then we should pray and ask God how He would have us to respond to this issue of fasting.

Here are a few things:

Do not flaunt, brag or display your fasting (Matt 6:16-18)

Fasting should be for God's glory (Matt 6:18)

Fasting should bring humility (Ps 35:13)

Fasting is imitating Christ (Matt 4:2)

Fasting is appropriate when the church is persecuted (Luke 5:33-35)

Fasting occurred when ministers of the Gospel were chosen (Acts 13:3; 14:23)

Fasting is associated with prayer, confession and mourning (Dan 9:3; 1Sam 7:6; Joel 2:12)

And of course we have numerous examples of Godly people fasting all through the Scripture, so there must

be something both Godly and beneficial about it.

God chose NOT to dictate reasons, terms and commands about fasting. This does not make it unimportant, but it does make it a LIBERTY that each Christian is free to work out privately with the Lord.

~~~~~

Finances - Bankruptcy

Is it wrong for a Christian to go bankrupt?

It is wrong for a Christian to not pay money that is owed and to not fulfill promises/contracts/responsibilities that they have given their word to fulfill.

Bankruptcy is a legal action. While this legal action may provide some "breathing room" from overly aggressive creditors, or intense pressures, any Christian who resorts to bankruptcy should not do so for the purpose of avoiding responsibility for debts and agreements.

So, is it "wrong" for a Christian to go bankrupt? My personal opinion is, that most of the time, yes, it is the WRONG CHOICE. But I would submit that there are times when bankruptcy can provide the means by which an honest person can "regroup" and plan to honor all responsibilities.

Is it a SIN? Bankruptcy is not the moral issue. The motivation behind it is. If the motive is to avoid paying debt or to get out of agreements, then yes, it would be sin.

God's opinion is clear about financial integrity and keeping your word:

Exodus 20:16 - You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. (NKJV) (If you don't pay what you owe, you have lied to your 'neighbor' about what you would do.)

Numbers 30:2 - If a man makes a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth. (NKJV) (Any oath by a Christian is in essence an oath to the Lord because you represent Him.)

Ecclesiastes 5:4-5 - When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; For He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed— Better not to vow than to vow and not pay. (NKJV)

Psalms 37:21 - The wicked borrows and does not repay, But the righteous shows mercy and gives. (NKJV)

In summary, it cannot be said that declaring bankruptcy is a SIN, but declaring bankruptcy for the purpose of getting out of what you owe is absolutely and always sin.

~~~~~

## Food - Prohibited Foods

**Is it unholy to eat pork due to the passages in the King James Version of the Bible? Are there any verses that state that pork is okay to eat?**

There are verses in the Bible which tell us that the Old Testament food requirements are no longer applicable

nor is it wrong to consume food that has been associated with "sin" (idolatry, false religion) unless it causes a fellow Christian to stumble.

Concerning the removal of dietary constraints (all foods are now permissible; there are no "unclean" foods):

Acts 10:9-16 - The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean." And a voice spoke to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again. (NKJV)

Concerning food that is associated with a worldly or sinful practice:

1 Corinthians 8:1-13 - Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him. Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. For

even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live. However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse. But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble. (NKJV)

1 Corinthians 10:23-33 - All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being. Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake; for "the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness." If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake. But if

anyone says to you, "This was offered to idols," do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake; for "the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness."

"Conscience," I say, not your own, but that of the other. For why is my liberty judged by another man's conscience? But if I partake with thanks, why am I evil spoken of for the food over which I give thanks? Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved. (NKJV)

~~~~~

Forgiveness - Making Amends

If I confess to GOD about evil deeds that were committed long ago against people, will I be forgiven by God if there is no way to make amends for physical harm?

That is the difference between the God of Christianity, and all other Gods. He can see into our hearts and is concerned first and foremost with our intentions, humility and motivations.

If you are truly repentant of sins committed ANY time, God forgives them when you ask. Period.

1 John 1:9 - If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our

sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (NKJV)

If we have the OPPORTUNITY to make amends, pay restitution or otherwise "make right" a wrong against another person, we most certainly should when appropriate. If that is impossible, then God knows your heart.

A word of caution.....

Before we go running off to "make things right," we need to consider if our actions are only going to result in more hurt. For example, let's say a person becomes a Christian and is truly repentant over an adulterous incident with someone else's spouse many years ago.

While it might make you feel better to "get it off your shoulders," you have no idea what kind of destruction you could cause the parties by "coming clean" years after the fact. You would have no idea where they might be in their walk with God, their marriage or the raising of their kids.

So when considering confession (to other humans), restitution or making amends for long past sins, ask God for wisdom on how to proceed, and He will answer.

James 1:5 - If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (NKJV)

~~~~~

## Forgiveness - Forgiving Terrorists

**My question is more a statement. I am having trouble with forgiving the terrorists. Jesus died on the cross to save our sins but how will these people be saved and will they?**

Unless one of them personally has done something to you, it is not your place nor obligation to be worried about "forgiving" them. It sounds like what you meant to say is that you have trouble not HATING them, or being bitter towards them. In that case:

Matthew 5:43-48 - You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. (NKJV)

Now WILL they be saved? If they repent and turn in faith to Jesus Christ.... most definitely yes. Is that likely? From a human viewpoint, probably not; but we can't limit what God will do.

Finally, how could God possibly grant salvation to terrorists? I have hated; I'm a murderer (1John 3.15). I've lusted; I'm an adulterer (Matt 5.28).

I've not always been 100% honest; I'm a liar. I've put things ahead of God; I'm an idolater. Starting to get the point?

I have broken every law of God either in spirit or actual act. So have you. So has everyone you know. And yet God has chosen to save me despite my lawlessness.

Terrorists are horrible, ruthless cowards; but in reality, their violation of God's holiness is no more horrible, eternally speaking, than our sinfulness. God can and will save according to His rules, not ours.

~~~~~

Forgiveness – Does It Require Repentance?

If someone continually sins against you and does not repent, are we still to forgive? I know we are not to take revenge, but doesn't forgiveness require repentance?

First let's answer how many times you, as a Christian, are required to forgive:

As a practical point, let me ask you, how many times has the Lord forgiven you? Do you want Him to have a set number? Then you're out of luck. Or do hope that He is merciful and patient and forgives you as often as you need it?

Now to the Bible:

Matthew 18:21-22 - Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I

forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven." (NKJV)

Was Jesus actually saying "490 times, that's it?" And then at 491, you can get hold your grudge and tell'em "too bad, so sad!" Let's hope not, because I can guarantee you anyone reading this has sinned against Jesus more than 490 times!

No, the Lord was NOT giving a set, legalistic number. He was figuratively saying "as many times as it takes." There are many Biblical examples that say we must forgive as much as necessary, so we won't beg that point.

Next question: does the other person have to be repentant? I cannot find Biblical support for the notion. It appears that we are to have a forgiving spirit regardless of any response or attitude from the offender.

Remember, forgiveness is as much for the VICTIM as it is the offender. Forgiveness shows your gratitude to God for forgiving you (Matt 18:21-35). God has forgiven us much, we in turn should freely grant forgiveness to others. Forgiveness brings you peace no matter how the other person acts. Forgiveness is obedience in action.

Of course we hope for a repentant attitude from the offender simply because we know that they cannot be right with God if they are not contrite. But we want their repentant attitude based on a selfless reason: we simply care about the state of the other person's soul and walk with God.

Our greatest example would be Jesus himself. The people who crucified Him

had tried to make His life miserable from day one of His earthly ministry. They accused Him of working for Satan; called Him names; tried to kill him. Ultimately they murdered him without so much as a hint of repentance... but Jesus said, "Forgive them Father." (Lk 23.34) If anyone had a right to say, "They don't deserve forgiveness," it was Jesus. But He left us with a clear example to follow.

Finally, let me toss in an intuition: if a person asks if they HAVE to forgive someone; i.e., are they required to... I'm going to urge that person to consider that they personally probably have some unforgiveness and bitterness to deal with down deep inside.

People who have a forgiving spirit and are free of grudges and bitterness don't wonder whether or not they are "required" to forgive others. Or, possibly the person who asks this question has not considered all that God has forgiven them for. Or they simply may be untaught about the subject.

Either way, some self-examination is in order, because the question reveals a lack of understanding of forgiveness, or some root of bitterness that needs to be confessed.

That last part is my own opinion, not a Biblical position. To close, I don't read any requirement of repentance from the offender in this command from the Lord:

Matthew 6:14-15 - For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses,

neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (NKJV)

Further thoughts from reader comments:

God was patient towards Israel for 490 years before punishing them. 490 years was "Seven Seventies."

In Scripture, the number 7 is always the number of perfection and 10 is the number of completion. So "seven times seventy" or "seven seventies" always refers to complete perfection.

So when Jesus spoke in Matthew 18:21-22, He was saying that we are to forgive the perfect completeness of God.

Thanks to JDP and CR for reminding me of those points....

~~~~~

## Forgiveness - Does The Offender Have To Repent?

**One of your Bible Answers indicated that it doesn't matter if the offender asks for forgiveness from you, you still forgive them. Doesn't Luke 17:1-4 teach that the offender must be repentant?**

Luke 17:1-4 - Then He said to the disciples, "It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he

should offend one of these little ones. Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him." (NKJV)

I agree that this passage teaches ABOUT the repentant offender but not that he MUST repent in order for the OFFENDED to forgive. The plain teaching of this verse is that we are to be ready to forgive as many times as someone repents of their sin against us. It does not answer the question, "What if they are unrepentant?"

We can assume, imply, guess or insert new meaning here and conclude, "If they don't repent, you don't have to forgive," but that is simply not stated in the verse and goes against other Biblical principles of forgiveness.

When you reach the point where someone sinning against you will not repent, the forgiveness you extend in your own heart, and perhaps with your words (as Jesus did from the cross to His executioners), is for YOUR benefit. It keeps YOUR heart free from the burden of unforgiveness, bitterness, hatred or malice. It keeps YOUR spirit free regardless of the offender's intransigence.

The verse you cite deals specifically with the REPENTANT brother, not the unrepentant (believer or not).... if someone refuses to repent, WE still act in forgiveness and let God judge and "repay" for vengeance His alone.

Luke 23:34 - Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know

what they do." And they divided His garments and cast lots. (NKJV)

Those who sin and are unrepentant don't REALLY know the consequences of their offense, or they would repent (whether unsaved and slaves to sin; or saved and out of fellowship).

Again, when a person ASKS for forgiveness (repents), we are commanded to forgive as often as they ask. When they refuse to repent, we forgive them TO KEEP OUR OWN HEART FROM BITTERNESS AND UNFORGIVENESS, and leave the vengeance to God:

Mark 11:25-26 - "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses." (NKJV)

Romans 12:19 - Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. (NKJV)

Ephesians 4:32 - And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. (NKJV)

Colossians 3:13 - bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. (NKJV)

James 2:13 - For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. (NKJV)

Matthew 6:14 - For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. (NKJV)

1 Peter 3:9 - not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. (NKJV)

There is overwhelming Scripture to support the idea of forgiveness, with or without the repentance of the offender. The verse you point out specifically speaks to the situation where the same person keeps wronging us over and over, but repents.

We are commanded to forgive PERSONAL sins against us because God has forgiven us all of our sins which are much greater. God wants repentance from the offender FOR HIS SAKE, not for ours.

We are to forgive and have mercy as God has had mercy on us. Repentance from the offender is for their benefit, to bring them to a place of being forgiven by God. We can forgive the offense against us, repentant or not... but the offender has to come in true repentance before a perfect and holy God before that sin can be removed and fellowship restored.

In light of what we have been forgiven by God, and keeping in mind the terrible offenses that UNrepentant men have inflicted on our Savior, we need to follow His example and forgive those who do evil to us.

~~~~~

Forgiveness – Does God Still Punish Us After Forgiveness?

If God forgives everything...does He still punish? I feel like whenever I do something wrong, something I love gets taken away. This makes me fear God and always worry about doing things right. I feel like God punishes me every time I don't do something right, and it's hard for me to feel like I have a real relationship with God when that happens. I compare it to the relationships I have with my friends...and when I do something wrong to one of my friends, regardless of whether or not I meant to, they forgive very easily. While they may think of it from time to time, it doesn't affect the way they treat me. I want to trust God with everything but I feel like He's more of an "administrator" than a friend.

I think the best way to address this question is to break it down and comment on each statement.

Some of my comments may sound rather blunt, but it is important, as always, to be both TRUTHFUL and COMPASSIONATE. Too often, we have either extreme in the church today where we've become either 1) cold, hard and true or 3) mushy, feel-good and completely inoffensive. Neither is correct... neither is what Jesus modeled for us. Jesus was forceful and blunt (vipers! Matt 23:33), and infinitely compassionate (the

adulterous woman; John 8:7). I'll attempt both in this answer.

"If God forgives everything...does He still punish?"

First, God doesn't "forgive everything." On an eternal level, related to your eternal destination (heaven or hell), God forgives those who have repented of their sins and turned in faith to God for rescue through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Eph 2:8).

At the present, for Believers, God forgives us of sins when we ask Him to (1John 1:9). This restores our fellowship and intimacy with Him while we finish this race of battling against our sin-corrupted flesh which seeks constantly to pull us away from God (Romans 6:14).

Next, you need to understand the difference between punishment (discipline), consequences and pruning.

Punishment or discipline - like any good earthly parent who appropriately punishes their child, God the Father knows perfectly well when it is appropriate to discipline us (Heb 12:7-11). Unlike us imperfect humans, God's discipline is always done correctly and is an instrument to 1) teach us, 2) turn us and 3) perfect us.

Consequences - consequences are the natural and logical result of our choices. Even though God may forgive us of sin and we may receive the forgiveness of others we have sinned against, most always there are consequences to deal with. God is not mocked, and whatever seed we plant, that is the harvest we reap (Gal 6:7). A

couple may be forgiven for fornication, but have a pregnancy to deal with. A person may be forgiven for lying, but there is still trust to be rebuilt.

Pruning - God sometimes cuts away, or removes things from our lives that are keeping us fully from Him. This is not punishment. It is like the gardener who knows when to prune his plants so that the fullest and healthiest growth can occur (John 15:2).

It takes discernment to know the difference in these three, and maturity to accept the fact that forgiveness does not equal the removal of all things uncomfortable.

Forgiveness does not necessarily mean the removal of all things uncomfortable.

"I feel like whenever I do something wrong, something I love gets taken away."

You have two options to consider: 1) you are right, and 2) you are mistaken.

You might be right. God may very well be removing things from you that you love, or that are important to you "when you do things wrong" because God might know that is the perfect way to get your attention.

However, I have found from experience that most of the time this is our own paranoia, immaturity and insecurity speaking. Why? Because the Bible clearly tells us that God is NOT a harsh taskmaster riding the heavenly lightning bolt, licking his chops, just waiting for us to mess up so He can ZZZZAP us!

Now, I would propose that God could very well be confirming to you that "yes, you did wrong, yes, I am watching, yes, I am here" by letting you see a clear consequence ("taking something that is important to me") for your sin. This is not punishment as much as it is love. If earthly parents are capable of saying, "Sweetheart, if you do that wrong thing that you know is wrong, you're going to have face the discipline for it." If humans can understand this principle, how much more perfect and loving is it for God to understand?

What loving parent would say to their child over and over, "I know you did wrong, but I forgive you... there are no consequences, just go on." Anyone who has ever had kids knows that the child simply says "yahoo!" and goes right back to doing wrong because there is no price to pay.

In many very real ways, we are LIKE CHILDREN, even as adults. We want to mouth off, disobey, rebel, lie and make excuses... we just do it in a more sophisticated and manipulative manner. God is not fooled by our childish sinning any more than I am fooled by my two year old's attempt to disobey then act innocent. I forgive (compassion) - then proceed with the appropriate response (truth: discipline, consequence, pruning).

Finally, what we "feel" is very often wrong. If God took something away from you EVERY time you sinned, or most of the time, or even only when you "sinned big"... you would have LONG AGO lost everything you have. So your feelings are betraying you in an attempt to self-justify, excuse or pity your sinful choices.

"This makes me fear God, and always worry about doing things right."

You should fear God. You don't have to be SCARED of Him (if you are saved) but you should fear Him.

Fear is "healthy respect." If I'm standing in the road and a bus is hurdling towards me, I FEAR the bus, and I should! The power, the consequence, the result is obvious and I need to fear what will happen if I don't get out of the way.

In the same way, we "fear" God. God is God. He is our Creator. We owe our existence and salvation to Him. We should fear Him when we choose to ignore Him, disobey or rebel (sin). God has told us how to live, how to act, how to think... all for our own good, protection and eventual reward. Is God some tyrant, taking away all our fun? Hardly. God tells us how to live, think and act because He knows it will result in the VERY VERY best life we can ever live. Thank God He loves us enough to say "do this..." and "don't do that..."

Fear God:

Psalm 111:10 - The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever. (NKJV)

Hebrews 12:28-29 - Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire. (NKJV)

Psalm 130:4 - But there is forgiveness with You, That You may be feared. (NKJV)

2 Corinthians 7:1 - Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (NKJV)

You do not have to be SCARED of God. Let me again use parenting to explain myself. My children FEAR that I might spank them (strike them on the bottom) if they deliberately disobey. However, my children are not SCARED (live in unknowing fear) that I might walk up and just spank them for no reason, at any time.

We don't have to be scared of God in the sense that He just punishes us for fun, on a whim or for no reason. We do need to fear God that He may chastise us (like any good parent) when we willfully disobey.

If you are SCARED of God, it is from your own misunderstanding, ignorance or perhaps a result of sin gone unchecked (i.e., my kids might get scared and paranoid if they are sneaking around doing things wrong all the time and worried they are going to get caught unexpectedly).

"I feel like God punishes me every time I don't do something right and it's hard for me to feel like I have a real relationship with God when that happens. I compare it to the relationships I have with my friends...and when I do something wrong to one of my friends, regardless of whether or not I meant to, they forgive very easily. While they may think of it from time to time, it doesn't affect the way they treat me."

First, we know that God doesn't "punish you" every time you do something wrong. God RESPONDS

every time, yes, but whether it is punishment or not is up to His perfect parenting skills.

Next, what do your "feelings" have to do with whether or not your relationship is REAL? What parent hasn't had the joy of having their kid say "I hate you!" at least once (if they haven't, I can guarantee you they have probably thought it)?

When my kids get mad at me for disciplining them, it doesn't change my relationship with them. When they "hate me" for punishing them, it doesn't change the fact that I am their father. How they "feel" about the relationship, especially given their immaturity, has nothing to do with the genuineness of the relationship.

As well, how you "feel" about having a relationship with God means little. You either have one through salvation, or you don't. If you do, then you need to learn from the Bible what that relationship is, what it means and what is involved and adjust your mind, heart and feelings to the TRUTH, not to your emotions.

FEELINGS FOLLOW CHOICE

Remember, FEELINGS FOLLOW CHOICES. Like a caboose (feelings) at the end of a train (your mind and will), when the train engine (your power of choice and decision) changes direction, the caboose will eventually follow. Depending on the length of the train (how much growing you need to do; how far your feelings are from your knowledge of the truth), it might take a little while for the caboose to reach the "turn" that engine has already gone around... but eventually it will.

Feelings always follow choice. If you want the right feelings, make the right choices. We are a society who lets feelings RULE... and that is a recipe for chaos and confusion. Let your mind and heart rule, guided by Holy Spirit, educated by the Living Word - and your feelings will be the right feelings you can trust and enjoy.

Continuing... why would you compare your relationship to God with that of your friends? Your friends, truth be known, are sinful, rebellious, petty, fickle and UNFORGIVING. How can I say that? Because ALL humans are that way to various degrees.

You claim instant and perfect forgiveness from your friends, and that simply cannot be true. Why? Because they are sinful just like you.

First, your perception that your friends treat you this way is probably an inaccurate romanticization and a convenient dream that supports your wish that God would ignore your sin.

Forgiveness ALWAYS involves someone taking the pain and penalty of the sin that has occurred. For example, I can forgive my kids for breaking a lamp while horseplaying but in order to do that, I must bear the burden of the transgression. I've lost the lamp. I have to clean up the mess and I have to pay to replace it. They are forgiven because I am bearing the burden.

God can forgive us of sin because Jesus bears the price of it. He suffered for it. He died for it. He paid the price. So God can forgive me at Christ's expense.

I can forgive you for lying about me, but I must choose to bear the pain of

the hurt. If I tell others about it (gossip), then I'm hurting you. If I bring it up later, then I'm hurting you. If I secretly hold a grudge, then I'm hurting you because it will destroy our friendship. If I truly forgive you, then I bear the pain of the transgression alone, and never hold it against you, or up to you ever again. That is true forgiveness.

If you think all your friends do this for you, you are simply viewing them through rose-colored glasses.

As well, you do yourself a great disservice by wishing God was like your friends. What you are really saying is, "I wish God would ignore my sin and look the other way in mock forgiveness and let me off the hook".

Your friends may very well do that in their imperfect, sinful and finite abilities. God, however, knows PERFECTLY what the PERFECT response is to further PERFECT you. Whether discipline, consequence, pruning or "letting you off the hook" (which I believe God does in a sense many times), God always responds in the very best, most perfect way.

You want to change that? Rather, you should want to change your understanding of God than change God Himself.

Remember this: anything we perceive about God that is not as "good" as we can imagine it should be, is based solely on ignorance and misinformation IN OUR MIND. God cannot be "more good." He cannot be "more perfect." He is the definition of both. In any way that we perceive Him to be short of perfection and

goodness, we need to investigate OUR heart, not His.

I'll stake my forgiveness on how God does it rather than on my sinful co-humans (friends).

I want to trust God with everything, but I feel like He's more of an "administrator" than a friend.

Here is where I must be a little more blunt than usual (is that possible?). You don't want to trust GOD... you want to worship idols. Huh? How can I say that?

You want a "god" of your own making. You want Him to act and "forgive" the way that makes you feel good. You want a "god" that is your buddy and pal... not the Creator God of the Universe who sent His Only Son to die on your behalf and will come again in Holy Vengeance raining fire down on those who have rejected Him.

God is not your "friend" in the sense of being your buddy, your pal, your "hang out, chill out, cool out" group of comrades. This is a mistake of modern parenting where we attempt to be "buddies" with our children FIRST, instead of it being a natural by-product of respect, love, honor and admiration.

God IS your friend in the sense that He loves you, and cares for you intimately. He is your friend in the sense that you have direct fellowship with Him. But He is not your friend in the sense that He is an equal pal that just gives you the wink-wink when you sin and pops another cold one for you.

Let me give you some examples of earthly relationships that are the

proper type of "friend" but with the appropriate perspective:

I am my children's "friend." I love them. They can trust me. They can be honest with me. They can play with me, hang out with me, enjoy time with me, converse with me. However, because I am a TRUE friend, and there is a difference in "position and responsibility," I will not overlook bad behavior, disobedience, disrespect or rebellion. I will react with the proper response that will result in the best for them. I will forgive them, but not overlook their "sin."

When I was a Drill Sgt, I was a "friend" to my troops. They could come to me with problems. I allowed them at appropriate times to sit around and just talk to me casually. I counseled them. They could joke with me and cut up, but make no mistake: they didn't treat me like some equal "buddy." I did not overlook their mistakes and faults. I "forgave them" but it was my responsibility to make sure I did whatever was necessary to make them a better soldier. Sometimes it was a warning, sometimes extra training, sometimes punishment and yes, sometimes I gave them "the look" which meant "do it again, and suffer."

I've had "friends" who were Generals in the Army, CEO's of large corporations, leaders of big churches and other positions of power and authority. I could talk with them, joke with them. They would talk with me, spend time with me and do things with me but I never had any misconception that we were "buddies." If I messed up, then I knew to expect the appropriate response.

In that sense, yes, God is our friend. Given the fact of salvation, He is our ultimate friend, our best friend, in many ways our only true friend.

He is NOT our "buddy" though... He will not, cannot and should not overlook our sin and act like it didn't happen. He will respond perfectly, sometimes with "the look," sometimes with consequences, sometimes with obvious punishment (discipline) and sometimes with extra training or redirection.

Be glad God is not like your human friends. Learn to embrace His response to your sin because it is the perfect response that will make you more like Christ.

~~~~~

## Forgiveness – Forgiving Terrible Wrongs

**How do I forgive when someone who has terribly wronged me? Their lies cost me my job, my reputation, my life savings, and tore my family apart.**

The "how" part is simple. You just have to make a willful, purposeful choice to do so. You may not feel like it. You may struggle with it. But God honors our choice to obey Him regardless of what our feelings may be pulling us to do.

The "why" is the deeper part of the issue. Here are some Biblical "why?" verses:

God forgave us when we cost Him the life of His son and we were destroying His creation.

Romans 5:8 - But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (NKJV)

Ephesians 4:32 - And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. (NKJV)

Forgive them because we really don't know what we are doing when we sin. If we REALLY understood our sin, we wouldn't do it.

Luke 23:34 - Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." And they divided His garments and cast lots. (NKJV)

Forgive them simply because you are commanded to and God will honor your obedience.

Mark 11:25 - And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. (NKJV)

Forgive them so that God can begin showing His sovereign care and restoring that which was lost.

Joel 2:25 - So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, The crawling locust, The consuming locust, And the chewing locust, My great army which I sent among you (NKJV)(a promise specifically for the Israelites but applicable in principle to all God's children).

Our forgiveness is to have no limits and we should darn well be glad that God's does not when it comes to our sin!

Luke 17:4 - And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him. (NKJV)

Forgive them lest God withhold forgiveness from you and not listen to your prayers.

James 2:12-13 - So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. (NKJV)

Mark 11:26 - But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses." (NKJV)

Finally, you should not only forgive them, but you should love them and pray for them. I know this is tough. See my lesson here (<http://www.bible-evil.com/>) about this concept.

Matthew 5:44 - But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. (NKJV)

Finally, from a practical emotional standpoint, your unforgiveness ONLY HURTS YOU! They aren't sitting around bitter and torn up. By continuing to harbor unforgiveness, you extend the hurt and allow them further access to damaging your life. It is not THEM now hurting you, it is YOU allowing them to.

Trust God, obey Him even if you don't feel like. God will honor your obedience, heal your emotions, bless your devotion and restore what was lost (and that doesn't primarily mean monetarily or physically; it could, but it primarily means spiritually you will become WHOLE and then it doesn't matter what happens materially).

~~~~~

Gambling - Is It A Sin?

Is it wrong for me to play the lottery every now and then? Is gambling once in a while sin?

Sometimes I hesitate, just for a second, to answer questions like this. Conservative Christians will write and say that I missed the opportunity to clearly condemn something they feel is a sin. Liberal Christians will write and tell me that I'm judgmental and legalistic. Those who like to gamble will inform me of how it does not affect their Christianity, and those who have never gambled will proclaim that there is no way a Christian can participate in gambling in any form.

So with that disclaimer I will wade right into the quicksand and see how long I can stay afloat.

Before we get to gambling in general, let me make a comment about the lottery. First of all, you have a greater chance of getting hit by a meteor than you do winning the lottery. Despite that, a large percentage of Americans today fully believe that someday they will win a large sum of money from a

lottery. As well, it is a documented fact that the "big winners" of the lottery end up being a sad and broken bunch.

The lottery is a voluntary tax, primarily on those who can't afford it.

I know that comment is going to get me a lot of fire from a lot of people, but it doesn't change the truth of it. Very little of the money goes to all of the so-called good reasons that were pitched by the lottery proponents when it was first considered. The government allows it because it is literally a voluntary tax taking money out of people's pockets with a good percentage of it finding its way into the government coffers.

Regardless of whether or not gambling is a sin, playing the lottery is just dumb, dumb, dumb. It is a waste of money that could be going to help the poor, give to house orphans, care for widows or spread the gospel. If every Christian in America who wasted their money on the lottery were to give it to a missionary instead, we would not have to have our missionaries making the church circuit once a year to beg for enough money to feed their family.

Pause... sorry, I heard a clicking noise and wanted to see if it was the sound of the counter on my e-mail list going down.

As for gambling, first of all there is no New Testament prohibition SPECIFICALLY against gambling. If there was, the question wouldn't be a question.

I believe it boils down to defining what gambling is, because if you don't, what is considered entertainment to one person would be gambling to

another. For example, if a person says, "Hey, I'll bet you a dollar I can make this putt," would that be considered gambling? Is that the same as the person who sits at a horse track all day or at an online casino running up credit cards and spending the family budget?

Compare these two examples: one set of guys decides to go play a round of golf and each spends \$50 for a few hours of recreation. Another set of guys decide to set up a card table and play poker for a couple of hours with the constraint that each player can only spend \$20. Is spending \$50 to play golf okay when some would say that it is a luxurious waste of money that could have gone for the Lord's work? Is playing a game of cards where you can only bet \$20 a sin because that form of entertainment is called "gambling?" I think it's hard to draw a line and say that I can spend \$30 to go see a movie, \$75 to play golf, drop \$60 on a dinner and spend a \$125 to go to a concert, then turn right around and proclaim that the fellow enjoying a \$10 poker game at his buddy's house is a gambling-sinner-going-straight-to-hell.

My point is this, Christians are too eager to jump up and condemn things without seriously thinking them through. I'm not talking about things that the Bible clearly says is wrong. I'm talking about things that over the years different Christian segments have crystallized as sin for their own reasons such as dancing, drinking, smoking and gambling. Charles Spurgeon condemned going to the theater while he smoked cigars.

None of those things are specifically condemned in Scripture, which brings

me to my real answer. The real answer is that God is concerned about our hearts, motives and attitude. I am convinced that this is why the Lord did not give us an ABC 123 checklist of do's and don'ts for most specific behavior. I think this is confirmed in the fact that God DID give us very specific instruction when it comes to the internals: honesty, purity, integrity, holiness, love, etc.

When it comes to these external issues, the Lord has equipped us and empowered us by the Holy Spirit to be able to rightly discern that it would be wrong to spend your hard-earned money in the pursuit of a quick gain through gambling because your motive is to risk the blessing God gave you to get MORE than HE gave you. I believe the same discernment and Holy Spirit would have us realize that saying "I bet you a buck I can make this putt" or getting together with your buddies and spending a few dollars on a card game does not fall into the category of sin.

The problem is Christians in general, because of poor spiritual discipline and a lack of biblical depth, have lost their ability to discern such things.

Now, having said all that, my personal opinion is that it is always safer to stay on the side of caution if there is any question. If you don't go to casinos and gamble, you won't find yourself gambling in a way that is sinful. If you don't cultivate a lifestyle of gambling, then you will not succumb to its darker temptations.

Further, like the valid reasons against dancing, drinking and smoking, gambling comes with a worldly label and appearance. Being part of the

gambling market supports a well-known list of vices and questionable enterprises. Gambling can call into question your witness for the Lord and can easily cause another Christian to stumble.

In the end, gambling is a matter of conscience. Like drinking, (drunkenness), eating (gluttony), entertainment (immorality) etc., gambling taken too far or indulged in too much, is no doubt sinful. However, the fact remains that Biblically there is no specific verse that clearly and without question prohibits gambling in all forms, whether light personal recreation or hard-core addiction. Like all behavior considerations, there are principles that govern our behavior such as being good stewards of our money (1 Corinthians 4:2); being good witnesses for the Lord, being frugal and laying up our treasures in heaven rather than on Earth (Matt 6:20); the pursuit of money not earned through Godly work can be a snare (1 Timothy 6:9); gambling can easily lead to greed and idolatry (1 Timothy 6:10); gambling can waste money that could help others; gambling can be addictive; gambling can lead and often does lead to other sin.

There's plenty of Biblical principle to warrant extreme caution and concern about gambling.

It's gambling a sin? A lot of the times, without a doubt. All of the time? You cannot declare that Biblically. Do I think there is a more spiritual and Godly use of the funds that a regular gambler spends on gambling? Of course I do.

~~~~~

## Genesis – Cain's Wife

### Where did Cain's wife come from?

This question is usually presented as "evidence" of either "Bible errors" or evolution. I'll answer the obvious and let you dig deeper if you want on a site like

<http://www.answersingenesis.org/> or <http://www.genesisveracity.com/>.

First of all the Bible is true, and there is overwhelming, undeniable evidence to substantiate that fact.

Based on that premise the following can be concluded:

Cain's wife was a descendant of Adam and Eve

She may have been part of any number of subsequent generations since the life spans were so long

There was no prohibition at that time against inter-family marriage

There was no issue of genetic defects because it was so early in the human gene pool

She may have been a sister and niece

We have no idea how many children Adam and Eve had or how many there were before the Cain and Abel murder occurred. Given the length of life, genetic health, favorable environmental conditions there were quite probably a fairly sizable group of people on the earthy during the original humans lifetimes.

This is also the answer to where the people in other cities or the people who would kill Cain came from.

We should not let evolutionary or anti-Biblical presupposition cloud our critical thinking when it comes to these issues. Too often we allow the bias of "science," skepticism and political correctness to keep us from really thinking logically about these types of issues.

~~~~~

Genesis – Creating Day And Night

In Genesis 1:3-5 and v.14-19 it appears that God created the day and night on days 1 and 4 which would be two different days creating the same thing. I have never noticed it before but it doesn't seem to make sense. Can you help?

Good question. Most of the time our casual reading causes us to miss honest questions like this one. When we stop to look at things like this, not only does it make perfect sense, it also gives us a heightened appreciation for the Bible.

Here's the first passage:

Genesis 1:3-5 - And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

First, remember that God IS light. In heaven, there will be no sun or moon,

God will be the source of light (Rev. 21:23).

As God created our universe, He created LIGHT as we know it. Whether the original "light" simply emanated from God Himself, or was a separate physical presence, is not explained. I tend to believe He created light as we know it as it flowed out of Him. As Einstein rightly proved, light is a "thing" with tangible physical properties. Darkness is NOT a "thing" but simply the absence of light. (In the same manner, "evil" is the absence of GOODNESS, goodness being an attribute of God.)

Notice there is no mention of the sun or moon on Day One, nor of stars (we ASSUME they are present because of our reality, but notice they are not mentioned), but only the statement about the creation of "light." It does say God "separated" the light from darkness and created "day and night." How this was manifested physically is not explained. We can speculate all we want, but God didn't tell us.

What we DO know at this point is that light did not necessarily have to be related to stars (because it does not specifically say it is) or our Sun and Moon (because they are specifically created later). The next passage you ask about specifically tells us about those:

Genesis 1:14-19 - And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, 15 and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so. 16 God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the

day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. 17 God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, 18 to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. 19 And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.

On the fourth day, it says God specifically "made" two great lights - our Sun and Moon. Does this mean that the other stars were already created, and God simply declared their purpose on Day Four? Or did God create all the other stars on Day 4 as well? We aren't told and it doesn't matter. God could have created "light" before He created "light sources" simply because God is God. I think the stars were not physically created until Day Four.

Just because we can't understand it doesn't make it illogical or impossible. WE CAN'T UNDERSTAND ANYTHING ABOUT HOW GOD CREATED ANYTHING AT ALL. THE IDEA OF BRINGING SOMETHING INTO EXISTENCE FROM NOTHING IS TOTALLY BEYOND OUR GRASP.

So to find some part of the process that doesn't make sense to us, doesn't bring the process into question in any way, because the very process of creation is infinitely beyond our ability to understand in the first place.

For example, how could plants exist before the Sun was created? Light already existed, but without the Sun nearby, could "starlight" be enough to give them life? Or did they simply live a day without "energy" until God created the Sun the next day? These are all questions generated because of

our limited human knowledge and viewpoint. Hardly an issue with the God who created it all to begin with.

The Genesis account says plants came before the Sun. How could light exist before the stars and Sun were created? I have no idea, other than to say that everything is possible with God who created it all.

I personally believe that God put this "impossible" order into the Creation account simply to PROVE that GOD was the Creator, not evolution or any type of materialistic explanation.

Either the Genesis account is true, or evolution is true. There is no "synergy" or "cooperation" between the two. So this shallow cop out that "God created but used evolution" is UTTER NONSENSE.

If evolution is true, then the Genesis account is foolishness. If Genesis is true, the evolution is an insult to the Creator named in Genesis.

God created light. Then He created the stars, Sun and Moon. Possibly the light on Day One came from stars, but I don't think so. We tend to want to think that because it "makes sense," but given that plants were created before the Sun (another "impossibility" in our minds), I think the acceptance of the plain account in Genesis doesn't need to be questioned or wondered about. We don't need to wonder, we need to be IN WONDER of a God of such power.

God created light on Day One, and stars (including our Sun) and the moon on Day Four. What a wondrous God we serve!

On a side note, the confusion that evolution and modern science introduces into the plain account of Genesis causes most Christians to be insecure about the obvious. Do an informal survey of 25 Christians today asking, "What came first? The chicken or the egg?"

I'll guess that you might get ONE person answer confidently "the chicken," which is abundantly simple and clear from the Genesis account. However, we have been so indoctrinated by evolutionary thinking, that even amongst ourselves we waffle, hesitate and are insecure in even the most basic truths about creation.

~~~~~

## Genesis – Where Did All The People Come From?

**Who was Cain's wife? Did God create more people? Isn't this a contradiction in the Bible? It is not lawful to marry your sister, so who did Cain marry? Were there other people on the earth? Who lived in the land of Nod? Does this have any relevance to the gospel?**

This question is a "classic" that has been answered by many teachers. Because the answer is fairly involved, I want to point you to another answer online:

[http://www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/tools/cains\\_wife.asp](http://www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/tools/cains_wife.asp)

COPYRIGHT © 2004 Answers in Genesis

~~~~~

Genesis – Did It Rain Before Noah?

Did it rain on the earth before Noah's flood?

There's no mention of rain occurring in the Bible before Noah's flood; it says God watered the earth with the dew and underground springs. Of course, you have to first believe the Bible account of the Flood is actually true, and you must believe that the earth is relatively young (thousands of years) versus ancient (millions of years) because it is foolishness to believe that it did not rain for millions of years (for a lot of reasons). So starting with the premise that the Bible is actually true (what an amazing concept!), and it's plain language means what it plainly says (another outrageous idea!), I think it can be safely assumed it didn't rain before the great Flood.

Gen 2:5-6 - before any plant of the field was in the earth and before any herb of the field had grown. For the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; 6 but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground.

This verse doesn't specifically say that it would never rain, but makes it a point to say that God was keeping it from raining on purpose and that He had other ways to water the earth. Before the flood, the weather cycle was much different. The supply of the earth's water not held in bodies of

water was held underground in the "fountains of the deep" (Gen 7:11). When Noah's flood occurred, God allowed the earth to "rip" open (the scars are still visible on the ocean floors) and the trapped waters exploded high into the sky. Many Christians in science believe that the reference to "windows of heaven" refer to a water vapor canopy that God collapsed via rain onto the earth as well as the water from underground. This started the water cycles as we know it today: water on the ground evaporates and becomes clouds; clouds rain; rain runs back into the oceans where it starts over again (the hydrological cycle).

While the Bible does not specifically say it did NOT rain before Noah, I think it's pretty clear that it did not. Another good indication is that if it did not rain for 400 years while Noah built the Ark, it probably didn't rain before that. Why? Because if the earth depended on rain, then 400 years of drought would have killed everything. One more... it seems that a rainbow was a new thing as well. Not specifically, but implied. If Noah had been looking at rainbows for 400 years, the Flood rainbow would not seem to be as significant as Scripture implies. The earth was warm and temperate ALL OVER before the Flood (as evidenced by tropical forests that are buried under the ice caps), and God watered the earth with dew (ground condensation as opposed to rain) and from underground springs. Based on that, I would side with those who think it never rained before the Great Deluge of Noah. You'll NEVER hear any of this on TV or in schools (government, and even a lot of "Christian" schools). They deny the

Bible and the Flood. So don't bother looking to non-Christian or liberal education sources. All you hear about there is evolution and "millions of years" which are absolutely unBiblical and false, bordering on an absurd religious blind faith.

~~~~~

## Genesis – What Are The Nephilim?

**In Genesis 6:4 who are the Nephilim? Are they angels or did God create other beings beside men and angels?**

There is much speculation, and the Bible does not answer directly.

As sensational as it sounds, they were probably a race of men who were birthed by women who cohabited with demon possessed men. If Satan could corrupt the seed of humankind, he could thwart, in his thinking, any chance a sinless Savior could be brought forth from "the seed of woman."

We get hints of this because there were demons from that phase of history who were exiled to "the pit" for violating their natural domain. The most sensible conclusion is that they engaged in human affairs that violated the boundaries God had set for them.

For those Christians who believe in the Tribulation in the last days, those demons will be released for a short time to torment sinful mankind who has rejected God. This is also a sensible conclusion because it clearly

defines that God banished the demons for a reason that would come in handy later and further demonstrates that texts of this nature are literal, and not symbolic.

Think about it... if God is going to pour out His wrath on a world that has rejected Him, what better way than to unleash some really hacked off demons who have been penned up in the dark for several thousands of years.

There are some who find the possibility of a semi-demonically originated race of giants too fantastic to believe... but there is no reason textually to doubt that is a very possible, in my opinion probable, explanation and definition of "Nephilim."

If you believe in an allegorical or symbolic interpretation of either Genesis or Revelation, you will most likely not accept this view.

~~~~~

Giving – Should You Give If You Don't Tithe?

My husband and I were thinking about sponsoring a child that was orphaned from the tsunamis which would only cost us \$32.00 per month. Then, I was talking to a Christian friend about this and she replied, "You can't do that, you don't even tithe!" Now, I know the importance of tithing, but if I did, I would not be able to pay my bills. Sponsoring a child costs less, and it

seems like I'd be doing a lot more good to someone who REALLY needed it. I'm not saying that my church doesn't, but those kids in SE Asia have nothing left! Which would you say is more important-Tithing, or sponsoring a child?

You ask a lot of very intriguing questions, none of which have perfect answers, and all of which will result in a load of email telling me what I SHOULD have said. But here goes anyway....

First, of course there is nothing wrong with sponsoring a child and giving to the needy UNLESS you are violating your conscience, which for a Christian is guided by the Holy Spirit.

1 John 3:17 - But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? (NKJV)

Now, your friend says that you would be wrong because you are not "tithing." I would have to take exception with that EXACT statement because as New Testament Christians, we simply are NOT commanded to tithe.

Most certainly we are commanded to give:

2 Corinthians 9:6-8 - But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you,

always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. (NKJV)

And we are commanded to give in the "assembly" on a regular basis:

1 Corinthians 16:2 - On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. (NKJV)

Without getting into the whole "are we supposed to tithe" (10% giving) debate, we can safely say that we are indeed commanded to give as we have prospered, on a regular basis, and in a cheerful manner.

So in this sense, your friend has a point. You are ignoring one of God's commandments and the "goodness" of wanting to help the needy in Asia does not excuse that. You should study the Scriptures and pray for wisdom about the matter. (James 1.5)

However, I think you bring up a point that is very important but not talked about today. A lot of Christians see their giving ("tithes") going to opulent buildings, more goodies for its members and being spent on all sorts of things other than spreading the Gospel, supporting missions, helping the poor and needy and furthering God's work.

So it is not an unreasonable to be concerned when you see significant amounts of money spent on things that basically benefit the members of a given church such as programs, gyms, resources, facilities, events, entertainment, etc. It has become part of our "seeker friendly" focus that churches have to "compete" to keep members by offering more and more

things that benefit the membership itself.

Don't get me wrong... it is not my place, nor do I have the ability to sit in judgment on how churches spend their offerings... but it does not change the fact that a WHOLE LOT of money is spent making Christians comfortable and entertained - as well as getting our "needs taken care of" with the Lord's money while Missions and helping the poor go wanting.

To summarize: yes, it's fine to sponsor a needy child. Yes, you should be concerned about ignoring God's command to give on a regular basis to the work of the local church (the "assembly") in your community. Yes, you have a legitimate concern about how church offerings are spent, and you should prayerfully consider talking to your leadership about it.

Let me close with a disclaimer... do not take my answer as an excuse to become divisive over this issue. I cannot in any way pass judgment on how a church spends their offerings. That is between that local church and God. My answer is not a sweeping indictment on having programs, events or gyms at a church.

My answer is simply meant to cause the reader to seek God's truth about these matters.

~~~~~

## Giving - Are Christians Commanded To Tithe?

### Are we as Christians still supposed to tithe today? What does the Bible say about giving? According to Matthew 23:23 we SHOULD tithe shouldn't we?

As Christians in the church age, we are to GIVE.

Tithing was specifically a system applied to the Jewish nation under the Law of Moses. Most people are unaware that 10% was the MINIMUM requirement of giving; practicing Jews gave sometimes up to several times that amount.

So what is our command today about giving as New Testament Christians? Well, let's let the Bible speak:

Early Christians gave to meet needs, take care of the poor and for the common good of the church ( Acts 2:44, 45; 4:34-37; 6:1-3; 11:29)

Paul received support for his evangelistic work (Rom. 15:25-28)

The early church gave when needed (2 Cor. 8:1-4, 11, 12, 14)

Generous giving is rewarded by God with generous reaping; giving is to be done with a cheerful heart (2 Cor. 9:1, 6, 7)

God never forgets those who give (Heb. 6:10).

Here is a primary Scripture concerning giving today:

1 Corinthians 16:1-2 - Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let

each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. (NKJV)

From this verse we get the command to give on the first day of the week which would make it an act of worship, and something that should be routine.

Are we supposed to "tithe" today? Not in the sense that it was done in the Old Testament. They gave from a sense of duty and law.

We are to give with a cheerful heart to support the work of God's Kingdom. He doesn't NEED our money, but our giving is representative of our heart towards God.

As for Matt 23:23 - "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

You make a common argument; but Jesus is speaking specifically to Pharisees still under Mosaic Law. He is not addressing the Church or New Covenant Christians.

Remember, when you interpret Scripture ask: Who was talking? Who were they talking to? At what time in history were they talking? What did the original words mean to the original hearers?

Only then can you discern the actual MEANING, then follow by making APPLICATION to us today.

~~~~~

Giving - Am I Responsible For My Spouse?

Will I be held accountable for my husband's tithes? I work & I give my 10% in my offering. He is a Christian, says he wants to give 10%, but acts differently when I write out the check (I have to ask him how much his check is). I told him to take care of his and I'll take care of mine. Sure enough he hasn't given his in 2 months.

This is more a question about spiritual responsibility, than it is a question about giving.

In one respect, both husband and wife are equally responsible for each other. Each spouse has a duty to lovingly communicate with the other about things that may need attention (such as a spirit of grudging giving).

Overall however, the husband has spiritual responsibility to be the Godly leader for his marriage. In what you describe, your husband has not only failed to honor God with generous and cheerful giving, but he also fails to honor God by setting the example for you.

It is your responsibility to give cheerfully as well, but my ADVICE (not Scripture) to you would be NOT to separate this activity from your husband's participation. By continuing to involve him at the time you choose what to give, your faithfulness may serve to convict him, and prick his conscience. Your example will consistently remind him

of his need to honor God with giving, and just as important, hopefully convict him that he is not being the spiritual leader God intends for him to be.

But you must do this with humility, respect and a motivation of love.

No person is held accountable for the sin of another. God will only hold you accountable to love your husband, to submit to him (as long as he does not ask you to violate your Spirit-led conscience), and to continue to be an example of Godliness, a quiet spirit, and purity....

1Peter 3:1-7 - Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, 2 when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. 3 Do not let your adornment be merely outward--arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel-- 4 rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.

~~~~~

## God – Do Christians And Jews Worship The Same God?

**Do Christians and Jews worship the same God? Can you explain the reason for your answer? I have heard both yes and no answers to this question. And is this the same as "Allah"? The following is an**

**answer I read from Al Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and I wanted to get your opinion of his answer: [http://www.baptiststandard.com/2001/11\\_5/pages/mohler.html](http://www.baptiststandard.com/2001/11_5/pages/mohler.html)**

The short answer is YES, Christians and Jews believe in the same God, but NO, "Allah" of Islam is NOT that God. We hear a lot today that "Allah" is just another word for God, but even Muslims themselves say that God is not a "Trinity" and does not have a Son. So by the very words of Muslims, the God of Christianity and Judaism is not the god of Islam.

While the claim today is made by Islam that Allah is the "God of Abraham" and "Creator," a simple review of the historical origins of the religion will reveal this to simply be rhetoric.

Christians and Jews both worship and believe in the One Creator God of the Universe, of the Bible, of Abraham and Moses. However, as a whole, the Jews reject Jesus as the Son of God, and thus, reject the salvation found only in Jesus. So they believe in God, and do worship the True & Living God of whom there is Only One, but they reject Him when they reject His Beloved Son.

(Many Christians believe the Bible teaches there is coming a day in the future when a large number of the Jews will finally turn to Jesus, and become His evangelists in the last days - the 144,000 in Revelation that have turned in faith to God during the Apocalyptic period. Those Christians who believe that the CHURCH has REPLACED Israel - i.e.. "spiritual

Israel" (Replacement or Covenant Theology) - do not believe this more literal interpretation of Revelation and other prophecy.)

After reading the article you referenced...

The article is correct about the Muslims. They worship a non-Biblical, monotheistic deity that was originally one of many common gods of that time and location. The "moon god" was chosen to become a sole deity of Islam by Muhammad, the Muslim founder. (Hence the crescent moon symbol of Islam). Muslims do indeed worship "one god" but by Christian, Biblical and even Islamic definition, it is not the same God of the Holy Bible.

Allah was never the God of the Bible, is not a personal god, does not exist in three persons... Allah was NOT, and is NOT, the Creator God of the Universe. Christians should not entertain the idea, nor use it to find "common ground" in religion.

To lump YHWH (Jehovah), God of the Jews and Christians in with Islam's Allah, is a strange and somewhat puzzling answer from a president of a Christian seminary. Many Christian groups, including many Baptists, teach that the CHURCH has replaced Israel, which opens the door for comments and assumptions like this one. I cannot say if Mohler's answer is based in Replacement doctrine, he doesn't say. I bring the subject up because it is important for Christians to understand this difference, agree or disagree.

The Jews DO worship (or at least believe in) the True and Living God... hence their rejection of Christ is all

the more consequential. God has dealt with them severely over post-Cross history because of it.

Many Christians disagree that God still has plans for the Jewish nation, but that doesn't change the answer to this question. The Jews always have, and continue to believe in and worship One Creator God, self-existent, Unique and All Powerful. Yes, they reject Jesus, His Son, and for that they have faced, and will face, judgment.

This "Islam and Jews" comparison, is careless, and in my opinion an inappropriate and misleading answer. To compare Jews and Muslims as both rejecting Christ would be appropriate. To imply or state that the God of Judaism and Allah are equally false, is not a good comparison and ignores the origins of both.

We must not sugar coat the rejection of Jesus by the Jews, but to compare them with Islam who worship an impersonal, man-imagined, moon god is simply unacceptable from a Bible teacher.

Christians worship God in full by accepting Jesus, His Beloved Son. Jews believe in the same True God as Christians but reject Him by rejecting His Son. Muslims worship Allah, the moon god of Arabia.

~~~~~

God - A Crutch Or Fire Insurance

What do you say to someone who says to you "The only reason you

are turning to God is because everything has fallen apart for you, now all of a sudden because you're desperate, you're using God."???

You say, "Well, duh!" Or, "Darn right!" Or, "You think?" Or, "Yeah, and it's about time."

I'm always amazed at how foolish and illogical people get when it comes to God. For example, "I know this expensive car could never just happen by chance. It's absurd to think that it was not designed and created by an intelligence higher than itself. But I believe the earth, the heavens, and the human body which are infinitely more complex and exquisitely design, all just happened by random chance and time."

We would never think such nonsense about "real life" but when it comes to God, we start spouting foolish nonsense. Such is this foolish notion that we are only "using God" when people turn to Him in times of trouble.

Think about the absurdity of the following statements:

You're just using the doctors now because you're sick! You didn't have any use for them before!

You only care about the cancer medications now since you got cancer. You didn't even know about them or believe they existed before.

Now all of sudden you're at the financial advisors office every day. You didn't think that was important until your finances fell apart.

You don't really care about mechanics. You're just using them now since your car broke down.

How stupid would those comments be if someone said them? And yet, we can say it about God and feel like we are really smart.

Of COURSE you turned to God when your life was falling apart. Here are a few reasons why:

Prideful humans very often don't feel a need for God when life is going well; "I'm handling things" - God would just cramp our style.

God often uses "our life falling apart" to finally get our attention and get us to turn to Him. How many times does the doctor warn us that our lifestyle is going to cause us health problems, but we don't change until those health problems finally occur?

When life "falls apart" you finally realize your need from Someone and Something higher than yourself; you realize you can't control everything, and that HOPE comes from outside of our existence.

Our need for God is not always something we can see until circumstances arise that force us to evaluate our life, and determine our need for Him.

Rather than ridicule, REJOICING is the proper response that God in His love allowed our life to become so wrecked, we finally woke up and turned to Him. That should be your response to God.

Your response to your skeptical friend should be to tell them you're glad, you're happy, you're thankful that

your life finally disintegrated enough to force you out of your self-dependence and to acknowledge God. This blessing of "a falling apart life" NOW, has caused you to turn to the One who will give you a "perfect life" for ALL ETERNITY.

Remember what Job said in the Bible after he suffered the loss of his family, his health, his reputation - EVERYTHING WAS FALLING APART:

Job 42:5 - I have heard of You [God] by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You. (NKJV)

He is saying that before he suffered, before his life fell apart, he had only heard about God. But after suffering, he REALLY truly saw and knew who God was.

When your life falls apart, that's often the time that God really has your attention, and can begin to show His love and mercy to you.

Tell your friend that your life is "sick" and you've gone to the Great Physician. Ask him if he would go to the doctor if he was sick. Tell him that if it took your life falling apart for you to finally turn to God, you hope his life will fall apart too.

~~~~~

## God – Why Create Evil Humans Knowing They Will Be Evil?

**"Do you think God is omniscient? If so, WHY WOULD GOD CREATE HUMANS KNOWING WE WOULD**

## **SIN AND REBEL AND ALL THIS SUFFERING WOULD RESULT?**

Originally this was sent in as:

(A question that was asked to a friend of mine): "Do you think God is omniscient? If so, WHY WOULD GOD CREATE HUMANS KNOWING WE WOULD SIN AND REBEL AND ALL THIS SUFFERING WOULD RESULT? Would we build a ship and then send it on a maiden voyage if we knew it would sink? Or build an airplane we knew would crash? Is this what God did?"

This is a question that is often considered one that falls into the category of "mystery," something only God knows and we cannot. I'm not sure about that given what the Bible reveals to us. It is also a question often presented by skeptics, atheists or those bitter with God, to trip up unsuspecting and typically Biblically illiterate Christians.

First, the ship and plane analogies are straw men (distracting irrelevant arguments). We don't have relationships with ships and planes. God most certainly could have built a "perfect human" who would never sin and always "love" Him... but it would be an artificial, forced, robotic love if this "perfect human" had no choice but to love God.

Again, it goes back to the very most basic and foundational aspect of why God created us in the first place: so He could love us, and we could choose to love Him thus creating a genuine love relationship. (I already lost the Calvinists, but even if you hold to Calvinism, I hope you'll still read the rest of my answer).

The existence of evil and sin, and all that it entails and has caused, revolves around the issue of FREE WILL AND CHOICE, without which there can be no true love, or true relationship. God created a perfect world, with perfect humans so that He could enjoy a perfect relationship with them, because above all, God is about relationships and love.

In order to have true love and true relationship, God MUST create beings with a CHOICE to love Him. That is the only real way true love can exist. No amount of theological wrangling, twelve dollar theological terms, or strangling of Greek tenses can alleviate that simple fact. LOVE CANNOT BE TRUE UNLESS THERE IS A CHOICE NOT TO LOVE. It is the single most logical, irrefutable and important fact of our existence and "why?" God created us (and the biggest problem with the Calvinist view as a whole\*\*).

God, in His omniscience, knew that even His perfect Creation would at some point experience sin, because a free will to love leaves the INEVITABLE consequence that at some point one of us would exercise our God-given choice to seek our SELF first, making God second. Inevitable? Of course, or there wouldn't really be free will to love God. It was inevitable that at least one relationship would make a choice to love Self more than God.

And from God's known attributes, we of course can confidently know that He foreknew His very first relationship with His first perfect humans would end in the curse of sin after ONE instance of choosing Self over God. Even the first pair of

perfect humans, while created in God's image, were NOT God. ONLY GOD CAN HAVE THE POWER OF CHOICE AND BE PERFECT\*. That's why God foreknew from before the foundations of the world what He would have to do to restore the relationship and love that He desires with His children. If I may be so bold, let me humbly summarize what God may have thought (just for our reasoning; the wisest of my words aren't worthy of even being considered by God). God thinking:

"I AM. I love. I am a real and personal God. I want relationships, someone to love, and someone to authentically love me back. When I create this perfect being whom I can love, I will give him free will so that when He chooses to love Me, it will be genuine. And I can love him, bless him, care for him and show my love in return for I AM LOVE. And he will love me, worship me and be my child. He will love me as his Father, and I love him as My child.

But I know that with a free choice to love, not only comes authentic relationship, but the inevitable time when one of them will choose to not love me first, but choose their own way first. At that point my creation will be tainted, and will no longer be perfect. Nothing less than perfection can ever exist in My Presence. I know that no human can attain perfection in that ruined creation, so I will have to go down to them, become one of them, live a perfect life, and then when I have earned eternal life by my perfection, I will suffer their penalty for them, and then I can JUSTLY restore their relationship to me while retaining my perfect Justice and Holiness.

I cannot create robots who cannot choose themselves over Me, because that's not true love. Knowing what will occur, I have a plan already in place even before the first day of Creation, and in the end, even with free will, everyone who chooses to love Me, even though cursed with sin, I can rightly and justly forgive them and allow them in my presence for all eternity.... and have the true, authentic love and relationship that was the point to begin with."

Even with that summary, I can hear the accusations of "earning your salvation because it depends on your choice." How absurd to read what I just wrote and think that our choice to accept God's sacrifice and offer salvation EARNs us salvation because we had to do something in response. Even when we CHOOSE to accept salvation on God's term, there is NOTHING that the "chooser" has done to even REMOTELY earn, produce or manifest his own salvation. Our choice to accept salvation on God's terms is simply that: getting saved on God's terms as He has offered them.

God created us because of "relationship and love." The free will involve in relationship and love made sin inevitable. Far from changing God's mind and "giving up" on having the love and relationships He desires, God in His omniscience knew the perfect plan to fulfill His every desire to have a love relationship with us.

For your consideration,

Brent

\* Then why won't we sin in heaven? Because we will have Christ's nature, and be free of sin-cursed flesh and sin-

cursed creation which is only possible because 1) Jesus chose to sacrifice Himself, and 2) by willingly CHOOSING to repent and believe in Jesus, God can give us Christ's nature and without violating our free will which keeps intact our true love and relationship with Him.

\*\* I was once a committed Calvinist. I have spent a tremendous amount of time studying and understanding the position. I'll humbly ask to not be flooded with reams of copy and pasted excerpts from Calvinist apologetics books. I respect the commitment and conviction that Calvinists have, I just simply do not believe that it represents the simple teaching of "why?" or "how?" in Scripture after years of considering points like the one we've discussed here.

~~~~~

Guilt – Should A Christian Ever Feel Guilty?

**Should a Christian ever feel guilty?
Is there "good" guilt?**

Yes, I believe there is an appropriate time for guilt. In a nutshell, you should feel guilty when you sin.

It is popular in today's psychology to proclaim that guilt is bad, and we should rid ourselves of it, but this stems from the humanist approach that denies God and disavows the existence of absolute right and wrong.

As Christians, we believe that what God says is a standard that transcends our opinion, our feelings, society and political correctness. Since those standards transcend human authority, then it is appropriate to feel guilty when they are violated.

Guilt is the appropriate emotion stirred up by the Holy Spirit to draw a Christian's focus towards sin in their life.

There is a difference between appropriate guilt and destructive self-condemnation.

It's important to be able to recognize the difference between condemnation, which you are free from (Romans 8:1), and conviction, which God uses to tell us something is wrong in our life (John 16:8). Condemnation comes from Satan in the form of self-focused false guilt. Condemnation will be vague, degrading and leave you feeling hopeless. Conviction comes from God and is the feeling that something is wrong but God tells us specifically what to change to make things "right." Conviction is uplifting because it brings Godly correction and leaves us feeling blessed and hopeful.

Appropriate guilt helps us to know that we have sinned. Once we repent and ask for forgiveness, the guilt is no longer necessary. To hold on to it is destructive and exposes some other sin or problem that needs to be dealt with. Some people hold on to guilt out of ignorance, some for attention and some because of self-pity. At that point, guilt becomes something else (i.e., self-pity, pride, ignorance, etc.).

Psalm 51 is a great place to start a Biblical study about guilt. Here a few highlighted verses (NKJV):

2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
And cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I acknowledge my transgressions,
And my sin is always before me.

5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
And in sin my mother conceived me.

6 Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts,
And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

11 Do not cast me away from Your presence,
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,
And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.

13 Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,
And sinners shall be converted to You.

17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit,
A broken and a contrite heart—
These, O God, You will not despise.

~~~~~

## Guilt – The Difference Between Guilt And Conviction

### What is the difference between guilt and conviction?

Conviction is the work of the Holy Spirit as He aligns our life with God's Word. Conviction is the witness of God's work in our life as He prunes us, directs us, chastens us and disciplines us as a loving parent would do for any child (Psa. 51:1-4, 7-17; Luke 5:8; Acts 2:37; Acts 9:6; Acts 16:29, 30; Rom. 2:15; 1 Cor. 14:24, 25).

Guilt comes in two parts: true and false. True guilt is the pain and remorse we correctly feel when we knowingly, willingly or repeatedly violate God's Word. We are wrong, and we know it. Guilt is the natural and proper feeling that grows as we move farther away from God.

False guilt is guilt that Satan tries to lay on us after we become Christians such as, "God can't love someone like you" - "You'll never be good enough to be saved" - "You're the same old sinner you always were, you should just give up" - "God doesn't listen you. Quit asking," etc.

False guilt can even be self-imposed, typically from a lack of Biblical knowledge. "I can never quit doing this sin; it is just too strong," is one example.

Conviction is good; true guilt is good. Both serve to realign us and reestablish our fellowship with God. False guilt is a tool of Satan, and is overcome with the Word (Matt 4).

## Hair – Men With Long Hair

I have a question about long hair. A friend of mine mentioned that the people of that time and region had long hair and that Jesus himself had long hair also. I told him that is false, Jesus thought it to be shameful for a man to have long hair (1Cor 11) Needless to say, this is an argument around the office now. It has been mentioned that the Discovery Channel and other sources provide proof that Jesus and all men had long hair during that time in history. What does the Bible say about male hair length?

What physically constitutes "long hair" is primarily a cultural baseline and one of moral intuition. The Bible does not say "long hair is 3 inches" or "touching the collar" or "over the ear."

The Bible doesn't say exactly what long hair is. So if the Bible doesn't say, then we are left to determine it by principle and conscience. My version of long hair is going to be much shorter than people of other generations, or different nations, and probably shorter than most of my friends'.

The last couple of generation had much longer hair standards with "on the ear" considered short and only hair down the back was "long." An American Indian man has long hair as a rule, so what is considered "normal" vs. "long" to them? Is a black man with

a grown out afro considered "long" hair? My hair is still cut almost like my Drill Sergeant days; my boss has hair that is a couple of inches long. Is his hair "long"? Who decides?

The Bible doesn't give "inches," so we are left to figure it out. That's the fact, so anyone who states dogmatically a universal standard is simply take a "heart issue" and making it legalistic.

The major principle in play here is, MEN AREN'T SUPPOSE TO LOOK LIKE WOMEN. That is why it is a "shame for men to have long hair."

The idea is that in whatever culture you live in, if your "long hair" makes you look like a woman, then it would be classified as "long" Scripturally - with reason. If Godless culture dictates long hair as "normal" that doesn't negate God's principle of "men should look like men." It is the same principle that makes today's effeminate male clothing an issue.

God gave us roles and identities as men and women. Our hair helps identify that, and HONOR that. That is why it is "a shame for a man took like a woman." It ignores and dishonors the gender differences and roles that God has plainly declared.

1 Corinthians 11:14 - Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? (NKJV)

As a side note, "long hair" can also associate you with an unGodly segment of society, so that is a consideration as well. If your "long hair" (whether touching your collar or touching your shoulder blades) identifies you with a segment of society that is openly defiant to God,

then that definitely becomes a consideration as well.

The overriding principle is that men are to look like men, to represent by their hairstyle and dress an appearance that honors their God given role and respect.

Remember, hair is hair. There's nothing sinful about the hair itself no matter what length. What can make it "wrong" is the attitude, motive or disobedience that comes with violating God's principles and standards.

~~~~~

Hard Verses – Acts 16:31

Can you explain Acts 16:31 "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved-you and your household"?

First, we know that it does NOT mean that one person is saved because of another person's belief. Scripture is overwhelmingly clear on that point, which is the primary reason that infant baptism is a futile practice. So we know that simply having a parent, or the head of household, respond to the Gospel, is not sufficient for the salvation of any other individual, family or not.

That leaves us with some options:

First, it could mean that because the head of household believes, the other family members are likely to follow in genuine belief as well, due to their influence. It is a great encouragement for parents to know that their faith

will be passed on through the generations and result in the salvation of much, if not all of their family.

Or, it could mean that the entire household will OUTWARDLY respond in the same way even if they are not genuinely converted internally. That culture was much different than ours, so the family would be expected to embrace whatever religion the head of household embraced. This does not mean that each family member was genuinely saved, but they would all go through the motions externally. However, even if this option is true, it still remains that the first option above comes into play.

Finally, it could be that the statement was directed to each family member individually. In other words, maybe it was understood more in this way, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, and everyone in your family who believes will be saved too."

It's important that this verse is not used to teach "salvation by proxy." The Bible is CLEAR that salvation is an individual response for each person.

Given that, we can be encouraged that the influence and example of any family member who is converted will extend into the entire household.

~~~~~

## Hard Verses – John 14:13

**Would you please explain John 14:13-14. We talked about it in Church today, but nobody really explained it well.**

John 14:13-14 - And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it. (NKJV)

Most of the confusion with this verse comes from people want to use it as a prooftext which means they take it OUT OF CONTEXT to support some preconceived idea they have.

This verse is a favorite of the "name it and claim it" positive-confession teachers. Regardless of your opinion of positive confession, this verse HAS NOTHING TO with us personally and specifically today.

The confusion disappears when you realize that Christ is talking to and addressing HIS DISCIPLES who would go on after He was gone and establish the early church and finish the inspired Word.

Back in John 13:31, Jesus informs the future 12 Apostles that He would be leaving them soon. He goes on to comfort them with instruction and encouragement. He tells Peter of his upcoming denial. He comforts them by telling them about heaven and how He will return for them.

He answers Thomas. He answers Philip. He tells them how they will go on to do greater work than He did (in quantity, establishing the church, writing the New Testament, taking the Gospel to the Gentiles).

Then He builds their confidence by telling them, "Whatever you do or ask in my Name, I will honor it." This was not some "secret key to spiritual power" or one of the "ten steps to kingdom success."



As Christ's personally chosen representatives to launch the church age, Jesus was imparting full power and authority to them by giving them His name to impart. In that time, to speak under the name of someone else meant to fully represent them in all ways.

Jesus was promising His disciples, whom He was about to leave, that while they were fulfilling their mission, He would do anything they asked Him to do while asking with the authority of His name, a blessing He personally imparted to them specifically.

So you see, to rip this verse out of Scripture, apply it to us today and proclaim that all we have to do is say "in Jesus name" (even sincerely) and Jesus will "grant our wish" is simply perpetuating this "Genie In a Bottle" mentality that is so prevalent today. The vast majority of verses employed in the "prosperity" doctrine are clear examples of prooftexting. In fact, the overwhelming majority of pet doctrines, doctrinal confusion and "fad doctrines" are derived by gross prooftexting. Sadly, much teaching today is the product of prooftexting. ("Here's what I believe; let me find some Bible verses that seem to support it.")

The opposite and correct teaching approach is "expository" (explaining the meaning of verses): find out what the Bible says, in context, then teach that regardless of our preconceived ideas.

This verse - John 14:13-14 - is not hard, nor confusing as long as we simply ask the questions that we need to ask FIRST about ALL Bible verses:

Who said it?

Who was it said to?

What did it mean to the original listeners?

How does it apply to us, if at all?

~~~~~

Hard Verses — John 20:21

**What is meant by John 20:21-23?
Why did Jesus need to endow his
disciples with the power to forgive
sins?**

John 20:21-23 - So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (NKJV)

When you determine the meaning of Scripture, you often must use other Scripture to tell you 1) what is can NOT mean; and 2) what it COULD mean.

In this passage, it's helpful first to understand what the passage can NOT be saying based on other Scripture.

First, when Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit," we understand that this was a PLEDGE and not the actual event because Scripture clearly tells us that the Holy Spirit did not descend on them until Pentecost (Acts 1 and 2).

Next, we know that only God can forgive sins, and that through the Gospel forgiveness was made available because of Christ's sacrifice. No man, other than Jesus, has ever been given the actual power to simply forgive sins because they chose to.

Our eternal condemnation is because of sin against God. Only God can, and did, provide a way for forgiveness.

So what Jesus is saying here is that as His disciples, once the Gospel was responded to obediently by a hearer, they could confidently pronounce that person's sins forgiven... not because the disciples had "the power" to forgive sins, but because they were witnesses to Jesus life, death and resurrection which gave them complete confidence in the saving power of the Good News.

Jesus was pledging the Holy Spirit, reminding them of their call (to spread the Gospel) and affirming to them that their message would result in the true forgiveness of those who responded. Upon that fact, the disciples would be able to confidently declare "your sins are forgiven."

Likewise, for just the opposite reasons, they would also be able to declare that anyone who ignored or rejected their Message, those sinners would not be forgiven.

~~~~~

## Hard Verses – Baptism For The Dead

**Your devotional on the "hard verses" spurred me to ask about a verse I've never understood in light of the rest of scripture: I Cor.**

**15:29--"Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead?" I don't know of any Christian church that baptizes for the dead. What does this verse mean? Thanks!**

The Mormon church has the only widely held practice of "baptism for the dead." You may read a good answer to the Mormon practice: [http://www.christiancourier.com/arc\\_hives/deadBaptism.htm](http://www.christiancourier.com/arc_hives/deadBaptism.htm).

As for the Christian church of the Bible, you are correct, there are no major or well-known church groups practicing it.

1 Corinthians 15:29 - Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead? (NKJV)

So what is the Bible talking about? Many explanations have been offered, from the ridiculous to the highly complicated, but the fact is, there is no DEFINITIVE answer. It is a very difficult verse.

Here is what I believe to be the most likely meaning of this difficult verse:

The entire chapter is about the resurrection. Paul was explaining the "Christian" version. The pagans around Corinth obviously believed in the resurrection (the "afterlife"), demonstrated by their practice of

"baptism for the dead" as a way to assure a good afterlife.

So Paul was saying in essence, "Even you believe in the resurrection as demonstrated by your baptism for the dead; if you don't believe in the resurrection, why are you practicing 'baptism for the dead'?"

Remember, Paul was preaching about the resurrection. So he seemed to be emphasizing that the "resurrection" wasn't some crazy idea, because even the local pagans believed in it (as demonstrated by the practice of "baptizing the dead" to get a good afterlife).

Paul, as he did often, was using local custom and practice to make his preaching more understandable and relevant for his audience.

~~~~~

Hard Verses - The Body Of Moses

In Jude, why was Michael arguing with the devil about the body of Moses?

We have no definitive explanation in Scripture so we are left to ponder God's reasons for this verse:

Perhaps Satan wanted to use Moses' body as an idol (much the same as "relics" are used today) to draw the Israelites away from God

Maybe Satan thought that presenting Satan's body as a trophy would cause the Israelites great despair, seeing

their beloved leader in the hands of the enemy

God chose to hide Moses's burial place to keep it from becoming a worship shrine; Satan probably would have done what he could to make Moses's grave a place of worship

The answer to "why?" Satan wanted Moses's body is not clear, but there are some interesting things about the event we can examine.

Jude 9 - Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" (NKJV)

Notice that Michael, the archangel, a "super" angel, "dared not" bring an accusation against Satan, but instead left that to God. And yet, we have many Christians today running around "binding" Satan and demons. We have multitudes of Christian "teachers" who with great arrogance, even with humor, talk about how they "manhandle Satan" and "stomp the Devil" and "kick that Devil right out of here".

They speak as if Satan is some little chew toy to be made fun of and to be taunted. They flaunt their ability to "whip" Satan and exercise power over Him.

This comes from a gross and serious misunderstanding of the power of Satan and demons. YES, we have victory over Satan. NO, Satan and the demons cannot control or overcome us. BUT IT IS BECAUSE OF JESUS CHRIST, NOT US. And fallen angels or not, they are beings of great power. Nowhere in Scripture will you find

humans being told to be flippant or even casual about demons or Satan.

Nowhere in Scripture are we commanded to make fun of, joke about, or tell humorous stories of how we beat up and stomp the Devil; or in any way act flippant, casual or arrogant towards the fallen angels. EVEN MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL DARED NOT ACCUSE SATAN DIRECTLY BUT INSTEAD SAID, "THE LORD REBUKE YOU."

Satan is defeated; demons are defeated, but for the time being still have great power and are NOT to be toyed with or be treated casually or arrogantly.

There are two BIG problems with this idea of "binding Satan":

The authority to bind and loose was given specifically to the original disciples specifically with regards to spreading the Gospel to the world before the final revealed will of God was compiled into Written form (the Bible).

The specific act of "binding Satan" is not even found in the Bible, much less commanded of Christians.

Furthermore, "binding Satan" is illogical because if Satan were bound every time a Christian says, "I bind Satan in the name of Jesus," then Satan most certainly would ALWAYS be bound, because multitudes of Christians pray this phrase daily.

If Satan is bound by this prayer, then for how long? What let's him loose? Is he stuck in a cosmic game of "red light, green light?" What purpose does it serve? Satan and the demons don't cause us to sin; they may influence or

tempt, but sinning is still a human choice.

What is accomplished by "binding" Satan? Does it remove the curse of sin in the flesh? Does binding Satan open the way for God to do more or better work? And regardless of what answers are offered to those questions... WHERE IS THE BIBLICAL SUPPORT FOR THIS IDEA OF "BINDING SATAN"? Without clear Scriptural support, should we be doing it? Should we be dealing in any way with the spiritual world that is not specifically clear in Scripture?

The Bible is clear that Satan will only be bound when he is cast into darkness by the conquering King of Kings. (Rev 20.2)

So even IF an argument can be made that Christian's today have the "power to bind and loose," that argument most certainly cannot apply to binding Satan.

No doubt I will get MUCH negative response to this answer; all I ask is that you honestly consider my points first. This teaching of "binding Satan" is very prevalent today, but if Scripture doesn't support it, then we should really take a hard look at it. Just because a lot of people do it, and teach it, doesn't necessarily make it right.

~~~~~

## Hard Verses - Dead People Walking Around

**Can you explain this hard verse: Matthew 27:51-53 - "The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people." Can you explain this verse, especially the part about bodies of the holy people who were raised to life???**

Yes, I can explain this verse. The tombs opened up and the dead bodies of the righteous were resurrected.

It's not hard to explain, just hard imagine. The tombs probably broke open from the earthquake that occurred upon Christ's death.

The reason for the occurrence is not specifically explained in Scripture, but it's not hard to speculate why.

It showed Jesus' triumph over death both for Himself, and for others.

It was a sign of how momentous the events were surrounding Jesus' death.

It was a spectacular sign confirming that Jesus truly was the Son of God.

It may have been a fulfillment of the Feast of First Fruits (Lev 23.10) whereby the Priest would receive a handful of grain from the coming harvest. Jesus was receiving a portion of the eventual harvest of saved, glorified souls.

Sometimes we quickly read over these events without really imagining the impact they had. The tombs opened

and some of the dead were raised to life. The foot thick curtain that veiled the Holy of Holies was ripped in two which would have terrified the temple priests. There was a massive earthquake that broke rocks in two. There was pitch black darkness for three hours. This was no eclipse of the sun. This was a supernatural event from God.

All of these events were for the purpose of achieving the response that the Roman guards declared:

Matthew 27:54 - So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God!" (NKJV)

~~~~~

Hard Verses – Saved By Childbearing

Can you tell me what the Bible means when it says women "shall be saved by childbearing?"

The verse referred to in the question is 1Timothy 2.15:

Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.

Remember, the Bible is unique in that it interprets itself. Being God's Word, it cannot (and never) contradicts itself. For this verse, it's helpful to rule out first what it CAN NOT mean.

It CAN NOT mean that a woman receives eternal salvation by having children. This contradicts the most basic and core essentials of Christianity in that salvation is found through nothing else, and by no one else, except faith in the atoning sacrifice of the Person of Jesus Christ.

The actual rendered meaning of "saved" in this verse is "to preserve safe and unharmed" or "to heal" or "to rescue." The obvious question we are left with is: preserve from what? Heal what? Rescue from what?

In context, Timothy is being instructed by Paul on proper behavior by men and women, specifically in church (v. 8-14). Paul says in verse 13 that Adam was formed first, then Eve, providing the foundation by which God appoints the man authority (and responsibility) over his wife (much to the dismay of the world which equates ROLE with VALUE; but that's another lesson).

In verse 14, it is pointed out that Adam was NOT deceived, but it was the woman who was deceived and first brought sin into God's perfect creation (before you get too haughty, men... we were not deceived - Adam WILLINGLY chose to sin knowing full well it was wrong).

Because the woman was deceived first, there is a certain shame and stigma that womankind carries through this sin-cursed life. This brings us to what she is "saved" from through childbearing.

In a sense, women are redeemed from the stigma of bringing sin into humanity by bearing children who can then be raised to worship and serve

God - kind of a temporary redemption of the shame of being the "original sinner."

Women are "healed" and "rescued" through the relationship they have as "mother" to the future generations of humans. Mothers typically spend much more time with the children, and have a much greater influence on them, especially in their formative years.

By this influence, they "save" themselves in part from what the curse brings to the world because they have a chance to birth and raise kids who will serve God, and thus continue God's redemptive in the world.

This is a wondrous opportunity that God has given women to help counteract what women's (Eve) sin did to corrupt the perfect creation.

To add a personal opinion, I think the application can be made that salvation comes by childbirth referring to the idea that while sin was "birthed" into the world by a woman, it would also be through a woman that our salvation would come as well (in the form of Jesus birth of course). This is not the specific meaning IN CONTEXT, but I think it obviously and logically leads us to think about this particular point as well.

Men have a similar opportunity through the authority and responsibility given them to love their wives, be an example to their children, and lead God's church in sharing the Gospel with the world.

You could say in this manner that "men are saved by obeying God's Word" - meaning that they are

counteracting the same stigma of original sin (Adam) but now obeying God and thereby leading their families and other people to God.

Let me close by emphasizing, it CAN NOT mean "eternal salvation" as this would be a clear contradiction of numerous verses and doctrines. So we have to look at the context and the cultural clues to find the meaning.

~~~~~

## Healing - Modern-Day Healers

**What are your views on people who claim to heal other people? For instance Benny Hinn, I mean, come on! It is obvious they are fake. But what is your view?**

Last year during the height of the Todd Bentley fad, I wrote a post on him that I took waves and waves of grief and criticism for. By the way, after his inevitable fall, which any discerning mature Christian could have foreseen, I didn't receive ONE note saying, "I guess you were right."

I've written many times on this issue of faith healers and divine healing. Here are a few samples:

- <http://www.brenttriggs.com/blog/?ItemID=164&ParentCategoryID=207&t=Christian-Absurdity&c=Religion>
- <http://www.brenttriggs.com/blog/?ItemID=158&ParentCategoryID=207&t=Readers-Rebuke-Me&c=Current-Issues>

[207&t=Readers-Rebuke-Me&c=Current-Issues](http://www.brenttriggs.com/blog/?ItemID=154&ParentCategoryID=207&t=What-About-Todd-Bentley?&c=Religion)

- <http://www.brenttriggs.com/blog/?ItemID=154&ParentCategoryID=207&t=What-About-Todd-Bentley?&c=Religion>
- <http://www.seriousfaith2.com/asr/question.asp?questionid=1374>

As for those like Benny Hinn, since you mentioned him, I find his "healing" to be a deceptive false teaching, a "show," but it is not the REALLY DANGEROUS part of what is taught. To find out what he (and those like him) teach that is simply NON-CHRISTIAN, read here:

<http://www.seriousfaith2.com/asr/question.asp?questionid=1352>

~~~~~

Healing -Is Sickness A Lack Of Faith?

I attend a church that believes that going to the doctor is a lack of faith, and that if we are sick or injured we should ask God to heal us. Recently a young woman from our church died of an unknown illness. I am having a hard time with this. Do you think it is really Gods will for us to just sit back and wait to be healed? Or does he provide us doctors for a reason? I am just confused about the whole thing.

We should ask God to heal us. And we should take advantage of the wonderful blessing of modern medicine that was developed by many highly intellectual and God-gifted Believers. The world of modern medicine, which is just short of miraculous in many ways, has relieved the suffered of countless millions, extended lifetimes and improved the quality of life for generations.

Groups like Scientology and those professing a Christian belief in "divine health" are not Scriptural. The former is simply a metaphysical cult, and the latter is poorly interpreted Scripture (accompanied often by poor motives) brutally twisted out of context to say what it does not say.

That does not mean that the people who both believe and/or teach "divine health" are not sincere or "good" people. In fact, I think of one family I've known for 25 years who are long time teachers of "word faith" doctrine, and they are the most kind, loving, sincere and good people you'll ever know. But they are most certainly wrong in both their belief and understanding on this issue of divine health (and prosperity).

Let me state unequivocally that I believe they, and most people who have been confused by parts of the "word faith" teaching, most certainly profess an accurate and genuine saving faith in Jesus Christ. None of us have all our doctrines and beliefs 100% perfectly accurately (and caution to you if you think you do). We can be growing and learning in our Bible understanding and still be saved. We can be WRONG about a non-saving doctrine and still be saved.

So my comments are NOT meant to imply that anyone who believes in "divine healing" is not saved. Far from it.

It is SO clearly and undeniably obvious that:

1) God works through medicine.

As I said, many of the founders of medicine were stalwart Believers, using the principles of Creation and Science to discover the truths of medicine. The tangible and insurmountable evidence that medicine is a gift from God's own hand is denied only by those who reject it because it doesn't fit a religious belief.

2) The Christian world that claims/teaches divine health does not have divine health themselves.

Even the leading teachers, promoters, healers and advocates of Biblical divine health are saturated with cases of cancer, sickness and death. If the teachers and "healers" can't heal themselves or their families, why are millions of people to be deceived by it?

As a Bible teacher, I can tell you that the Scriptural support and Biblical argument for "the divine health of the Believer" are utterly poor exegesis (the effort to draw the truth from Scripture), that it is aggravating to see people innocently being drawn into this way of thinking. Thankfully, after several decades of this false teaching, people seem to be less interested in it, although the effects of hearing the same verses quoted out of context 10,000 times still remains. "By His stripes you are healed..." is a perfect example. I write a plain and

irrefutable explanation of that verse here (<http://www.seriousfaith2.com/asr/question.asp?questionid=1374>) and it has NOTHING to do with physical healing.

In summary, we have SPIRITUAL perfection (health) NOW... we get PHYSICAL perfection (divine health) when we exit this sin-cursed flesh upon death or the Lord's return. Not until.

Ask God to heal. Ask God to guide the doctors. Take advantage of all the means God has given you for medical care (prayer AND doctors). Ignore "divine health" teaching. It is wrong, confusing, and a shameful example of twisting Scripture out of context to fit a predetermined view. It is the TEACHERS and PROMOTERS of this view who OFTEN BENEFIT, often financially, that I direct this statement to.

To the average Believer who just hasn't really taken a good hard look yet and realized how poor and inconsistent the "divine health" and "word faith" doctrines are, I do not criticize you. I encourage you to study further, take a good long hard look at these beliefs with an open mind, and hopefully you will loose yourself from them so that you can continue to grow and mature in the Lord.

Note: for those who do want to investigate further, here are a few of my answer to some of the false "word faith" teachings:

- <http://www.seriousfaith2.com/asr/question.asp?questionid=1951>

- <http://www.seriousfaith2.com/asr/question.asp?questionid=3118>
- <http://www.seriousfaith2.com/asr/question.asp?questionid=1589>
- <http://www.seriousfaith2.com/asr/question.asp?questionid=1352>
- <http://www.seriousfaith2.com/asr/question.asp?questionid=992>

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Healing - Are We Healed By His Stripes?

In Isaiah we read that 'by His stripes we are healed' - what does this statement mean? Does it refer to the physical healing or the spiritual healing?

This verse is routinely used today to support the idea of divine healing:

Isaiah 53:5 - But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. (NKJV)

NO MATTER WHAT YOUR BELIEF about "divine physical healing," this verse has absolutely nothing to do with it. Let me repeat myself to be clear. Even if you are one who believes that Christians have a right to divine healing upon request, or if you believe the God heals physical

sickness and disease today (either through a man, or directly through prayer) - if you believe in routine, divinely originated, physical healing... it is important to understand that ISAIAH 53:5 IS NOT A VERSE THAT SUPPORTS OR ADDRESSES PHYSICAL HEALING.

You certainly would not know that by simply listening to popular teaching or by listening to the common statements of those who believe in divine physical healing. This verse in Isaiah is arguably the MOST used verse to promote the idea of healing which is on the one hand puzzling, and the other hand somewhat humorous because physical healing is nowhere to be found in the context of the passage. It is an example of blatant prooftexting (pulling verses from context to support a meaning that is not present in context).

Let's take a quick look at the context then go over some other points. Again, MY ANSWER IS NOT MEANT TO BE A DOCTRINAL STATEMENT ABOUT WHETHER OR NOT DIVINE HEALING IS FOR CHRISTIANS TODAY; MY ANSWER IS ABOUT WHETHER OR NOT ISAIAH 53:5 IS A VERSE THAT SUPPORTS THIS BELIEF.

First, the chapter is an obvious prophecy of Jesus death and suffering on the cross (Isa 53:3-12):

He is despised and rejected by men... He was despised, and we did not esteem Him... Smitten by God, and afflicted... But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him... And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all... He was oppressed and He was

afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth... And they made His grave with the wicked— But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth... Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief... By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities... Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors.

There is no question that the indisputable purpose of Jesus death on the Cross was for spiritual healing, i.e. salvation - to heal us of the eternal condemnation of sin and an eternity in hell was THE reason for the Lord choosing to die willingly on our behalf.

This purpose and meaning is not in question, in fact, it cannot be questioned regardless of one's belief about physical healing because it is the fulcrum of Christianity.

That the foundational context is about spiritual healing is beyond question. If physical healing is part of these verses, then it must be brought forth from the verses themselves (exegesis) rather than inserted into the meaning (eisegesis) by the reader wanting to prove a point. Let's take a look verse by verse to see whether physical or spiritual things are in mind:

1 Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

2 For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him.

3 He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

4 Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. (SPIRITUAL; bore our griefs, carried our sorrows)

5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. (SPIRITUAL HEALING; transgressions [sin], iniquities [sin], "by His stripes we are healed" - healed from what? our sin [transgressions and iniquities as stated in the verse])

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. (SPIRITUAL; "gone astray" [sin], iniquity [sin])

7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.

8 He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken. (SPIRITUAL; "transgressions" [sin])

9 And they made His grave with the wicked— But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth.

10 Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. (SPIRITUAL; offering for sin)

11 He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities. (SPIRITUAL; justification [making the sinful righteous])

12 Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors. (SPIRITUAL; "bore the SIN of many" - "made intercession for transgressors")

There simply is no plain reference to physical healing and you must INJECT, INSERT, IMPLY and ADD the idea of physical divine healing to these verses. Let me state AGAIN... this answer is not about whether or not "God still heals today." This answer is about whether or not "by His stripes you are healed" is a correct use of Isaiah 53:5 to support a doctrine of physical healing.

It is an important distinction. This verse is used frequently and liberally by millions of Christians and multitudes of popular Christian

personalities to promote the "Christian doctrine of the Believer's Divine Right to Physical Health." But, like many of the verses used, this particular verse is about healing, but has nothing to do with physical healing.

Even when Peter references this phrase in the New Testament, the context is clearly about sin and spiritual healing, not physical:

1 Peter 2:21 - For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: (SPIRITUAL; "follow in his steps" - holiness)

22 "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth;";

23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; (SPIRITUAL; all comments about righteousness not physical health)

24 who 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. (SPIRITUAL; "died to sins" - "live for righteousness" - all spiritual things; no mention of physical health)

25 For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (NKJV) (SPIRITUAL; "sheep going astray" refers to salvation, not the sick getting physically well)

Finally, Matt 8:17 makes reference to this passage in Isaiah. Many use this as a "definition" of Isaiah 53:5 to

which it obviously refers. Remember, the writers of the New Testament often referred to passages in the Old Testament which they were very familiar with. Though writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they were still writing from their own perspective and experience.

The writer here personally saw and experienced Jesus on a daily basis healing MULTITUDES (thousands upon thousands constantly) of the sick and casting out demons, so much so that the whole world couldn't contain the books that would document Jesus' acts (John 21:25).

The verse in Isaiah was a very familiar passage to the Jews at that time who were expecting the Messiah (but for all the wrong reasons). It was very natural to associate the phrasing "by his stripes we are healed" to Jesus while watching Him personally in the act of countless miraculous healings - and keep in mind, these were not the type of healings we see claimed today. Jesus made limbs reappear, shriveled legs become whole, leprosy vanish and the dead come to life. These types of healing weren't the EXCEPTIONS, they were the norm, occurring countless times, again, so much so that the whole world could not contain the records of them (John 21:25).

To use Matt 8:17 to DEFINE Isaiah 53:5, rather than as the writer's own obvious and natural commentary of his personal observations, has a couple of major problems. First, that passage in Matt 8:17 is not presented as doctrinal instruction - in other words, the writer is not declaring "here's what Isaiah 53:5 means...". Even if it was, the writer is declaring

that Jesus Himself, and the His acts of healing which the writer was observing firsthand, were the fulfillment of the passage as he understood it. There is no doctrine of divine healing for every Christian set forth in these verses. Matthew comments on what Jesus was doing without any extrapolation to either the disciples of that time, or to us today.

Second, if you do use Matt 8:17 to define Isa 53:5, then you must do so consistently. To do so consistently means that the same type, frequency, quality and miraculous nature of healing should be occurring today that were the subject of the comment to begin with. Even the most ardent believer in divine healing today would be hard pressed to support the idea that miraculous, instantaneous and complete healing is occurring today in the same manner it occurred with Jesus who healed multiple thousands upon thousands upon thousands of REAL diseases and infirmities, not just back aches and mysterious pains. And this quality and frequency of healing would apply to all Christians because "by His stripes we are healed" - there is no conditions place on that.

We hear today that this is just a matter of "faith" - but that is adding a condition on Matt 8:17, Isa 53:5 and on Jesus acts that Scripture does not declare. To add "faith" - or the lack of it - as the reason we do not have healing today on par with how Jesus healed then, is to imply that every single person (thousands upon thousands upon thousands) who was healed by Jesus had the necessary faith to "receive" that healing, and yet, we find even the Apostles themselves struggled with having faith. So it is a

mind boggling stretch to say that a lack of faith is the only thing that keeps us from our divine perfect health today when 1) the Scripture simply and plainly does not declare this idea (it must be extracted from Scripture by coupling many different verses from different contexts together), and 2) the verses like Isa 53:5 that are used to support this idea make no mention of "faith" as a prerequisite which is a very glaring omission if it is indeed the fact.

Finally, we have a couple of other major problems in using Matt 8:17 as a "definition" of the passage in Isaiah. It is the common human experience starting with the Apostles and Paul himself that all Christians do NOT live in divine health. Sickness is a regular and recurring part of this sin-cursed world and to claim otherwise ignores both reality and the multitudes of Scripture that matter-of-factly assume the same. Lastly, if perfect physical health is a divine right purchased by Jesus death on the Cross, then Jesus, the Apostles and Paul for some reason chose NOT to clearly declare this very important blessing for some reason. We are left to derive this belief by indirect application of verses like Matt 8:17 rather than develop the doctrine of divine healing from clear and plain Scripture that declares it to be so.

Divinely granted healing and physical health, as important as it is to us on a daily basis, would surely be something clearly taught were it indeed something Christians had been granted by Christ's death. In the same manner that spiritual healing is clearly communicated, physical healing would be just as clear if that was the intended meaning of these verses. But as we have seen, physical

healing must be INSERTED into the meaning of Isaiah 53, while spiritually healing is plainly declared.

Finally, consider this. If divine healing is true in the sense that it is presented today, then we would never die. Death is the process by which the body grows increasingly "sick" and the cells of the body die and degenerate until ultimately, the person dies. No matter how "natural" a death may be, the root cause is still from the cells of the body deteriorating (sickness). No one argues that we all will die. If divine healing is a right for all Christians, then we should be divinely healed of the very processes that cause death which are most certainly sickness and disease. And every Christian who dies should be raised from the dead and healed if this right of divine healing is applied consistently.

True physical healing will accompany our spiritual healing the day we die and leave this sin-cursed flesh to be forever replaced with our incorruptible glorified bodies. God promised Adam and Eve that on the day they sinned they "would surely die." This was both physical and spiritual. Jesus' death on the cross purchased spiritual healing immediately for all who believe (just like spiritual death was immediate for Adam and Eve). His death on the cross also secured our ultimate physical restoration later on when we leave this sin-cursed body (just like Adam and Eve who didn't physically die immediately, but death came later). The pattern and parallel is obvious.

(Note: am I saying that God does not, or cannot, miraculously heal today? Absolutely not. He most certainly can

and does according to His will and pleasure. But God's ability and choice to heal is not the same as declaring "healing" to be a divine right of every Christian, purchased by Jesus on the Cross, and accessible at will if only the right amount of "faith" is applied.)

If you believe in divine physical healing AND you are Christian who believes that Bible verses should not be ripped from context to prove a point.... then go ahead and believe in physical healing, BUT DON'T USE ISAIAH 53 TO SUPPORT YOUR BELIEF because it simply does not speak of physical healing.

Hold to your belief honestly and through personal effort, whatever beliefs you have. Learn not to take Scripture out of context to support them. Be spiritually, theologically, Scripturally and intellectually honest. The Bible is not a shopping mall or a grab bag. It is the Holy Word of God. Conform your beliefs to God; don't use His Word to pick out what supports your point disregarding the context.

I will receive many arguments and rebukes for my answer, and that is fine; I welcome them. What I ask is that you send YOUR disagreement along with YOUR Scriptural support. Please do not copy and paste arguments from other teachers or websites; or send me the name of a book and tell me that if I would only read it, I would get straightened out.

Each Christian should know what they believe, why they believe it, and give the Scripture to support it. Any belief you simply repeat and cannot defend

means that you are trusting man's opinion and not God's.

So if you disagree, please do so with God's Word, not your Pastor's sermon, a Christian TV personality's book, your personal "feeling" or some experience someone has had.

The Bible is our source of truth and doctrine. Use it accurately and faithfully, rightly dividing God's Word (2Tim 2.15) which is able to divide soul and spirit (Heb 4.12), is profitable for all teaching and correction (2Tim 3.16-17), and is sufficient for all things that pertain to life and godliness (2Pet 1.3).

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Heaven – Is It Going To Disappear?

In Matthew 5:18 it says: "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished." Can you please explain this verse to me - is heaven going to disappear?

Well, bad news... yes, the heavens and earth are going to disappear, instantly in a fiery disintegration....

But then God is going to recreate them perfectly, better than ever!

Matthew 5:18 tells us that the Word of God will remain authoritative and alive until God's plan is totally

finished and "everything is accomplished." Not one letter or pen stroke of God's Word will go away until ALL is accomplished exactly according to God's pleasure.

2 Peter 3:10-13 - But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (NKJV)

So the earth will "pass away" after God's Word has been fulfilled, and then the heavens and earth will be renewed:

Revelation 21:1-2 - Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (NKJV)

Given that, I can't wait for the earth to "disappear." Can you?

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Heaven – Will There Be Sex?

According to the Mormons that I know, they believe that there will be sex in heaven. What does the Bible say about this?

It seems to be a common thread with non-Christian religions to teach that sexual activity will be part of the next life, usually as some kind of reward.

Muslims believe that perpetual sensuality with virgins await the martyr who murders the "infidel" (typically innocent bystanders, not combatants) "in the name of Allah."

Mormons teach that a whole planet, complete with eternal sexual delights await each enlightened faithful male. Most pagan religions teach eternal sexual pleasure as some type of reward.

Will there be sexual relations in the true Heaven as revealed in the supernaturally inspired Word of God? No.

First, the Bible does not say that there will be procreation. Given God's completed plan for the redemption of humankind, there will be no further need for procreation.

Procreation was a mandate by God to Adam and Noah to create a population of people. This population will already exist in heaven at a fixed number.

Furthermore, the Bible is clear that we will not be married in heaven (Luke 20.35) - (which doesn't mean we won't remember or cherish our earthly relationships; we will). Marriage is a picture of Christ's relationship to His Bride, the Elect of God. The "picture" will no longer be necessary in heaven.

Since sexual relations are only permitted within the bonds of marriage, and marriage will not exist in heaven, it appears obvious that sexual relations won't either.

We won't desire sex like we do now because God's plan will be fulfilled and our pleasures will be of a different sort... we will have new measure of pleasure beyond our wildest imaginations.

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him." (1Cor2:9).

Eternal sex is a pagan idea, used as bait to lure the masses into false religions. God has wonders and delights in store for us that will far surpass anything we have experienced on this earth.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Heaven - Are There Really Gates?

My question is why are there gates in Heaven? Who or what is going to use them and why? This may seem a silly thing but it has puzzled me for some time now.

Other than the fact that God obviously wanted gates, I'm not sure our speculation can be anything more than that.

The city of New Jerusalem will be very real, with great walls made of precious stone. A walled city with no gates would be more like a prison,

though even if there were not gates by God's design, it would still be perfect.

While we will live in our dwellings that God is preparing for us, we will obviously not be limited or confined to them, or the city. The entire earth and heavens will be recreated perfectly and we will exist in our glorified bodies. I personally think that the whole universe will be available for us to explore but that is purely speculation on my part.

The gates of a city were historically places of fellowship and gathering and I would guess they will be that way in Heaven too. I can imagine the wonderful stories of exploration and adventure that will be shared as people return, and the feelings of warmth and "welcome home" that the gates will represent.

The gates will also represent things from our earthly past: the twelve tribes of Israel, the twelve Apostles. There will be three gates on each side of the squared shaped New Jerusalem with an angel standing watch at each. The gates will never close symbolizing the fact that sin no longer exists in God's creation.

Here are some verses to read:

Rev 21:12 - Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:

Rev 21:13 - three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west.

Rev 21:15 - And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall.

Rev 21:21 - The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

Rev 21:25 - Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there).

Rev 22:14 - Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Heaven - Will We Have Special Relationships?

In heaven, will we still have a special love and relationship with people like our parents, kids or spouse?

I believe so. Heaven is a continuation of our life, a transition to the eternal. Our memories, personalities and relationships endure. You are still you; I am still me.

Sin is removed, and everything that was good remains and is enjoyed and grows all through eternity.

We will remember who our parents are, our children, our spouse... we will all be brothers and sisters in Christ, and not husband/wife, parent/child... but I believe there is NO doubt we will

have complete continuation of our feelings, special relationships and memories.

There will be all eternity to grow the relationships we enter eternity with and infinite time to start new ones.

It makes no sense either Biblically, or logically, that God would erase our memory, neutralize (or equalize) the level of our love for certain people, or remove the memory of relationships we built up as Christians in this life.

Here is a very interesting list taken from **Wilmington's Book of Lists - 53 Facts About Heaven:**

- | | |
|--|----------------|
| 1. Heaven is being prepared by Christ himself. | John 14:3 |
| 2. It is only for those who have been born again. | John 3:3 |
| 3. It is described as a glorious city, likened to pure gold and clear glass. | Rev. 21:11, 18 |
| 4. The name of this city is the New Jerusalem. | Rev. 21:2 |
| 5. It is in the shape of a cube, with the length, width, and height being equal. | Rev. 21:16 |
| 6. Its size is 12,000 furlongs, roughly 1,400 miles long, wide, and high. | Rev. 21:16 |
| 7. The city rests upon 12 layers of foundational stones, with each layer being inlaid with a different precious gem. | Rev. 21:19-20 |
| 8. Each foundation has one of the names of the 12 apostles on it. | Rev. 21:14 |
| 9. The wall around the | Rev. 21:18 |

city is made of pure jasper.

- | | |
|---|---------------------|
| 10. The height of the wall is approximately 216 feet. | Rev. 21:17 |
| 11. The wall has 12 gates, three on each of the four sides. | Rev. 21:12 |
| 12. Each gate is made of solid pearl. | Rev. 21:21 |
| 13. Each gate has on it the name of one of the 12 tribes of Israel. | Rev. 21:12 |
| 14. An angel stands guard at each gate. | Rev. 21:12 |
| 15. The gates will never be shut. | Rev. 21:25 |
| 16. The palaces may possibly be made of ivory. | Ps. 45:8 |
| 17. The River of Life is there, to insure everlasting life. | Rev. 22:1 |
| 18. The Tree of Life is there to insure abundant life. | Rev. 2:7; 22:19 |
| 19. It will bear its fruit each month. | Rev. 22:2 |
| 20. The throne of God will occupy the central palace. | Rev. 4:2; 22:1 |
| 21. It is likened to wheels of burning fire with an emerald rainbow canopy. | Dan. 7:9; Rev. 4:3 |
| 22. It is surrounded by 24 small thrones. | Rev. 4:4 |
| 23. Near it stands the brazen layer, described as "a sea of glass, like crystal." | Rev. 4:6 |
| 24. Beside the throne are four special angels who worship God continually. | Rev. 4:8 |
| 25. The golden altar is there, with bowls of | Rev. 5:8; 8:3; 9:13 |

incense.

26. The menorah, or seven-branched lampstand fixture, is there.
Rev. 1:12; 4:5
27. The holy Ark of God may be there.
Rev. 11:19
28. The main street of the city is composed of transparent gold.
Rev. 21:21
29. The city will shine with and be enlightened by God's glory.
John 17:24; Rom. 8:18; Rev. 21:11, 23; 22:5
30. It is a place of holiness.
Rev. 21:27
31. It is a place of beauty.
Ps. 50:2
32. It is a place of unity.
Eph. 1:10
33. It is a place of perfection.
1 Cor. 13:10
34. It is a place of joy.
Ps. 16:11
35. It is a place for all eternity.
John 3:15; Ps. 23:6
36. There may be a tabernacle.
Rev. 15:5; 21:3
37. There will be no temple.
Rev. 21:22
38. There will be no sea.
Rev. 21:1
39. There will be no tears.
Rev. 7:17; 21:4
40. There will be no sickness.
Rev. 22:2
41. There will be no pain.
Rev. 21:4
42. There will be no death.
Isa. 25:8; 1 Cor. 15:26; Rev. 21:4
43. There will be no more thirst or hunger.
Rev. 7:16

44. There will be no more sin.
Rev. 21:27
45. There will be no more judgment upon sin.
Rev. 22:3
46. There will be no need for the sun or moon.
Rev. 21:23
47. There will be no night.
Rev. 21:25; 22:5
48. The city will be the Bridegroom's gift to the bride, Christ's Church.
Rev. 21:2, 10
49. It will be shared by saved Israel.
Heb. 11:10, 16
50. It will be shared by the holy angels.
Dan. 7:10; Heb. 12:22; Rev. 5:11
51. The Father will be there.
Dan. 7:9; Rev. 4:2-3
52. The Son will be there.
Rev. 5:6; 7:17
53. The Holy Spirit will be there.
Rev. 14:13; 22:17
- Willmington, H. L. (1987). Willmington's book of Bible lists. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House.
- ~~~~~

Heaven – Will We Recognize People?

Will I recognize my loved ones in heaven? Will my father be however I want to see him?

Let's start with the second question, "Will my father be however I want to see him?"

I'm not really sure what that means. Every person in heaven will be as GOD

wants you to be seen, AS YOU, in your glorified new body when all is said and done.

As a common thread, we continue (in this series of "heaven" questions) to fight the myth that heaven will be something unimaginable, otherworldly and completely foreign to our understanding when the Bible simply does not paint that picture.

Heaven will be YOU and ME (assuming salvation) as the persons we are - MINUS SIN - in new, incorruptible, eternal, physical bodies (1Cor 5:1-8; Phil 3:20-21) existing forever in the newly re-created heaven and earth, which God will choose to abide in with us in perfect fellowship (Rev 21; 2Pet 3:13; Isa 66:22).

It is a destructive myth that "heaven will be a state of mind where whatever I imagine as heavenly will become so." No, your father will not be however YOU want to see him. If he is saved, and in heaven, he will be HIM (excuse the grammar) however God wants him to be seen: in his new, perfect, eternal body.

If you are speaking of "personality," then again, no. We will be who we are, minus the sin nature. Brent will be Brent in perfect holiness, but still Brent. You will be you, your father will be whoever he is - all of us free from sin forever.

God is preparing heaven for US. Not some robot version of us, or some memory-wiped, unrecognizable, changed version of you, me or your father.

Christianity suffers terribly from a wide spread misunderstanding of

heaven primarily from poor teaching, and un-confronted myths. Heaven is our final home, when God will rid creation of sin and its corruption by destroying it once for all, and recreating everything touched by sin: the heavens and earth, and our bodies.

So, given that, yes, it is natural, logical and Biblical that you will recognize your loved ones in heaven. Jesus makes that clear in Luke 16:19-31. Here, Jesus specifically names names and tells of actual events. Likewise in Revelation 6, martyrs know who other martyrs are. In Rev 11, 14 and 19 we have groups of people belong to identifiable groups: elders, the 144,000, those not defiled with sexual immorality.

As well, when the final judgments occur, each person is judged by who they were, and by the works that identify them. It would be illogical to think that we live as one person, get judged for that, and then exist for all eternity as some unrecognizable, or generic "being."

This whole idea that we will all be white-washed, generic, memory-scraped, spirits attending church for all eternity is a devilish lie that has caused countless Christians to dread heaven, rather than long for it.

Satan has done a masterful job at destroying the joy and the hope we should have in heaven by making it something boring, unimaginable and void of fun and adventure.

If you can imagine people, then you can imagine people in heaven, MINUS SIN. If you can imagine the heavens (stars, space) and the earth, then you can imagine the NEW heavens and

earth, perfectly recreated without sin or corruption. If you can imagine beauty, adventure, work, love, joy, relationships... then you can imagine all those things, ONLY PERFECT, with no sin, no pain, no tears, no disappointment.

Throw off the myths and disappointments of this mystical, unknowable, ghostly, boring, tedious "eternal church" version of heaven. I've known countless people who have thought "I hope I get to [fill in the blank with some earthly joy] before I go to heaven because then I will have missed out on the best things in life."

That type of response comes from a TOTAL misunderstanding of what God has prepared for us.

You will be you. I will be me. Your friends, family and every other person there will be THEM - personality, looks, memories, etc. Physically, God will give us all a perfect body and perfect health. Our physical, eternal bodies will be devoid of defect or flaw. Our personalities will be our recognizable personalities, minus sin, minus weakness, minus character flaws.

You will be you, only perfect (not to be confused with all-knowing or all-powerful). You will be you in a perfect, incorruptible body, minus all sin, and its effects.

Given that, I will "recognize" everyone that I know now and everyone that I get to know after arriving in heaven. We'll have all eternity to make as many friends and develop as many relationships as we want!

The REAL, Biblical version of heaven is utterly exciting, and when you

understand heaven as God presents it, you can't help but long to get there! The real heaven of Scripture is EVERYTHING WE HAVE EVER LONGED FOR THIS LIFE TO BE THAT SIN HAS RUINED: perfect health, perfect provision, perfect relationships, perfect love.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Heaven - Will We Miss Those Who Are Not There?

When we are in heaven, will we be aware of our loved ones that are not?

The Bible seems to be pretty clear that we will retain full knowledge of who we are, who our families were, and who other people were when we get to heaven ([Luke 16:19ff](#)).

As well, it does not seem logical or in keeping with God's character, that He would "wipe" our memories of either all or part of what makes us who we are; and our relationships and knowing other people are certainly a major factor in that.

There is NO Biblical hint, implication or story that teaches "who we are" will be "erased" (except for our sin nature). So given that, I think that it is hard not to conclude that we will know the family and friends in our lifetime that are not in heaven with us.

Having said that, God promises us that we will not cry, or sorrow, or have pain. I believe we will be aware of who did not make it to heaven, but because of God's comfort and fuller

understanding that is not clouded by our sin nature, we will not "sorrow" over it in the sense that we understand sorrow in this life. It is not possible for us to understand this reality on this side of heaven, but that does not diminish the faithfulness of God's promise.

The Bible tells us that every person who ends up separated from God will be without excuse, clearly implying that every person had the opportunity at some point to respond to God either through the Gospel or through the clear revelation of God in creation (Rom 1.20). I don't see how knowing that those in hell "deserve" to be in hell would alleviate our sorrow, but it does not change the clear teaching of Scripture. Whoever ends up in hell, chose their destiny.

I do not know how it will be possible to not grieve our lost family and friends. I do not believe that God will remove that knowledge from our memories or consciousness; there is no implication in Scripture that God will "wash" our minds of our previous life or knowledge (although the sin nature will be removed).

Apparently, we will be aware ([Luke 16:19ff](#)) of family and friends who are not in heaven. But NO, we will not suffer sorrow, tears or pain.

I don't understand it, but God has promised it and God never fails to keep a promise.

Consider some things about heaven:

- Most everything we truly love is either in Heaven or will end up there: our Christian brothers and sisters, our saved family members,

Jesus, our Father, the Spirit. ([Heb 12:23](#), [1Pet 1:4](#), [Phil 3:20](#), [Matt 5:12](#))

- No tears, no sorrow, no pain, no regret, no sin, no temptation, no unending struggling with your flesh - the battle with sin will be over. You will live in perfect holiness, pure and sin-free for all of eternity and it won't be a desperate battle to win, it will be the simple nature of our existence. ([Rev 22:3-5](#))
- An eternity of never ending blessing and enjoyment in God's presence where every day will be a new day of discovering God's goodness
- After a million million million years we won't be one day closer to the end or closer to exhausting God's capacity to surprise us with His greatness, creativity or love
- We will eat and drink for pleasure, not for sustenance ([Rev 2:7](#))
- Unimaginable beauty and experiences beyond anything we could ever begin to dream of ("no mind has conceived")
- We will experience and explore God's new Heaven and new earth, all remade to perfection by God. If you think there are beautiful scenes on this earth, they won't compare with God's recreated Heaven and earth ([2Pet 3:11-12](#))
- We will be in the direct presence of God the Father and Jesus our Savior... we won't have to be insecure about our relationship with Him anymore
- We will have a perfect body that never grows old, is never sick, is never injured or in pain ([1John 3:2](#))

- It will be a place of perfection, unimaginable beauty and untainted holiness:
- [1 Corinthians 13:10](#) - But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.
- [Psalm 50:2](#) - Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God will shine forth.
- Revelation 21:27 - But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.
- There will be no tears, no pain, no sorrow, no death, no sickness, no hunger or thirst, no tears: [Revelation 7:17](#) - for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."
- [Revelation 21:4](#) - And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."
- [1 Corinthians 15:26](#) - The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.
- [Revelation 22:2](#) - In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.
- Revelation 7:15-16 - Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the

sun shall not strike them, nor any heat;

- [Luke 16:19](#) is the closest thing in Scripture that tells us we may know or "see" those who are lost but the Bible promises of "no pain" and "no tears" are concrete.

So if you find yourself scared or worried about someone who is already deceased and you think they were not saved - don't be scared or worried, there is no reason to. You can't change the past, and God will take care of the future.

If you find yourself scared or worried about someone who is still living who might not be saved, then now is the time to do whatever necessary to share the truth about sin and the Gospel with them.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Heaven – Giving Account Of Our Life?

Why do we have to give an account to God when we die? Doesn't He already know everything about us even before we are born?

We can only speculate about the "why" because the Bible simply doesn't say. Unless you say the "why" is because "God said so."

"Because I said so" was good enough for my Dad, so I assume it's good enough for God too.

Since God already knows everything and nothing can improve Him or make

Him more complete, then "giving an account" MUST be for our benefit. It MUST be... it's the only option.

Since we will eternally learn in heaven, I would guess that our accounting will help us worship and bless others even more by the lessons we will learn from that accountability.

I'm probably not even close, but I rest in the peace of knowing that if God requires it, it will be for our best, and it will be for His glory.

From Ken and Helen Poland:

Perhaps it's because God knows our nature. If we know we will be asked to account for our whereabouts and activities, we are a little more conscious of what we are doing. We are also a little more likely to check with those to whom we are accountable to see what they expect. With God, that means reading the Bible, prayer, and fellowship with other Christians (we are known by the company we keep).

If a child is held accountable for their actions, they are a little more apt not to do something they have to try hiding from their parent. The secret here is consistency in requiring accountability. And, rest assured, God is consistent!

From Favi Podbereski:

I would imagine that giving an account mainly keeps us constantly aware presently of our own thoughts and actions and if we are in one accord with our Lord. It's an exercise

of conscience and self-examination. It's not that God doesn't know about us, but that we are apt to whistle down the road being somewhat oblivious to the justice we give others.

From Brent:

Well, evidently I overlooked a pretty obvious point because I wasn't thinking about THIS life. Of course, knowing that we will have to give an accounting helps us to be more careful about what we do now. Duh! I always knew I wasn't too bright... now I have proof!

~~~~~

## Salvation - Age Of Accountability

**A brother in church asked me about the age of accountability for children. He heard that any child, no matter what age, if not saved, will not be permitted to go to heaven. I pointed him to 2 Sam. 12:23 where David said he would go to his dead baby son. Can you help me find more Scriptures on this issue?**

The "age of accountability" is not Scriptural. It is a concept created by men because of questions such as "will babies go to heaven?".

It comes from man's need to answer questions that God doesn't give us a specific answer to. The "age of



accountability" is an attempt to explain the "innocence" of children or babies, and give some sort of idea of WHEN someone is "old enough" to respond to the Gospel.

We get ourselves in trouble trying to create answers to questions that God does not answer for us.

There is no "age of accountability" in the Bible, not even an indirect reference to it. All persons are born with the sin nature ([Jer 17:9](#); [Rom 8:7](#); [Gen 6:5](#)). It is not imparted at the "first committed sin" as this man-made doctrine assumes.

The need to have this idea of "age of accountability" is because it is unthinkable to us that babies are born with sin, and because we know that sinners are condemned to eternal hell unless cleansed by the blood of Christ. **The idea of matter-of-factly stating "all babies that die go to hell" is simply unacceptable to us.**

And it should be. We are created in the image of God ([Gen 1:26](#)) and the idea that babies who die (still born, aborted, infant death, etc.) will go straight to hell is repugnant to us. I believe this repugnance stems from the fact that we are created in God's image.

God is good. God is love. God is merciful, patient and above all JUST. It is NOT in keeping with His character that millions of babies will spend an eternity in hell because they died before ever being able to hear or understand the Gospel.

Now, the FACT is, this question about "where babies go when they die" is simply not answered in Scripture, much the same as the FACT that an "age of accountability" is NOT a Scriptural doctrine.

**God has not specifically answered the question about a dead baby's eternal destination.** Scriptures like [2 Sam. 12:23](#) do give us "hints" about the matter. David speaking about his dead baby said:

"But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? **I shall go to him**, but he shall not return to me."

We can also make some fairly substantial arguments based on the revealed CHARACTER OF GOD that babies who die will go to heaven and be covered by God's mercy.

In the end we have to draw our conclusions from Scripture and accept that this question is not answered. The Biblical conclusions are:

- The "age of accountability" is not Scriptural and attempts to answer what God has not
- The Bible does not specifically state the eternal destiny of a baby or young child who dies
- The Bible does "hint" that they go to heaven
- What we know about God's character seems to support that they go to heaven
- Being created in God's image, we are rightfully repulsed at the idea of millions of babies condemned to

eternal hell, and this innate "knowledge" supports the idea that they go to heaven.

## Heaven – What About Aborted Or Miscarried Babies?

**I know this may be a stretch, but pertaining to your questions about heaven and recognition of loved ones, what about the babies that have been aborted or miscarriages and the fertilized embryos that have been destroyed? Will we have more babies in heaven? Will there be sex in heaven?**

It's not a stretch. It's a legitimate question. However, there is no plain address in Scripture to turn to.

First, I already addressed a previous question of, "What about babies who die, do they go to heaven?" and the so-called "age of accountability" so we're going to assume for this question that we are talking about babies that DO end up in heaven for whatever reason God chooses for them to be there. If you want to study whether babies who die go to heaven, reference the link above.

So the unanswered question remains, WHAT FORM will babies take in heaven? From newly conceived fetuses to fully formed and birthed human, who most certainly have had the "breath of life" infused into them by God, what will their eternal form be?

Well, it's entirely speculation, and I most certainly could be completely wrong, but it doesn't seem to be that hard to "guess." We will live for all eternity in heaven, so obviously they will not live as fetuses, or 1 month olds or toddlers because I think it's pretty clear they wouldn't enjoy the fullness of a complete relationship with God and the adults who dwell there.

So it leaves us with two alternatives:

Their glorified bodies begin as babies (but what about barely developed fetuses?) and they grow up into adults then remain that way forever.

They are immediately in the form and "age" of a fully formed adult in perfect health and stature, and receive their new glorified body in adult form to remain that way for all eternity.

What age is the "perfect adult age?" That's irrelevant, we are still thinking in finite human terms. We don't pick 20, or 28 or 35 as the "perfect age." We will have the perfect adult body with no signs of aging or imperfection. We will be the "perfect us" - how we would be now if it weren't for the sin curse.

Because there is no mention of children or growing up or adolescence in heaven in the Bible, and for logical reasons, I believe the babies who die at whatever stage of development or age, will simply be transformed into the perfect "adult" they would have become if allowed to live, and without the sin curse.

However, I'm left with an even more intriguing question when I think about this. We know that Adam and Eve, BEFORE THE CURSE OF SIN WAS

IMPOSED, were commanded to multiply and fill the earth with their offspring (Gen 1:28).

We know there is no marriage in heaven, but Adam and Eve weren't married in the civil union sense we think about it. They were created for each other and told to "fill the earth." In a sinless world, their offspring would choose and mate and do their own "filling" since obviously ONE couple could not "fill the earth" by themselves.

Without sin, there would be a perfect understanding of faithfulness and fidelity, hence, no need for a "contract of marriage." If sin would have never entered, the earth would have filled with perfect people, choosing a mate as modeled by the First Couple (Adam & Eve) and divinely written on their hearts by God.

So, it is understandable that there will be no MARRIAGE in heaven because a civil union and contract of faithfulness and fidelity is not necessary in a sinless environment. However, we assume that a lack of marriage means a lack of procreation.

Adam and Eve were commanded from day one to procreate, before sin. So will we continue to fill the earth with new, sinless births? Two arguments:

NO, because there will already be the entire population of a fixed number of saved Christians and the Bible does not speak of any more humans being added... and the natural assumption of "no marriage" means no procreation.

YES, because Adam and Eve were commanded to procreate in the Garden before the sin curse, and there is no explicit Biblical statement that

clearly says procreation will end once and for all. It's an assumption from the "no marriage" verse, while not considering the original command to Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and multiply."

I have read and read and read everything I can find about the question of "sex in heaven," and the only answer I can ever find is based on the assumption that there is no sex or procreation because there is no marriage.

I believe there may be no procreation for one set of reasons, but the Bible simply doesn't say. The possibility remains open because Adam and Eve were commanded to procreate before the introduction of sin. We may well indeed have an eternal "mate" and "help mate" exactly as modeled by Adam and Eve, and if true, logically that would be your mate from this life if you have one.

I believe there may be no sexual love in heaven for an entirely different set of reasons; however, again, obviously Adam and Eve enjoyed that before the introduction sin. There is no clear directive or information in Scripture stating simply "yes" or "no" about sexual love in heaven. If you know of a Scripture that I am obviously unaware of, please let me know. (We've already discussed marriage, so don't send that argument, please).

To summarize, and these are just my opinions and speculation on subjects the Bible does not clearly speak about, I think babies that die will be transformed into fully mature adults once in the presence of God.

There will not be marriage in heaven, that is a fact, but we cannot rule out the possibility of procreation and sexual love, thus new babies, for two reasons: 1) the Bible doesn't say one way or another, and 2) given the presence of sexual love and procreation BEFORE sin (Adam and Eve in the garden) there is reasonable curiosity that the same will continue in the New Eden (recreated heavens and earth) where marriage is not necessary because a contract for faithfulness and fidelity is not necessary.

I know this flies in the face of our typical assumptions on this issue and I welcome correction Scripturally if someone can show me something I have simply overlooked. Otherwise.... hmmm.....

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Heaven – Is That Where We Started?

**Over the last few days there have been quite a few commercials paid for by the Mormons that try to get people to believe that we are all going to RETURN to our home (HEAVEN) when we die. The person speaking states that the SCRIPTURES tell us that we were all residents of Heaven before we were born into this life and so when we die we are just returning to our original Home. Do you know of any scripture that supports this claim?**

No, there are no truly GOD-GIVEN Scriptures to support this idea.

It is distinctly false and unBiblical as are many other peculiar Mormon doctrines to which the average Mormon will say, "We don't teach that!" (i.e. baptism for the dead; holy underwear; polygamy; eternal marriage; the ability of humans to become gods; the Trinity as three separate Gods; mother gods (heavenly mothers); temple marriages as a requirement for exaltation; and salvation after death in the spirit world.)

The whole idea of us being and becoming gods is tantamount in this idea that we were in heaven as babies and then came to earth. Since Mormonism claims authority of the "corrupt Scriptures" of Protestant Christianity, then virtually any doctrine can be dreamt up as "new revelation" or "corrected revelation." I often am very sad for the utterly sincere and good people who are trapped in this very unBiblical, unable to save, man-made religion. It is the perfect deception because of Mormonism's claim to be the restored, corrected, original and uncorrupted true and original Christianity, while everyone else who claims the Bible as God's sole authority on earth is deceived, believing a terribly corrupted and incomplete "holy book."

Ironically, the Bible (as orthodox Christianity understands that term), has withstood 2000 years of attacks, skepticism and lies... and yet it remains firm and unmovable as historically, scientifically, archeologically and factually correct. The Book of Mormon, however, is

saturated with unsubstantiated historical claims (despite MASSIVE efforts to find ANY proof possible), grammatical blunders and scientific absurdities... all of which otherwise reasonable, logical and good adult Mormons REFUSE to acknowledge, consider or openly discuss. It's both sad and puzzling.

"We were first begotten as spirit babies in heaven and then born naturally on earth" (Journal of Discourse, Vol. 4, p. 218).

"In your life before birth, before the earth was created, God presented a plan to his children for their advancement. You were free to accept or reject this plan of salvation. Those spirit children who accepted his plan were given the opportunity to live on earth; those who rejected his plan were not privileged to enter mortality" (The Purpose of Life Pamphlet handed out at the Temple on BYU campus).

The Mormons teach that prior to physical birth, everyone had an existence in heaven as a spirit-child and we are all born from the sexual union of God the Father with one of His wives.

Of course even the most green Bible student knows that this is utterly foreign to the Word of God, but when you claim a higher authority than God's Word (or reinvent God's Word in a new revelation), then you can simply make up whatever doctrine you want no matter how metaphysical, new age, unGodly, unChristian and pagan it is... which this doctrine is on ALL counts. Pure unadulterated, new age tripe.

The real Bible, the real Holy Word that has stood the test of time and skeptics and repelled all who would try to discredit it, clearly refutes this idea:

Gen 2:7 - the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

This is just a simple refutation. It does not take into account all of the major doctrines and theological principles that are completely denied and contradicted by this false teaching of prior existence in heaven.

What I find so insidious is the effort by Mormonism to redefine and cloak their teaching in elaborate Christian terminology. What I find so sad and even more tragic is the general lack of knowledge and effort by Protestants to know ENOUGH about their own faith and theology to be able to refute such obvious and flagrant false teaching.

I'm not getting on to the gentlemen who wrote this question (he obviously IS making an effort). I'm getting on the fact that more and more Christianity is accepting cults, false teachers and heresies as simply disagreements and fine points in doctrine. Why? Because we don't know enough of our own Scriptures to 1) recognize the false teaching, and 2) effectively defend true Christianity from it.

Okay, I'm off my soap box now. Let the "judgmental", "intolerant", "Christian extremist", "religious bigot" emails start rolling in. Let me save you some time, and you can copy some of these very common responses and send them to me:

- You don't know what you're talking about
- Mormons don't teach that
- Mormons worship the same God as you
- You've never studied Mormonism, you're just saying what you've been told by other misinformed Christians
- I'm a Mormon, and we've never taught that before
- You're being unloving; we can't reach Mormons with that kind of language
- It's people like you and you're hate speech that give Christianity a bad name

One final thought, really just humorous for me. A prominent Mormon recently sent me an email just berating me and rebuking me for calling him a "Mormon" which he claims is a derogatory term now. Funny, the LDS church website is "mormon.org". Someone should inform them.

~~~~~

Heaven – Will There Be More People Created?

Follow up questions for yesterday's comments on "sex, babies and procreation in heaven": Does the Bible say Adam and Eve engaged in sexual love? I don't believe there will be sexual love because it would diminish our love for God, right? How could there be more people born heaven when Christ paid the price for ALL the world

and that part of history is completed (in eternity)?

Does the Bible say Adam and Eve engaged in sexual love?

The first specific mention of sexual love in Scripture is AFTER the fall of man into sin:

Genesis 4:1 - Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from the Lord." (NKJV)

That no children or sexual love is specifically mentioned before this reference does not necessarily mean that it did not occur. That is reading something into the verse that simply isn't there. There COULD have been sexual love.

What's more, I have looked and looked, and admit I might be missing it, but I don't read anything conclusive in Scripture that declares there were no children before Cain. If you know of a verse that teaches this, please send it to me.

Further, Cain is scared someone will kill him once God banished him for killing Abel (Gen 4:14). Where did those other people come from? Obviously from Adam and Eve. Were those children conceived after Cain, and yet had time to go out and build and populate entire other communities?

We assume Cain was firstborn because no other children are mentioned previously in the Bible. Does that mean there were none? Or was there a period of time before sin that Adam and Eve were fulfilling

God's command to "be fruitful and multiply?"

Of course those speculations still hinge on whether or not there is a definitive verse that states Cain was the firstborn of all human children. I can't find one, but trust someone will enlighten me if there is.

Now, one substantial argument would be all sin came through and because of Adam and Eve's sin, so there must not have been other humans before sin occurred. Would it not stand to reason that if there WERE sinless children before the Fall of man, they would then be infected by the curse of sin when their parents fell? Not an illogical question. Speculative, DEFINITELY, but hardly inappropriate or fanciful.

So you are left with the following possible scenarios, and again, this is all just studious speculation, thinking about how life MIGHT be in heaven, so if you can give me Bible verses that clearly refute any of this, PLEASE DO. I would be very appreciative. Here are the possible options of Eden:

Adam and Eve sinned very shortly after being created

Adam and Eve lived a good while in perfection with God before sinning but had no sexual love

Adam and Eve lived a good while in perfection with God before sinning and had sexual contact that did not result in children

Adam and Eve lived a good while in perfection with God before sinning and had children who were not under the curse until they sinned

My own personal intuition is, and that's ALL it is, is number three is most likely though the last option is intriguing. They lived for a period of time in perfection and fellowship with God, enjoying all aspects of their relationship including sexual love but not long enough to have children (or perhaps God delayed them having children).

My point? We make FAR TOO MANY assumptions without thinking them through or realizing that the Bible simply does not often support our common assumptions.

The Bible does not say Adam and Eve didn't enjoy sexual union before sin, and given God's commandments and the obvious relationship-building aspect of sex, it doesn't even seem consistent.

Even if Adam and Eve were only alive a FEW DAYS before sinning, it doesn't seem likely they would have ignored the obvious sexual attraction, nor does it seem likely God "turned sex on" only after sin occurred. Just doesn't make sense and is not consistent with anything about "why?" God created us male and female and gave us our physical attraction. Sexual attraction is NOT BECAUSE OF the sin curse, it is part of our created essence. God made us that way. Sin didn't cause it.

In fact, I would propose that sexual attraction and activity WERE present before sin simply because of the feelings of shame that came after sin. What did they cover up in shame? Their sexual anatomy. That should tell us something. Another reason I think this is because immediately following the creation of woman, God declared

that she would become "one flesh" with her man, a clear reference to sexual consummation.

Now, why am I talking about all this? Because the question is on the table about sexual love and procreation in heaven. WHAT OCCURRED WITH PERFECT CREATION BEFORE SIN, WOULD REASONABLY BE A CLEAR INDICATION OF WHAT WILL OCCUR WHEN THAT PERFECTION IS RENEWED AND RESTORED.

The answer about "sex and procreation in heaven" is always "of course not!" because 1) habit, 2) there is no marriage in heaven, and 3) we will be like the angels. See other questions that discuss this.

I'm just pointing out that all I am able to find from Bible teaching, answers and commentary is ASSUMPTIONS that there will be no sexual love or procreation in heaven, BUT, given the model of the Garden of Eden, God's command to procreate and fill the earth BEFORE the fall of man and the fact that there is simply NO Scripture that prohibits the possibility.... we should quit automatically saying the answer is "no" (to sexual love and procreation in heaven) when the Bible doesn't say that.

The answer might be "no" but it could be "yes" too.

At this point in my own study of it, I can't find "no" in the Bible or "yes," but there seems to be more INDICATION of "yes" than "no." You don't build doctrine around "indications," but neither do you build it around "assumptions."

Next, I don't believe there will be sexual love because it would diminish our love for God, right?

My comment is the usual: there is no Scripture that teaches that. I would ask this: did it diminish Adam and Eve's love for God?

God pronounced His Creation "good" (perfect) and commanded Adam and Eve to procreate and fill the earth with offspring, obviously involving sexual love. Would God's creation be perfect if obeying His command lessens His creation's love for Him? Or was it not that way for them but will be that way for us? Maybe, but again, why? What's the reason? Why the difference? And what Scripture even hints at that?

It all goes back to our foundational ASSUMPTION: "no sex or procreation in heaven" based on no Scripture. That assumption makes us interpret a whole lot of Scripture and questions negatively when the Bible simply states no such negative (that I've been able to find).

To the contrary, even in eternal perfection, our relationships will honor God and glorify Him, not diminish our love for Him or distract us from Him.

Question: if sexual relationships would diminish our love for God, why wouldn't friendships, mates, family or ANY type of relationship other than our one with God likewise diminish our love for Him? Will we have NO relationships in heaven lest they diminish our love for God? Or does that only apply to sexual love? The logical extent of this idea is that we would have NO relationships with

other people or angels in heaven. Not likely or logical.

Finally, How could there be more people born in heaven when Christ paid the price for ALL the world and that part of history is completed (in eternity)?

If Adam and Eve had not sinned, they would have filled the earth with their offspring who would have no need for salvation because they hadn't sinned or been born with sin as we are.

In heaven, IF there is procreation, and we resume (there's one of those words again: resume, restore, redeem, return, replenish, etc.) filling the New Earth in the same manner as Adam and Eve would have filled the original Earth, then those children will not be born with sin, and won't need to be saved in the sense that we understand it.

Folks, this is all speculation and good old fashioned dreaming of what heaven will be like. We're not building doctrine, stating doctrine or declaring black and whites. However, let's please quit making the same old assumptions about heaven that do MUCH damage to the reality of what we are going to enjoy and experience.

Heaven is NOT a never-ending church service of ghosts surrounding God's throne singing hymns in the clouds. Heaven is NOT mystical, otherworldly and unimaginable. Yes, we cannot fathom the DEPTHS and WONDERS of everything about heaven, but God HAS given us plenty of references.

As I said in a previous answer, if you can imagine people, then you can imagine people in heaven, MINUS SIN. If you can imagine the heavens (stars,

space) and the earth, then you can imagine the NEW heavens and earth, perfectly recreated without sin or corruption. If you can imagine beauty, adventure, work, love, joy, relationships... then you can imagine all those things, ONLY PERFECT, with no sin, no pain, no tears, no disappointment.

God has given us plenty of clues and reference points by which to imagine what heaven will be like: a perfect earth, with perfect people, living and working in perfect love and fellowship, walking and talking in perfect relationship with God, enjoying everything God always meant for humans to enjoy in a perfect creation.

If you find anything blatantly wrong, and have Scripture to prove it, I insist you take the time to let me know. I do not want to even SPECULATE about something the Bible has clearly answered.

~~~~~

## Heaven - Animals In Heaven

**Is it true that animals will not be in heaven because they are beneath man and do not have souls? I have a hard time believing that God would create all of these innocent creatures for the service of man and then not consider them beyond this life. After all, they didn't eat the forbidden fruit like man so their souls (if they have them) wouldn't need salvation like ours, right?**

First, let's answer the comment about animals and "souls." Animals are not eternal and not created in the image of God like humans are (Gen 1:26-27). So the question of sin and salvation is both irrelevant and inapplicable.

Now, about animals in heaven. No, it is not true that animals won't be heaven. The Bible mentions animals in heaven several times:

Lion, lamb, wolf and ox - [Isa 65:25](#)

Horses - Rev 19.11; Zech 14.20

Lions, calf, leopards, cow, bear - Isa 11.6ff

There is no clear Biblical imperative to think this list is exclusive.

While we can only speculate based on what we know of God's character and what He has already shown in His creative acts, I don't think it is a stretch to say that the animal kingdom will be present in heaven the same way it was present BEFORE sin entered humankind.

The biggest reason people automatically assume and dismiss the idea of animals in heaven is the misconception that heaven is NOT a physical, tangible place or existence, but rather we are all ghosts floating around a "spirit world."

As we will inevitably discuss in this series of questions on heaven, we will show that the Bible clearly and plainly teaches that HEAVEN is a physical existence, albeit in a new, incorruptible eternal form that is beyond our ability to fully grasp while cloaked in this sinful tent.

Heaven and earth will be RE-created (2Pet 3:10; Rev 21:1). They will be made new. It would be inconsistent with God's character that the new heaven and earth were some unimaginable, completely different version of what heaven and earth were when God created it perfectly the first time. The only difference is, sin will no longer exist or have a chance to corrupt.

So just like animals were part of God's perfect creation originally, I believe they will be a part of the new recreated, perfect heaven and earth - supported Biblically in my estimation by 1) the verses that mention animals in heaven, and 2) it is consistent with God's nature and revealed tendencies.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Heaven – Marriage In Heaven

**Can you please clarify your position on marriage, sexual love and couples in heaven? It's sounds in your other questions you lean towards thinking they will exist in eternity which disagrees with a lot of good teachers out there.**

First, the questions that are being reference are a part of a series of questions I've been answering about Heaven. Here are the links:

<http://www.seriousfaith2.com/asr/question.asp?questionid=2115>

<http://www.seriousfaith2.com/asr/question.asp?questionid=2102>

First let me say that I didn't intend to "lean" any direction except to lean away from the pat, quick and not well thought out usual answers that are instantly spit out based on church tradition and assumption.

The lingering questions that I needed more time to really study and ponder are the following. What I have previously written on them are clearly QUESTIONS and SPECULATION that I was personally wondering about myself as we opened up this series of public discussion on "heaven."

The Bible clearly states there will be no marriage in heaven (Mark 12:25); is marriage as we define it the same type of relationship Adam and Eve originally had?

Will there be sexual love, will we be sexual creatures still?

Will we have special "mates" or be "one flesh" with someone in heaven, presumably our earthly spouse if we had one?

These questions are not nearly as cut and dried as people like to present, which is why I didn't jump at the answers. In a nutshell, after really studying the issue my answers are:

Yes, marriage now is the same as the relationship between Adam and Eve

No, there won't be physical sexual activity in heaven, but we will still have male and female sexuality that is perfectly fulfilled

No, we will not have one person who we are "coupled with" like marriage now, but our relationships from the past will not be forgotten, diminished or insignificant

Some folks teach that to love anyone but God, to have a relationship with anyone but God or to cultivate relationship with anyone but God while in heaven diminishes our love for Him. This is simply not Biblical.

Our relationships with others who bear God's image GLORIFIES God, not insults Him. Our friends and family aren't idols because we love them and cultivate that love... we are showing God's love by our love for others. This is pointed out over and over in 1John. That fact won't change in heaven.

So the idea that we won't have relationships in heaven is patently false. The only speculation is what type and how will they be manifested.

Now, starting with the correct idea that Heaven will be a New Earth and New Creation, where all the things (and more!) that God originally intended for Adam and Eve will be restored, we have a principle of continuity to consider, i.e. what was true in Eden before the Fall of man, will be true in Heaven. However, there are obvious exceptions such as the presence of Satan and the potential to sin and turn against God.

It appears that marriage and sexual love as we know it is another exception. I can find no reason or Biblical basis to believe that the institution of marriage as God has defined it for us, is any different than what Adam and Eve experienced, though the Bible didn't call it "marriage" specifically.

The primary reason for marriage is as a foreshadowing and signpost to our ultimate marriage: the Bride married to Christ. The need and purpose of

marriage as we know it will be culminated and fulfilled with our eventual marriage to Christ. All Believers will be married to Christ, therefore marriage to each other will not be necessary anymore.

Further, there is no Biblical foundation that sexual love is ever permitted for any arrangement other than marriage whether it was before the sin-curse or after sin will be removed. (even if it's between two people and only two people; Biblically, "marriage" still has to be present, not just monogamy)

What's more, we will be "married" to Christ, and obviously there will be no sexual, physical love relationship between Christ and His Bride. So it is safe to Biblically declare that there will be no sexual love in heaven and logically no procreation.

Those are two questions I was still pondering as of a few days ago and not ready to declare a public opinion on until now. You may be tempted to say "DUH! You're not very bright!" and think this was any easy conclusion (and maybe for you it was) but most people have concluded this without any serious thought and without really thinking about the connection between the Garden of Eden and the New Heavens and New Earth.

Moving on... there is no indication, nor does it make sense, that our resurrected and glorified bodies will not have the same physical sexual traits we have now, i.e. sexual organs.

We know that God will make provision for every aspect of our existence, so whatever form or feeling our sexual nature manifests itself, God

has something completely satisfying and unimaginably more wonderful than even what the most healthy and loving sexual relationship can deliver for us now.

I suspect it will be in the form of perfect relationships, perfect love, perfect fellowship and perfect holy intimacy spiritually and emotionally. In other words, just as we partly understand even now, that great sex is due to great relationship and great emotional connection, I believe that the sexual aspects of our nature will be perfectly fulfilled in our relationships in heaven.

Finally, we will not have a spouse, or be "coupled" with anyone in heaven like Adam and Eve were. This seems to be another exception to the continuity from Eden to Heaven but with a simple answer: we will each be coupled to Christ as we are the Bride and He the Groom.

Given that, it is incorrect to teach "there will be NO marriage in heaven". That is unBiblical. We will not be married to each other in heaven, but there will be marriage. One marriage. We will be collectively married to Christ and that is the reason Jesus said that we will not be "married and given in marriage" to each other in heaven.

As demonstrated in other questions, we WILL know about our past lives and past relationships once in Heaven. I will not be married to my wife in heaven, but I'll still have a special relationship with her based on our life together now and my special love for her that will only be clearer and deeper when we are finally perfect and free from sin. Same for family and friends that I know now.

Our relationships now give us a taste of heaven to come. Heaven won't be devoid of family, it will be ONE GREAT BIG FAMILY. Our relationships won't diminish our love for God or distract us from Jesus no more than our love for each other NOW (which is commanded throughout Scripture) diminishes our love for the Lord.

We won't instantly have the exact same knowledge, friendship and intimacy with every single inhabitant of Heaven the moment we arrive. We'll know those folks we knew on earth, and we'll have all eternity to get to know the rest. As finite beings (eternally existing, but finite in power, presence and knowledge), it is obvious that we will have ever-growing and ever-increasing levels of relationships throughout eternity. We'll have a head start with those we already know and love like our wife and children.

We will have all eternity to create new relationships, to cultivate previous ones, and to grow and cherish our most special ones that we bring with us into eternity.

Relationships, family, love, perfection... Eden restored. I can't wait... can you?

~~~~~

Heaven - Is My Pet In Heaven?

How do I tell a young high school student, in a delicate way, that pets aren't going to be in heaven? This young lady is convinced her

pet is to go with her to heaven. She gets upset with God and the truth when we try to explain otherwise. How can we explain to her there won't be any pets in heaven?

Well my answer may shock you... THIS YOUNG LADY IS MORE "RIGHT" ABOUT THIS TOPIC THAN YOU ARE! Sorry, I know you were expecting some support from me. Hear me out...

First, the fact that there will be animals in heaven is undisputed Scripturally. Granted, it can only be conjecture that God will grant us a reunion with the pets we came to love on earth, but it certainly does not go against His nature to bless us with such a gift.

Don't misunderstand me. Pets aren't resurrected like humans; they do not have eternal spirits like humans but they do have "souls" in the sense that they have "life" that is above that of plant life or insects.

Animals are "aware" and "alive"... unlike a tree or a bug. If God were to bless us with our pets in heaven, it would be necessary to recreate them; but make no mistake, they are not "born again", "regenerated" or resurrected in the manner that humans will be.

I'm not saying "the Bible says so" about pets in heaven; this is strictly my personal opinion... but I'm AM saying that it is not that much of a stretch to believe that God might grant us our "hearts desire" in heaven even if our hearts desire is getting Rover back.

I base that OPINION on two things; 1) there WILL be animals in heaven; and 2) God is a Good God who showers gifts on His beloved children.

If the Bible declared the ABSENCE of animals in heaven, then we would have to state that same thing about pets. But that's not the case. Consider some of the animals in heaven:

Lion, lamb, wolf and ox - Isa 65:25

Horses - Rev 19.11; Zech 14.20

Lions, calf, leopards, cow, bear - Isa 11.6ff

I think allowing our earthly pets, or getting new pets in Heaven is very much in keeping with God's revealed character as well. God created animals. Before man sinned, all Creation was "good." Animals were peaceful and lived in harmony with man.

God gave us animals for our enjoyment and pleasure. He no doubt enjoys His beautiful animal creations not unlike an artist who enjoys the art he creates.

Given that many types of animals are specifically going to be in heaven, and lacking any specific Scripture to support your assumption... my opinion is to take the opportunity to teach her MORE about heaven, instead of informing her she is "wrong" on this minor issue.

Tell her about the "other" animals that will be there besides her pets. Teach how all animals were "peaceful" before the earth was cursed, which is a perfectly natural lead into teaching her the Gospel and God's plan of redemption for all mankind.

For what it's worth, I would lean towards believing that God may very well allow us a reunion with our beloved pets unless someone can show me otherwise in Scripture. I think it is very much in line with God's revealed character.

Regardless, there is no reason to treat this as a ridiculous or patently false notion that needs to be squashed as false teaching. It is a very minor issue. The important thing is that she be aware of who, and why, and which HUMANS will be in heaven; and how she can be one of them.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Heaven - What Is The New Heaven And New Earth?

I don't understand the new heavens and new earth business. If we are going to be heaven, who is going to be on earth?

This misunderstanding stems from a common myth about heaven: we'll all be floating around in some spirit, otherworldly church service for all eternity. It is also cultivated by the false, but very common belief, that Heaven is "out there" and earth has nothing to do with heaven.

This is probably why few people have any real longing for heaven anymore (compared to the number of people who profess they are going there).

Let's summarize the truth that Scripture clearly lays out:

All things in heaven and on earth will be re-united because of, and in, Jesus Christ. (Eph 1:10)

Heaven will be the re-creation of all things physical, returning them to the perfect state they were originally. (2Pet 3:13)

The final chapter of our history is revealed in Revelation 21 where we see the realms of heaven and earth reunited and eternally established under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

"Heaven" will be one universe where the final dividing wall (the physical one) will be removed just as the spiritual one has already been removed - both because of Jesus. Like the Garden of Eden, God will dwell with men in the physical creation and men will walk with God as Adam did. (Rev 21:3)

God's plan for mankind has always been to recover, redeem, reunite and restore (notice those words as a continual theme in Scripture) both humankind AND creation. His inevitable and completely unstoppable plan is to retrieve everything He created originally, that Satan and man messed up. God will restore the gap that now exists between "heaven" and "earth" bringing everything BACK together in perfection under the rule of the King of Kings.

Eden was what God intended for us eternally. Eden is what God WILL HAVE eternally for us (and more!). His plans can never be stopped, never be thwarted. Continue to consider:

An overriding theme of Scripture is "who reigns over the earth?" starting in Genesis. For a while it was man

until he sinned. Then it was/is Satan for a time. Ultimately it will be man again, under the supervision of Christ. Man will be restored to his dominion over the creation God specifically gave to him, and man will reign "forever and ever" with Christ. (Rev 22:5)

Satan tempted the first Adam and won a temporary victory and reign over God's physical creation (Genesis 1-2). The Second Adam, Jesus, crushed Satan's head, and assured the final resumption of His physical reign for all eternity, an event still future for us (Rev 20:10). Through Jesus' death, He disarmed the all Satanic power and authority (Col 2:15), stripped Satan of his reign ultimately (Heb 2:14) and destroyed all the devil's work (1John 3:8).

Notice this is all past tense. The work is done. The result of it is playing out. The great thing for Christians is, we get to play the game already knowing the final score and winner! While we struggle in the final throes of Satan's demise and still have to exist in this sin cursed world, the battle is won and the results are not in question. Let's continue:

How can the restoring of the physical universe be accomplished? By removing the curse that now corrupts it. That is EXACTLY what Christ did, and a curse-free RE-creation will be the end result. (Rev 22:3). All the curse and its effects (Gen 3) will be completely NON-existent for all eternity.

If you can imagine the earth with no curse, you've begun to imagine heaven.

If you can imagine yourself, and other people, with no curse (i.e. sin, corruption, hate, etc.), then you can begin to imagine life in eternity, which is the reuniting of heaven and earth.

Imagine a life where God and Jesus dwell with us every day, walking and talking with us as God did with Adam - and you can begin to imagine heaven.

Imagine the earth being perfectly ruled and supervised by Jesus Christ, with Believers being co-rulers in the perfect positions and responsibilities that will fulfill us and reward us.

Imagine that, and you can begin to imagine heaven.

This may all sound very strange or new to you. I don't understand why. This is very plain teaching from Scripture. It leads me to conclude that Satan has successfully distorted, diluted and degraded the very hope that is the whole point of Scripture: the restoration of our relationship with God culminating in eternal life on a new earth that is reunited with heaven.

Remember, if Adam would have never sinned, he would have lived eternally, walking with God, enjoying dominion over the creation that was without the curse of sin and corruption.

If that is the way God originally created earth, and obviously "heaven" was part of it because God dwelled with Adam in the garden, then why is it so strange to contemplate that a restoration of "Eden" (and more!) is what God has in mind when He says "eternal life in heaven."

I think if you study this with an open mind, and let Scripture speak, you'll find that there is a lot of myth,

confusion and illiteracy in Christianity about Heaven. Which is really weird when you consider the fact that HEAVEN (and all it represents) is the entire goal of our life.

How confusing is it to think, "We die, go to heaven, and then just forget about the doomed-earth below." How confusing to wonder about why there is a "new earth" if nobody is going to be living on it.

There is no confusion in Scripture. It's pretty straightforward and clear in the Bible. Satan gets his "at-a-boys" for doing such a great job filling the Body of Christ with misinformation, ignorance and myths about Heaven. Let's all start reversing that today!

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Hell - Catholics Going To Hell?

Are all Catholics going to hell?

Only God knows WHO is going to hell; we can only know WHAT will send a person there.

Breaking God's Law destines a person for hell, and we have all broken God's law (Rom 3.23).

The only way to be saved from hell is by accepting the free gift of eternal life bought and paid for by the shed blood of Jesus Christ by responding to the Gospel in belief, repentance and obedience.

I'm sorry if anyone was expecting a controversial answer or a declaration

from me that all Catholics are going to hell, but you won't find it here.

The Bible plainly declares the conditions of salvation, and God alone knows who has or will meet those conditions, not me.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Hell – Trading Places

A possible scenario: You die and find yourself in Heaven, and you are asked a question! Your Mother and Father are in hell, do you love them enough to trade places with them? I lost my parents before I knew how the forgiveness of sin was accomplished, so I do not know if they are in Heaven. I could plead with God, pray through the Holy Spirit and our Lord Jesus, and ask that my Father and Mother be included in the forgiveness that Jesus accomplished. But would He accept that, is it necessary that forgiveness comes only through personal request? I think the Roman Catholics are convinced that forgiveness of sin is earned during purgatory. I find no convincing scripture that supports purgatory, and I am still searching for some that will ease my sorrow by convincing me that God will accept prayer that will provide forgiveness for those who may be eternally in hell. Are you aware of any such scripture? Are you concerned about the same fate for

those you love? And do you love them enough to trade places with them and be placed in hell for eternity?

Your question has some difficult, and some plain, answers from Scripture.

Let's start with the issue of "trading places" with someone in hell. This is not an option, so it's not edifying to spend a lot of time debating or considering it.

However, my opinion is that it is not possible for someone to even consider this. To want to "trade places" with someone in hell is to not grasp or understand the nature or finality of hell. It has nothing to do with how much we love someone. It is not possible for humans to truly understand the consequences of such a choice, and upon immediately being given the ability to understand it, the choice would no longer be a choice.

In other words, if God gave you the ability to understand the TRUE nature of hell, the choice to "trade places" would evaporate because you would understand that knowingly and willingly choosing hell FOR ANY REASON is not possible.

Revelation 21:1-5 says, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God

himself shall be with them, and be their God. AND GOD SHALL WIPE AWAY ALL TEARS FROM THEIR EYES; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: FOR THE FORMER THINGS ARE PASSED AWAY. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful."

Every person in heaven will no doubt be aware of someone they know and love who did not accept God's free gift of salvation. And yet, God promises us that we will not cry, or sorrow, or have pain. It is not possible for us to understand this reality on this side of heaven, but that does not diminish the faithfulness of God's promise.

The Bible tells us that every person who ends up separated from God will be without excuse, clearly implying that every person had the opportunity at some point to respond to God either through the Gospel, or through the clear revelation of God in creation (Rom 1.20). I don't see how knowing that those in hell "deserve" to be in hell would alleviate our sorrow, but it does not change the clear teaching of Scripture. Whoever ends up in hell, chose their destiny.

I do not know how it will be possible to not grieve our lost family and friends. I do not believe that God will remove that knowledge from our memories or consciousness; there is no implication in Scripture that God will "wash" our minds of our previous life or knowledge (although the sin nature will be removed).

Apparently, we will be aware (Luke 16:19ff) of family and friends who are

not in heaven. But NO, we will not suffer sorrow, tears or pain. I don't understand it, but God has promised it and God never fails to keep a promise.

About purgatory... you are correct, there is no Biblical support for the idea of Purgatory. If you choose to trust in this doctrine, you are choosing to trust a teaching of the Catholic Church, not a teaching that originates in the Bible. It is not the point of this answer to debate whether the Catholic Church is right about Purgatory. In the context of this answer, it's suffices to affirm to the Questioner that Purgatory is not found in Scripture.

Without regards to your father and mother (whom only God knows their eternal destiny), the Bible clearly teaches that there is no second chance to accept Christ, or repent, after death (Heb 9.27). So the plain answer to your other question is "no," you cannot pray for someone's salvation to be realized AFTER they have passed away.

The time for concern about salvation is NOW, today (2Cor 6.1-2). For all of the history of our sin cursed world, people have had to live with the struggle of wondering about the fate of their loved ones. Our peace and hope comes from knowing that God is perfectly just, perfectly holy and perfectly loving.

When you find yourself struggling over the possibility of lost loved ones, turn your thoughts to God's Word and the fact that you serve a God who is faithful and perfect in every way. The fate of any person who has already passed is eternally decided and belongs only to our Holy God.

The living are all around, and there are plenty who still need to hear the wonderful News that you have to share with them.

The following Biblical account (NOT a parable; the context and grammar demands this story be taken literally) is profoundly applicable to our question today:

Luke 16:

19"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. 20At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores 21and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

22"The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23In hell, [c] where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

25"But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. 26And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

27"He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, 28for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

29"Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

30" 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

31"He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.' "

~~~~~

## Hell - Is It A Real Place Or Just Hard Times?

**Today our Pastor brought up a lesson about Hell. I was at first encouraged because he has typically avoided tough topics like sin or hell. In the end, I was thoroughly disappointed because it ended up being a "life can be hell, and Jesus can fix it" sermon. What are your thoughts about that?**

This whole "living without God during this life is 'hell'" or "life can be hell" is just "Osteen-lite." It's feel good, watered-down pop culture Christianity. I hate it when HELL is diminished with such pabulum. Hell is a real place of torment, darkness and separation. It is not lightly analogous to an unpleasant and "unvictorious" life here on earth. That

is pop culture vomit that only serves to keep people from thinking about the reality of eternal damnation, which is every bit as real as eternal salvation.

NO MATTER HOW BAD THIS LIFE BECOMES IT IS NOT, CANNOT AND WILL NEVER BE EVEN MORE THAN JUST A MOMENTARY AND SUPERFICIAL TASTE OF WHAT THE REALITY OF ACTUAL HELL WILL BE.... To even compare the worst of this life as "hell" is a long standing Satanic ploy to diminish the true nature of the eternal Hell that awaits those who reject Jesus Christ.

I'm amazed at some of my otherwise sound Brethren who teach a real, physical eternal heaven, but deny its counterpart with the doctrine of Annihilation (by whatever name or description) because it is not "God's nature to punish endlessly." Of course some fancy proof texting and interpretation of Scripture is added to give it an air of Biblical support, but in the end, Jesus warned us more about hell than he taught about heaven.

Hell is never shown to be anything in Scripture except a real, eternal, specific place of punishment\* that PEOPLE CHOOSE TO GO TO (as opposed to God sends them there because He is vindictive, takes pleasure in punishment, or God forbid, chose from eternity past to CREATE PEOPLE to go there and they have no chance to be saved, aka Calvinism). Hell is real and eternal\*, hardly any point could be more clear in Scripture.

(Note: let me save us some time... I won't debate Calvinism, just agree to disagree please. I've been on both sides of the Calvinistic fence; no, I'm

not Arminian... but I'm not a Calvinist, and NO, it doesn't have to be one or the other).

Let me say something VERY judgmental and purposely confrontational: any Bible teacher or Preacher who spits out that kind of pop culture spiritual milk (soured milk) has either 1) not really thought about what he is saying, 2) has been overly influenced by the feel-good "Jesus will improve your life" Christian culture, or 3) is deficient in Biblical understanding and should not be teaching given that they are going to incur a greater judgment (James 3:1, a verse that regularly sends chills down my back).

One of the greatest disservices we can ever do to our family, friends and those we Shepherd is to avoid, water down or diminish what God Almighty and Jesus Our Lord routinely communicated about an eternal hell that awaits all those who die without forgiveness through faith in Christ Jesus.

What does "positive thinking" or "negativity" really mean when the REALITY of eternity is ONLY two choices: heaven or hell? If we only have two choices, do you really think it's helpful, smart or effective to avoid teaching about one of them? God inspired Scripture about it. Jesus warned about it. Paul taught about it. But I guess we are just wiser than them, right? We realize that teaching about Hell will keep people from wanting to come to Jesus... only "love" and an "abundant" life attracts people, right?

Somebody should have educated God before He allowed them to muck up the Bible with all that negative stuff.

\*Hell

- The place of disembodied spirits. Ac 2:31.
- And a place of torment. Lu 16:23.
- Destruction from the presence of God. 2Th 1:9.
- Everlasting punishment. Mt 25:46.
- Everlasting fire. Mt 25:41.
- Everlasting burnings. Isa 33:14.
- A furnace of fire. Mt 13:42,50.
- A lake of fire. Re 20:15.
- Fire and brimstone. Re 14:10.
- Unquenchable fire. Mt 3:12.
- Devouring fire. Isa 33:14.
- Prepared for the devil, &c. Mt 25:41.
- Devils are confined in, until the judgment day. 2Pe 2:4; Jude 1:6.
- Punishment of, is eternal. Isa 33:14; Re 20:10.
- The wicked shall be turned into. Ps 9:17.
- Human power cannot preserve from. Eze 32:27.
- The body suffers in. Mt 5:29; 10:28.
- The soul suffers in. Mt 10:28.
- The wise avoid. Pr 15:24.

(This list: Torrey, R. (1995, c1897). The new topical text book : A scriptural text book for the use of ministers, teachers, and all Christian workers. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos research Systems, Inc.)

~~~~~

Hell - Do We Really Want A God Of Wrath?

Do we really want people thinking God is an angry wrathful God ready to punish us? Don't we want a balanced view? How will people who have been abused response to this "angry parent" picture? What about those who have had a bad experience with Christianity? Aren't they looking for love and not condemnation?

Well the problem with your question is that it approaches the "Truth" from the viewpoint of what we humans would PREFER. Therein lies the problem....

It doesn't matter what flavor we want, what kind of dish we want it served in, or how much sugar we would like sprinkled on it. The Truth is the Truth and it should be delivered exactly the way the Word of God delivers it.

Fully - all of the truth should be revealed, not just the easy parts, the blessing parts, the feel-good parts, the wonderful parts, etc. The awful, terrible and horrific parts are just as important and just as emphasized in Scripture.

Compassionately - the full truth should be delivered with love, compassion and concern. How can you know if it is? If your motivation is the salvation of a soul destined for hell then it is compassionate. If your motivation is to see a wasted life turned around for God's glory and blessing, you are compassionate. If

your motivation is to have the sinner see their dangerous and precarious state at all costs because you don't want them to die without Jesus - then you are compassionate.

With Balance - the truth should be delivered with the same balance that Scripture delivers it. Heaven and hell are equally disclosed in the Bible. Neither are just a passing comment, or a quickly covered point. God's love and His justice are equally revealed in Scripture - neither is brushed over or lightly mentioned.

In Biblical Language - we are masters at making bad things not sound so bad (fibs, affairs, alternative lifestyles, etc.). We cannot "package" the Gospel to make it more palatable to sinful men. We must proclaim it the way the Bible proclaims it. If Scripture describes an awful, tormenting, eternal hell - we should describe it that way. If the Bible speaks of God's anger, jealousy, wrath and vengeance - we should use the very same words. We are not at liberty to "tone down" God because we think the Bible vocabulary is too "harsh."

So to answer your questions:

Do we really want people thinking God is an angry wrathful God ready to punish us? Yes, because the Bible declares it so. Of course, the whole reason for telling people that is so that you can tell them the GOOD NEWS that God has provided a ways to escape the punishment. God is only "ready to punish" those who reject him.

Don't we want a balanced view? Of course. I have not ever taught that we should run around just preaching

"hell, hell, hell" without including the answer to hell: salvation through faith and obedience to Jesus Christ.

How will people who have been abused response to this "angry parent" picture? I'm not sure how to answer that. I can only deliver the message of the Gospel how God has delivered it to us in the Bible, and trust God to deal with hurting abused people. I can explain to them the difference between a perfect loving God who has a right to be angry at sin; and a sinful, angry, human parent who in no way reflects the true nature of God in their anger.

What about those who have had a bad experience with Christianity? A bad experience with Christianity only highlights the truth about sinful men and their need for a true Savior. Our duty is to proclaim the truth. God will deal with the myriad excuses and obstacles that mankind throws up in objection to Jesus Christ. The truth is the Truth regardless of our experiences.

Aren't they looking for love and not condemnation? Exactly. That is why it is important to teach people that they **ALREADY HAVE CONDEMNATION** whether they like it or not, realize it or not, believe it or not. People are looking for love. That is why we teach them the truth about heaven... and hell.

~~~~~

## Homosexuality - Can You Be Gay And Saved?

**Can a person be saved and be a homosexual? Is homosexuality a sin? How should Christians react towards homosexuals? Is a person born a homosexual? Is it impossible to change? (a compilation of several related questions)**

First, can a homosexual person be saved? I'll answer the question with question(s)... can a liar be saved? Can a thief be saved? Can an adulterer be saved? Well yes, of course, but for some reason we elevate homosexuality to some special class of immorality.

Granted, the social and individual consequences of homosexuality are devastating, but make no mistake... the heterosexual who lusts is sinning no less than the person who engages in a homosexual act. Sexual sin of all types is LOUDLY and PLAINLY condemned in Scripture because it is so destructive at all levels of society. It's not that homosexuality in particular is singled out by God.... SEXUAL IMMORALITY in general is given emphatic condemnation throughout the Bible. (Acts 15:29; Rom. 13:13; 1 Cor. 6:18; 1 Cor. 10:8; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:3; Jude 1:7)

Can a homosexual be a Christian? Depends on what you mean by that. A person can continue to have homosexual temptations (and maybe even fail at times) after becoming truly saved just the same way another person might struggle with gossip, lying or lust and fail some times. I don't read anywhere in Scripture

where one particular sin is singled out as the "you can't be saved now sin."

Is the person who willingly, continually and unrepentantly engages in the homosexual lifestyle a true Christian? Probably not, but only God knows for sure. But that is true for anyone who engages in continual sin without repentance and conviction; regardless of what sin it is. Again, homosexuality doesn't hold a special position of being a "worse sin" than any other with regards to salvation.

Is the act(s) of homosexuality wrong? The Bible is clear:

1 Timothy 1:8-11 - But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust. (NKJV)

1 Corinthians 6:9 - Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, (NKJV)

Romans 1:24-27 - Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the

creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. (NKJV)

Leviticus 18:22 - You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination. (NKJV)

Make no mistake, political correctness or not, homosexuality is plainly and directly condemned in Scripture. There is no wiggle room or exception.

But so is gossip, lying, slander, jealousy, anger, lust, etc. So Christians should not treat the homosexual like some special class of sinner. We should love the homosexual person, seeing them as God sees them... as a lost and dying sinner whom Christ loves and died for every bit as much as He did for the heterosexual sinner.

Is a person born homosexual? Doesn't matter. Is a thief born a thief? Is the gossip born a gossip? Is the angry man born with a temper? Doesn't matter. Is the fornicator born with raging sexual urges? Doesn't matter.

God's Word is still clear and absolute on these things, so to discuss whether a person is born that way, learns it, or chooses it... is irrelevant. To say you can't "help yourself" because you were "born that way" is no more of an excuse for the homosexual than it is for the fornicator who says they were

born with the urge for sex with lots of women. It's not their fault, they were born that way... let's get real. Fornication is a sin; homosexuality is a sin.

Can person be "changed" if they are homosexual? Yes. But again, don't classify that "change" as any different than any other sinner who is changed. God changes drug addicts, sexual deviants, murderers, thief, gossips, liars, trouble makers and all sorts of sinful types. Homosexuality is no different.

You can continue in your sin, or you can ask God to change you the same way the lust-filled heterosexual can ask God to change him. God works to change your heart, change your mind and change your desires. But it takes time. Just because it doesn't happen instantly, doesn't mean it can NOT or will NOT happen. Ask the person who is trying to "change" his bad temper, or "change" his lustful heart.

We can't sugarcoat God's opinion about homosexuality. Neither can we forget that the PERSON who struggles with homosexuality needs the gospel of Jesus Christ every bit as much as anyone else.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Homosexuality - Does The Bible Call It A Sin?

**A compilation of questions: Is homosexuality a sin? If we follow the Old Testament laws about homosexuality, don't we have to follow all the laws about killing**



**"ungodly" people too? God created homosexuals that way and "loves" them doesn't He? How can God condemn a person for the way they are born?**

Well first of all the "Old Testament" arguments are patent nonsense that if we "follow the Old Testament regarding homosexuality, then we also have to run around killing all non-Christians." The so-called "killing" being referred to (Israelites killing the inhabitants of Canaan ) was justified punishment from God on very wicked people. But let's throw out the OT completely just for the sake of argument.

There are plenty of New Testament verses that condemn homosexuality and all sexual immorality, which you can find with little effort (i.e., Rom. 1:24, 26, 27; 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:9, 10). The Bible never promotes marriage except in the traditional sense, and always speaks negatively of homosexuality, adultery and fornication.

As for the "homosexuals are born that way" argument.... So what? You don't even need to argue that point. What if they are? It doesn't matter. We are born with many negative tendencies, desires and traits. Does it make them all right? Why is homosexuality an exception? (answer: because we allow it)

If a person can be "born a homosexual," then any other sexual deviance can be argued in the same manner as being "natural." Pedophiles and rapists are "born" that way. They can't help it, or so the argument could easily be made (and

in fact is by many pedophilia-promoting groups and lawyers who defend rapists and molesters).

Yeah, "but that's different" is what you will hear. Really? How? We're all just randomly evolved chances of chemicals and mutations, right?

But that's another answer to another question. Tell me, exactly what is natural and normal about homosexuality, sodomy, lesbianism or bisexuality? It's plainly obvious to everyone that does NOT have an agenda that what is "natural" is heterosexuality. There is nothing physically or emotionally natural about homosexuality, PERIOD. It is SIN pure and simple; and just like lying, stealing or adultery... it is to be repented of and turned from.

The anatomy of appropriate sexual relations is obvious (males parts fit with female parts); procreation is essential to the survival of the human kind; and the natural differences of male and female parenting tendencies that make up the complete parental package (nurturing and discipline; emotion and logic; leadership and caretaking) are built into our gender specific character by God Himself.

We are born selfish, greedy, covetous, lying and lustful too... but it doesn't make it right, does it? You don't think we are born that way?? Really? Who teaches a two year old to lie, hit, bite, scream, be selfish and disobey? Why, they are born that way of course! So that makes it right! Right?

According to this argument of "we are born that way and can't help it," we have no business changing the way a two year old acts because it's

OBVIOUS they were born that way. They are too young to have their behavior blamed on environment, parents, or society.

So it DOESN'T matter if homosexuals are born that way. Or drug addicts. Or pedophiles, or thieves, or liars, or gossips. God still clearly pronounces it as an abominable, unnatural defilement of the human body and sexual immorality. So don't get distracted with the "born that way" argument. Concede the point. It doesn't matter.

The argument is patently ludicrous, but most Christians are overwhelmed with such groundless suppositions. We just aren't equipped to refute them adequately.

Note: many Christians at this point are guilty of putting "degrees" on sin. They don't see their lust (or gossiping, or greed) as being as spiritually bad as someone's homosexuality. The hypocrisy of this cripples the Christian witness to the homosexual community. Some Christians think that because homosexuality arguably has a greater negative societal consequence, that it is a "worse" sin than others.

Don't be intimidated by silly arguments be it about homosexuality, or "errors" in the Bible, or "proof" of evolution. BUT... you can't help being intimidated if you don't know your Scriptures, AND have a LOVING, but immovable commitment to obeying God and proclaiming the truth. The so-called Christians who parade around with "I hate Fags" signs and "Die queer" badges are shameful. A

homosexual is someone lost in sin, period; no different, or worse, than a thief or fornicator or a "good" person who is trying to get to heaven because they are "good."

Can you articulate why the Bible is trustworthy and supernaturally inspired? Can you tell a person why Scripture is authentic and give evidence that Jesus really existed and was the Son of God? If you can't defend your message properly, then you will suffer a credibility problem.

Now, having said that, let me be clear and say that we don't win souls and save the lost with apologetics. Even the demons believe in Jesus. Souls are saved by sharing the Gospel.

And that is really the key to having a discussion with a homosexual. You need them to see that they are a sinner who has broken God's law (and don't even use the homosexuality as the focus). Have they ever lied, cheated, stolen or gossiped? Why should God let them into heaven? Any of their sins makes them a sinner, not just the homosexuality.

Get off the homosexual issue and witness to them like anyone else. Once God gets a hold of them and gives them a heart transplant, the homosexual issue will take care of itself because they will have "eyes to see, and ears to hear."

It's very difficult today to stand firm against the popular immorality of the day. Don't worry about legislation, popular opinion or political correctness. Jesus didn't come to affect social change politically. He came to change hearts, and society would change as individuals change.

Just focus on one person, one heart at a time... plant the Gospel seed, water it with love and prayer... and let the Lord of the Harvest give life to the repentant heart.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Homosexuals – Will They Enter Heaven?

**Does Jesus say that a homosexual will not enter into Heaven? I have read in Romans 1:26-32 also 1Cor 6:9 concerning homosexuality. But Jesus only speaks to us in the four gospels, doesn't he, so therefore Jesus did not say that a homosexual wouldn't enter into Heaven. Am I right?**

This questions has lots of "mini" questions embedded in it, so let me see if I can dissect them.

First, you state that Jesus only speaks to us in the Gospels. NO, you are wrong. Jesus does NOT only speak to us in the four Gospels. Jesus directly and physically speaks in Acts and Revelation as well as the Gospels.

However, the foundation of the question is wrong to begin with. The entire Bible is, in the very real sense, all the words of Jesus. Jesus is "the Word" (John 1.1), Jesus is God... the Bible is the inspired, "God-breathed" written Word of God. To imply or believe that something the Apostle wrote is not "binding" because Jesus' own words aren't recorded as saying the same thing, is to open up the door to discard 90% of the Bible.

So no matter where we find it in the New Testament, the commands/instructions/principles are binding for Christians.

Will a homosexual enter heaven? No. And neither will fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, nor those who are being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; those full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents who are undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving and unmerciful (all contained in the same verses about homosexuality).

It's far too easy for Christians today to single out and demonize homosexuality while ignoring our own common sins that are just as horrible in God's eyes. The Church is full of sexual immorality, gluttony, materialism, laziness and hypocrisy.

But let a struggling homosexual come into our midst, and we will cast down hellfire and brimstone to get the evil Sodomite to renounce his ways.

Now, don't misunderstand me. Homosexuality is wrong. It is a sin. It has horrible and devastating effects on the individual and on our society. It is an abominable, detestable and utterly degenerate practice (just as all sin is in God's eyes).

A homosexual who has never truly repented of their sin will NOT enter heaven. And neither will any

unrepentent, willful, practicing \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank from the list above) enter heaven.

No one who dies in their sin having rejected Jesus Christ will enter heaven. Christians have done a poor thing by spotlighting homosexuality as the "sinner of choice" to beat up and stigmatize.

The doors of your Church should be a welcome refuge of comfort and hope for the homosexual who is desperate to find "something more" in life. We open our arms to broken families, recovering addicts and all sorts of people whose lives are messed up...

But let a known homosexual walk into our churches wondering what "Jesus" is all about, and we recoil in disgust and discomfort. It's almost as if we want them to "get right" before we will minister to them which is BACKWARDS since they have been drawn to Jesus BECAUSE they feel that something isn't right.

(I can hear the protests of "not my church;" maybe my personal experience is wrong about this, but in general I find Christians to be VERY hard and condemning towards the struggling homosexual).

Beloved, homosexual sin is no worse than the rampant "lust fest" we have going on in the Christian body today. Even in our fundamental, evangelical churches, the ladies, and especially our young ladies, wear provocative and alluring clothing (by God's standard, not the world's); our entertainment is just as sensual as the average non-saved person and our opinion of lust has been watered down significantly.

It is the "dirty little secret" that we are just beginning to expose and discuss that multitudes of Christian men (and women) are struggling with lust and sexual immorality of which there is to be NO HINT of in our lives (Eph 5.3). NO HINT, none. So if you are "good" compared to the next guy, it doesn't matter. NO HINT means NO HINT.

Why am I getting on such a "soap box" about this? Because I have FAR TOO OFTEN listened to Christians condemn, insult and ostracize "homosexual sin" while ignoring the "accepted" sins of today's church.

Matthew 7:5 - Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. (NKJV)

Two lessons: 1) The struggling homosexual needs the same love, mercy, grace and compassion as any other person seeking "new life", and 2) we should not ignore our common sins (lust, gluttony, pride, etc.) while smugly condemning others for their sin that we don't struggle with.

There are many other social, historical and moral issues to be discussed about homosexuality, but as far as salvation goes, the homosexual is as much a candidate for God's redeeming love as any other sinner.

(Note: this is not specifically addressed to the reader who wrote this question; remember that my answers are general in nature and not directed at who submitted the question).

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Honor – Call No One Father

**In the Bible it says call no one on earth Father. Does this apply to Priests?**

This is a puzzling verse to those who casually read it:

Matthew 23:9 - Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. (NKJV)

To answer your question in great politician tradition: "yes" and "no."

I have heard many times Christians whip this verse out to "prove" a wrong by the Catholic Church. It is a very poor use of the verse, so let's establish that right up front.

First of all, it is obvious that Jesus does not mean in a superficial way, "Call no man father." He Himself commands us to honor our "father" (Matt 15.4). Paul called Abraham the "father of all who believe" (Rom 4.11). He exhorted Timothy to exhort an older man as "father" (1Tim 5.1).

Obviously Paul and Jesus don't contradict themselves. Also, how illogical would it be if Jesus is telling us to NOT call our own father, "father" (after all, old Dad is included in "anyone on earth").

So what could this verse mean? If you take the verse in context, the issue at hand is about HONOR. Jesus is rebuking the people for over-honoring the religious rulers and rebuking the religious rulers for seeking honor.

There are appropriate times to honor men:

1 Timothy 5:17 - Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. (NKJV)

1 Timothy 5:1 - Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, (NKJV)

But we should always honor in proper perspective. Compared to Jesus, no man is worth honor. Compared to God, no man is worthy of honor.

Remember who Jesus was speaking about: the Sadducees and Pharisees who had usurped God's rightful place as the One who is due all honor, and they were elevating themselves as worthy of being thought of like God.

They were the "religious elite" and had convinced the people that they were above everyone else and special class of men. But Jesus set the record straight by telling the people the truth about the Sadducees and Pharisees:

Matthew 23:2-7 - saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi.' (NKJV)

After blistering them about their hypocrisy, notice that Jesus says they

love to be called "Rabbi" which means Teacher. This was a title of honor that the religious rulers coveted. And the people were all too happy to oblige and call them by their revered titles. So both parties are guilty, the people and the leaders.

Jesus goes on to say, "Don't call anyone Rabbi because there is only One teacher; don't call anyone father because you have only one Father in Heaven."

In other words, don't elevate men to places of honor that are due only to God, which happens often in religion.

So, back to the original question: does this apply to Catholic Priests? If calling a Catholic priest "father" elevates him to an improper position of honor that only God should have, if the Priest is a hypocrite or if the Priest does not truly know God - then YES, this verse would apply.

But it would just as well apply to the Televangelist who is overly honored and revered, especially if he is a false teacher or hypocrite. When people "over-honor" today's Christian personalities, they are wrong. When the Christian personality himself seeks and accepts this honor, he is wrong.

It would apply to any religious leader who is seeking honor and is honored in such a way that God is robbed of his glory whether it's a priest, preacher, Elder, bishop, pastor, pope or even a Bible teacher who writes a Devotional on the Internet!

God's servants should not be seeking honor for themselves. If they are, this verse applies. Let's conclude with what Jesus said the right attitude is:

Matthew 23:11-12 - But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. (NKJV)

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Humility - Washing Each Other's Feet

**A friend of mine wants to have foot washing at an upcoming fellowship time, and I'm a little uncomfortable with this. It has never been my understanding that foot washing was an ordinance, on the level of communion or baptism. I've always seen Jesus' foot washing story as an example of servitude toward one another, rather than a literal command to wash each other's feet. What do you think?**

First, let me define what a "foot washing" is for those folks who may not understand the question.

John 13:5 - After that, He (Jesus) poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. (NKJV)

Jesus was showing the reality of his servanthood, that he came to serve mankind; that the first will be last, the greatest will be least. He was leading by example.

In the culture of that time, people wore sandals. Their feet were filthy and dusty constantly. We are used to

nice, soft feet that are protected in shoes, socks and lotions. Not so in that day. Feet took a beating.

Only the lowly slaves, or lowest in a household would wash feet. It was considered the most humble of tasks; maybe akin to cleaning public toilets after people today.

You are correct in your understanding that foot washing is not on par with Communion or Baptism. It was never commanded for us to do as a ceremony or some sort of requirement.

The reason why some people do it today, is to follow Jesus example by becoming the humble servant, doing the things that the proud would consider "beneath" them. In that sense, there is certainly nothing "wrong" with doing it; but I'm not convinced that washing feet in Western culture ends up teaching or delivering the same lesson it did for Jesus.

You ask me, "What do you think about it?" A few thoughts....

Washing feet is not the same type of "chore" it was then; while feet can still get dirty, it is simply not a custom that has a whole lot of meaning to us today in Western culture.

However, it is STILL humbling to wash someone else's feet; it is also very humbling to ALLOW someone to wash your feet (unless you're paying \$150 at a salon!). Anything that produces humility can certainly be argued as being positive.

Perhaps your discomfort is from either not being used to this custom; or it COULD stem from our Western

pride that simply doesn't like either washing someone else's feet, or having someone wash ours.

You are correct in your statement that the point Jesus made was one of humble servanthood. In Jesus day, this was perfectly demonstrated by the foot washing.

So your friend, or a Pastor/Elder, wishing to make a statement about humility, or teach a lesson on servanthood, might think of what is considered to be the "lowly" tasks of our culture such as:

helping clean up a homeless person who hasn't bathed or washed in days or weeks

cleaning the home of an elderly person whose level of cleanliness (or ability to clean) has slipped with age

taking on the "menial" and "thankless" chores at church like cleaning bathrooms or taking out garbage

cleaning the pots and pans while everyone else at church is enjoying a nice fellowship meal together

The list could go on, but my point is: you don't actually have to wash feet to participate in the lesson Jesus was teaching. You can do this by asking God to reveal in your heart the most humbling service you could perform, and then go do it.

Jesus was saying by His act of washing feet that there is NOTHING too "lowly" for Christians when it comes to serving and helping other people.

My suggestion? Sit down with your friend, and the two of you come up

with a way to help or serve someone or some group that most people would "turn up their noses" at. For example, locate a really poor family, or some homeless folks, or an elderly person who lives in poor conditions... clean their house, get them a hot bath, give them a haircut and shave, trim their finger and toe nails, get them some new clothes.

Do something that truly shows that Christians are never "too good" to help anyone, no matter what shape they are in. This will be equivalent to "washing feet," and in my opinion, probably more effective. Washing feet was about REAL LIFE when Jesus did it; it wasn't simply a ceremonial or symbolic act.

Find some humble service that is REAL LIFE for today. This would honor Jesus' example.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Internet Protection

**How can we protect our kids from the Internet? There are many good things about it we want them to benefit from but we also want to keep them from the filth too. Any suggestions?**

I have been using and testing a piece of hardware for several months, and I think it is absolutely the BEST thing parents can use.

Now, in the interest of honesty, once I decided I loved this product, I signed up as a partner, and anyone who purchases one through the link I'll give you, is also making a donation to SeriousFaith. Just want to be very

transparent about those types of things.

Most parental control involves installing software on each computer that has to be configured, updated and used separately on each system.

The iBoss Home is a broadband wireless router unit that has the parental controls built into the interface. So it doesn't matter if you have one computer or 50 access your home network, they are all protected. With a very simple and easy to use interface, it allows you to:

- Easily Block Websites by Category
- Block Chat, Gaming and more
- Built-In Wireless-G Firewall Router
- Schedule Internet Access Times
- Easily Control When and Where Your Children Surf
- Protect Your Children from Online Predators
- Monitor Your Children's Online Activity
- Manage Time Spent Online
- Prevent Viruses & Spyware
- Share Your Internet with Multiple Computers (Wired & Wireless)
- One Device Protects and Manages All Your Computers
- Works with Mac, Windows, and Linux
- Absolutely No Software to Install
- Built-in Firewall Protects Against Online Threats
- Guard Your Children from Inappropriate Content

As my readers well know, I VERY VERY RARELY ever promote a product, but this device works so well, and serves such GREAT spiritual



purpose, that I would be negligent if I didn't tell you about it.

Here's a link to purchase that will result in a commission being paid to SeriousFaith:

<https://www.iphantom.com/action/s hopping/selectproducts?orderCodeNumber=7303285714&bo=2>

If you feel that is not appropriate, here is a direct link to their site:

<http://residential.iphantom.com/iBos sHomeProductResidential.html>

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Jesus - Did He Go To Hell?

**Jesus rose on the third day, where was he for those three days? I was taught that when he died on the cross, he was in hell--separated from God, which is our punishment, that he took our place. Someone told me that is not true, he never went to hell. Did Jesus go to hell?**

It is a common doctrine being taught today that Jesus went to hell for three days and got beat up on by Satan and the demons before becoming the first "born again" being.

It is taught primarily by those who follow Ken Hagin, Ken Copeland and similar proponents of the "Word Faith" movement.

There are many problems with this teaching that puts it plainly in the camp of false teaching:

The Bible does not teach anything even remotely close to this doctrine; it takes incredible amounts of implication, proof texting and distortion of Scriptures

Satan is not in hell, nor does he rule over hell; God is in control of hell

The Bible never says in any way that Jesus was beat up on by demons for three days who were throwing a party in hell because they had defeated Jesus

The idea the Jesus was "born again" is pure heresy clearly implying that 1) Jesus had a sin nature that needed to be regenerated, and 2) that Jesus is equal to MAN, not GOD.

What does the Bible teach?

Luke 23:46 - And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.'" Having said this, He breathed His last. (NKJV)

Jesus Himself plainly says, "Into Thy hands I commend my Spirit;" not into Satan's hands and hopefully God would come rescue Him. He clearly stated that He was going to the Father. Consider as well what Jesus told the thief:

Luke 23:43 - And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." (NKJV)

The thief would be where? When? With whom? In Paradise, that day, with Jesus. Does it make any sense, or can it be support Scripturally or even logically that Jesus went to spend a little time in Paradise before moving on to get His beating by Satan?

This verse alone DESTROYS the notion that Jesus went to hell for three days to be punished by Satan. It would be ludicrous to think He stopped by Paradise for a while before going.

Now, the difficult verse related to this matter is:

1 Peter 3:18-20 - 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, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. (NKJV)

These verses are sometimes used to support the idea the Jesus went to hell. Granted, we can't know a definitive interpretation of these verses, but we can know that it does NOT mean that Jesus went to hell and got beat up on by Satan for three days because the Bible does NOT support that idea for reasons listed above.

There are many opinions on this verse including:

Jesus went to declare victory over death to the Old Testament era persons

Jesus went to proclaim victory over the demons that were imprisoned in Noah's time

Jesus went to proclaim His Kingship to the lost and have every knee bow to Him who had died rejecting God and thus eternally condemned

There are pros and cons against each of those points. But the clear fact remains, it has NOTHING to do with Jesus going to hell for three days and being "born again" which is rank heresy.

In summary, Jesus did NOT go to hell and get beat up on by Satan. He was not "born again." He was not punished for three days as our replacement (His shed blood and death paid for our sins, and was complete when Jesus said, 'It is finished.' Jesus didn't say 'I'm getting started, only three more days.' He said, IT IS FINISHED!).

Jesus DID go to the Father; He was in Paradise with the thief; He did "preach to the spirits in prison;" and He did rise again in a glorified body on the third day.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Jesus - Why Was He Not Received?

**In Luke 9:53, why did the people of Samaria not receive Christ when he entered the village?**

Well the answer starts in verse 51:

Luke 9:51 - Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, (NKJV)

This was a milestone in Jesus' earthly ministry and began His journey to the Cross. It was time. That is why He "set his face" to Jerusalem - the time to

finish His business on earth had arrived.

When Jesus entered Samaria, the Samaritans knew of His plans to go to Jerusalem. This was an insult of sorts to them, because it represented a rejection of the worship of the Samaritans.

The Samaritans were the product of mixed marriages between Jews and non-Jews. This became a source of great disgrace in the eyes of the "pure" Jews who considered the Samaritans to be less than "dogs."

The Samaritans set up an alternate worship site on Mt. Gerizim that was a mixture of Jewish and pagan ritual. Jesus addressed this in John 4:20.

So when Jesus came to Samaria and it became known that He had "set His face" on Jerusalem to go there for worship, the Samaritans "did not receive Him"... in other words, they refused to welcome or show hospitality to the Lord; and most likely were pretty vocal about it.

What is interesting to me is the response from the Sons of Thunder (James and John), "Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven and burn them up?" (v.54).

The Lord gave them a stinging rebuke for their attitude from which we need to learn a lesson. When someone offends us, or even offends the Lord, we should not be too quick to "call down fire" on them but should instead pray for their salvation (v.56).

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Jesus – Was He A Jew?

**Someone suggested to me that Jesus was a Christian and not a Jew. This confused me to some degree. I realize He was born a Jew but His teachings were not consistent with the teachings of the Jewish leaders. Was Jesus a Jew?**

Yes, Jesus was most certainly a Jew - in fact a Jew of the highest order if there was such a thing. He is not a "Christian" (oops, that ought to spur some emails). First, the "Jewish" question:

He was the King of Israel (Matt 27:42); the Judge of Israel (Micah 5:1); the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Rev 5:5); the High Priest (Heb 3:1); the offspring of David (Rev 22:16); and the seed of Abraham (Gal 3:16).

That's just a taste of verses that declare His "Jewishness," but it will suffice.

The reason that Jesus' teaching seemed to conflict with the Jews at that time was twofold.

First, the Jews had become "religious," turning true faith in God into an endless list of external rules and regulations that served more to elevate the "elite" and confound the average person.

Second, Jesus came to fulfill the Jewish law and religion, not to sustain it or join in with the ruling elite.

Jesus represented the end of what the Jewish religion had become, so

naturally He was not exactly welcomed. Everything Jesus taught pointed out the hypocrisy and spiritual bankruptcy of the Jewish leadership.

Finally, Jesus is not a "Christian." He is the CHRIST. "Christian" means "little Christs" or "to be like Christ"... in other words, Christians are those who imitate and follow Jesus Christ.

Obviously, Jesus doesn't imitate and follow Himself. He's not a Christian - He is Christ. He is Jewish, always will be.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Jesus – I AM

### What is the meaning of John 8:59?

John 8:58-59 - Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by. (NKJV)

In verse 58, Jesus called Himself, "I AM." Every person there knew EXACTLY what that meant: Jesus was claiming to be God.

So much for all the claims today (sadly, even by some well-known 'christian' preachers) that "Jesus never claimed to be God." This passage is not only indisputable proof to the contrary, it is only one of many. But that's for another question.

The religious leaders of that day were self-righteous and hypocritical, so

they used Jesus' "I AM" proclamation as a reason to stir up the crowd to kill Him. As they picked up stones to murder Jesus, an extraordinary thing happens, though the Bible just simply mentions it matter-of-factly.

Jesus just walked right past them and through them as if they weren't there and as if they never saw Him.

Can you imagine an angry mob with sticks, knives and guns ready to kill you, and you just calmly walk right through the middle of them as if they were of no concern?

Of course Jesus could do this because He was God as He claimed, but even more important, and applicable to us, He did it because God's plan had not yet been fulfilled and they were NOT going to interrupt God's plan.

Same for us today. Don't fear what God has you do. You will be safe in God's arms NO MATTER WHAT THE THREAT OR DANGER until God's plans for your life are fulfilled and He decides to call you home.

Yes, you might face an unpleasant death for His sake someday, but your life will be preserved until the SECOND that God's will for your life is complete. I believe this so firmly that I'm quite sure this type of event can and does still occur today, especially out on the front lines of the missions work and in countries where Christians are horribly persecuted.

Did you know that hundreds of thousands of Christians are imprisoned, beaten, robbed and killed every year simply for their faith in Christ? Christians in the "free" parts of the world would do well to be aware of this and realize that it is only a

matter of time before persecution comes to us.

In that day, do you believe God will let you "walk through the murderous crowd" if it is His will for you to live on? I'm not asking if you believe this will ALWAYS happen... I'm asking if you believe it COULD still happen today?

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Jesus — Why Did God Kill Him?

**Yesterday was Easter and it got me thinking. Why would God create humans if He knew that we would sin and He would have to kill Jesus to save us?**

That is one of many questions and considerations about salvation that is simply mind-boggling. Jesus' death and God's whole plan for salvation raises MANY profound questions, and AMAZING considerations. I'll list a few that I think about and then offer some thoughts, but it would take shelves of books to really dig into any single one of these:

God created humans knowing they would sin; God created humans knowing He would have to sacrifice His Son to save them; In reality, God created humans knowing that God would have to kill Himself to save us; God and Jesus are one, but somehow God forsook Himself (Jesus) when God (Jesus) died on the Cross; Jesus was fully God and one with God while being fully human and experiencing

life, pain, suffering, joy, violence and temptation fully, as a human; We turned our backs on God, and He killed Himself so that He wouldn't have to kill us; We are incapable of choosing God on our own, so God draws us to Him and orchestrates/empowers our ability to choose/accept His free gift of eternal life. Total sovereignty that includes genuine choice at the human level is truly mind-boggling.

Have you ever really stopped and thought about what salvation means? Have you ever sat in amazement at "the deal" God offers?

We sin; We turn our back on God; We are evil; We would never choose God; We are prideful; We are rightfully condemned to hell; We would never be able to live a Godly life; We could never be like Jesus.

So what does God do?

God wants to save us (1Thess 5:9); God goes to extraordinarily unbelievable lengths to get us to turn to Him (Gal 1:4); God predestined our holiness (Eph 1:4); God draws us to Him and providentially arranges for us to be able to see Him and choose Him (John 6:44); God recreates our spirit and makes us new (Titus 3:5); God offers us the free gift of eternal life (John 11:25); God indwells us with Holy Spirit so we can have a Guide, Comforter, Teacher and Intercessor (1John 4:13); God preserves us, seals us, guarantees us, and secures our salvation (John 10:28; 2Cor 1:22; Titus 3:5); God orchestrates, ordains, designs and oversees every day, every step and every moment of our life in such a way that we can become more

and more like Jesus every day (Psalms 3:8; 2Tim 1:9).

See how amazing salvation really is?

We can't earn it; We don't deserve it; We can't understand why God would do it given what we do to Him

And yet,

He earned it for us; He gives us what we don't deserve (mercy, grace, eternal life) while taking what we do deserve on Himself (death, punishment); Even through the process of living our life after salvation, God forgives us and patiently teaches, corrects, guides and cares for us.

While there is much of the SPECIFIC reason that God does not choose to reveal to us at this point, I do believe there are principles and known attributes of God that allow us to begin to get a grasp on the "why?" of some of the most perplexing questions like, "Why did God create us if He knew we would sin and Jesus would have to die?"

### **God's Perfection**

We can be sure, even if we don't understand it all, that everything IS EXACTLY PERFECT in the overall design of humanity because God is perfect. That doesn't mean that death, evil and suffering are perfect. It means that God in His infinite wisdom knew just how/what/when/where/why things had to happen in order for His overall WILL to be accomplished and for things to turn out perfectly.

As humans, we simply cannot fathom the details, variables and unique make up of billions upon billions upon

billions of human lives. God can not only see each life in minute detail, He can see the infinite mesh of how they all interconnect and affect humanity as a whole. God knew that the way things have "gone down" from Eden to the Second Coming were EXACTLY the perfect plan... because God can do nothing less than be perfect.

### **God is Personal**

Why did God create humans and angels? One reason is for relationship. God is a personal God of relationship who wants not only to love but to be loved. To love, a creature must have the opportunity to love, and the genuine choice to love or not to love. Else, love is not real. If there is not a real choice NOT to love, there is no real choice to love, from a human perspective.

When God considered His desire for a love relationship (to receive love, and to give it), He knew that it came with the reality that some would choose to reject the relationship.

(Note for my Calvinist brethren: here we come to a point that will either send you packing, or keep you thinking. I agree that God is sovereign. Man can do nothing to cause, procure or secure his salvation. It is all God. And yet, in God's sovereignty, it is abundantly clear from both Scripture and the human experience that God lays the responsibility of CHOICE on man, bringing him to a point where each person must - within the framework of his human reality and the manifestation of his conscience and life - make a choice to be his own god [pride, my way, self] or to lay down "self" and submit in obedience to God's way [faith, repentance,

obedience]. No matter what theological terms it is couched in, FROM THE HUMAN PERSPECTIVE, we choose, or reject, God. We love Him or choose to love ourselves. This is what makes love genuine. This is what makes relationships real. I realize there are deep theological concepts, doctrines and principles by which it can be explained that via the sovereignty of God, salvation is ALL GOD and man is simply the benefactor of God's providence and love; but for the sake of this HUMAN LEVEL discussion, the CHOICE to obey God or reject Him is a REAL human consideration, and one that makes the reality of a genuine love relationship real.)

### **God's Love**

God's love meant that God would still want those who reject Him to be able to return to Him. The atoning sacrifice of Jesus was the perfect plan to keep in place His perfect love relationship while allowing sinful creatures to be justly reunited with Him.

I'm often amused (in a sad way) that people say, "It's unfair that God would send a person to hell for all eternity," or "A loving God would never send a person to hell." Well, guess what? First, God doesn't send anyone to hell. He simply pronounces the penalty for a person's OWN CHOICE to reject God and choose hell. That's like blaming the Judge for sentencing the murderer to death. "I can't believe that nice Judge would sentence that man to die for raping and killing that little girl." God doesn't send anyone to hell. People choose hell by rejecting God. God is simply being the good and

proper Judge by imposing the correct sentence.

Second, the whole idea that "a loving God would never send a person to hell" IGNORES WHAT GOD HAS DONE TO KEEP PEOPLE FROM GOING TO HELL. God offers eternal life to anyone who will receive it on His terms. He punished His own Son, who never committed a sin, so that your penalty would be paid. God is patient and over the course of someone's life, tirelessly knocks at the door of their heart and offers them forgiveness and eternal life. Millions of God's children have sacrificed and died to make known the way of salvation. Countless spiritual battles are fought to try and bring each and every person to salvation. No person can stand in front of God and say "unfair!"

How foolish to say "SEND" concerning hell, when the real word is "CHOOSE." We choose hell. God doesn't "send" people there in that sense. Only after they have rejected and rejected and rejected every attempt God makes, including the death of His own Son, does God finally say, "Have it your way," and "send" you to hell.

### **God's Glory**

God is glorified by what He does. He is glorified through the fruition of His will. He is glorified by the Kingship and dominion of His son. He is glorified by what Jesus has done, and the preeminence of Christ. He is glorified through salvation. He is glorified through worship, praise and obedience. God's glory is perfect and excellent. The story and process of salvation serve to bring the greatest glory to God and His Son.

Romans 6:4 - Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (NKJV)

-----  
God created humans knowing they would sin, and then He punished Himself to pay our penalty for that sin, so that God could have the love relationship with us (receiving love and giving love) that so characterizes our personal God.

How He could do this, I don't know. How He could kill Himself, I don't know. How He could forsake Himself, I don't know. How He could die and be resurrected and yet never cease to exist, I don't know. How He could be totally sovereign in our salvation and yet give us choice, I don't know.

But I know it's true. And Easter is a good time to remind us all of these incredible, amazing, awesome, confounding and eternal truths.

Titus 1:2 - in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began, (NKJV)

2 Thessalonians 2:13 - But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, (NKJV)

2 Peter 3:9 - The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. (NKJV)

John 3:16 - For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (NKJV)

2 Corinthians 1:22 - who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. (NKJV)

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Jesus - Born Again?

**I have heard it taught that Jesus "was crucified and descended into hell." I can't find references in the Bible that indicates that Jesus "descended into hell." What is your understanding of this? I've heard someone teach that Jesus was beat up in hell and born again. Have you heard that?**

I have been avoiding this topic for quite some time because I will invoke a FIRESTORM of criticism and "you're being divisive and judgmental" email. It has already been written about many times, but evidently it needs to be written about again, because I get this Topic repeatedly.

It has to do with Jesus descending to hell after his death on the cross. The idea comes primarily from these verses:

1 Peter 3:18-20 - 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, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were



disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah (NKJV)

First, we know that we are talking about the abode of the condemned (Hell, Hades, Torment) because the disobedient of Noah were either angels that overstepped their bounds with God, or the humans that were so wicked that God decided to destroy the whole world except Noah.

It's not my intent to declare what the phrase "preached to the spirits in prison" does mean, because there are multiple possible valid options. However, we can know for sure what it does NOT mean: it does NOT mean that Jesus went to hell for three days and got beat up on by Satan and then was born again.

This is a commonly held but extremely heretical version of Christ's death that is publicly taught today by many leaders of the Word Faith movement. This doctrine is so dangerous that I consider it of the upmost importance not to mince words or sugarcoat the topic.

With consideration to the average person in the Word Faith movement, most apparently have never heard it before, because I constantly have members of Word Faith churches tell me they've never heard it. This answer is also not a broad-stroke indictment on those who attend Word Faith churches (whether overtly Word Faith or just influenced by Word Faith). This answer is not questioning the motives, hearts or salvation of those in Word Faith churches. The sole purpose of this answer is to address a very dangerous and false

teaching that is taught by Word Faith leaders.

Jesus went to hell for three days and got beat up on by Satan and then was born again.

This is a well-documented position of many, if not most, of the well-known Word Faith teachers, and for it they have been the recipient of numerous rebukes and attempts at correction from other Christian leaders.

Let me repeat very clearly without compromise - the doctrine that says Jesus descended to hell, was beat up on by Satan and the demons for three days, and then was born again - constitutes ANOTHER GOSPEL and cannot result in salvation for any who actively teach or knowingly believe it. If you come to find out that a preacher or teacher holds this view, they should not be considered a part of true Christianity.

Now, those are very bold and somewhat harsh words, but they must be said. We're not talking about styles of music, hair length, tattoos or electric guitars in worship service. We're talking about robbing Jesus Christ of His deity and calling Him a sinner. That constitutes "another Gospel" which can in no way be tolerated or excused by true Christians.

Let me state the false doctrine I'm speaking of one more time to make sure no one misunderstands: "Jesus died on the cross, descended to hell for three days to get beat up on by Satan, then was filled with the Holy Spirit and born again."

I could write an extremely long answer on the theological reasons

why this doctrine is dangerous and unbiblical, but space does not permit. So it will suffice to give several simple foundational considerations that more than make the point:

Yes, Jesus descended to "prison" (some part of hell) to "PREACH to the spirits" NOT "get beat up on by Satan." There is no Biblical support anywhere for this idea. Who the "spirits" are is a matter of question, but it still remains that He descended in victory to preach, not to get "beat up."

Satan does not rule hell. Satan has no authority over Christ anywhere, anytime. Satan's domain, temporarily, is the earth. Hell is Satan's future damnation, not his personal playground.

Finally, and the point that definitively makes this doctrine "another Gospel:" for a man to teach that Jesus was "filled with the Spirit" and "born again" is to declare that Jesus didn't just DIE FOR SINS but that Jesus Christ WAS a sinner who needed to have the supernatural regeneration (Titus 3.5; "born again") that all sin-cursed descendants of Adam are in need of (you and me!).

Do not pass this over lightly. First of all, it is completely unsupported Biblically that Jesus went to hell to get "beat up" by Satan. That makes this doctrine right off the bat a false teaching.

However, to add the "Jesus was born again" aspect is to now step over into teaching a FALSE GOSPEL which cannot result in salvation for those who believe it.

The purpose of this teaching is to lower Christ to man's level and raise man to Christ's level.

This teaching serves to lower Christ to man's status who has the need to be born again, which in turn elevates man to Christ's equal... that is the real essence and agenda of this teaching.

The same folks that teach this doctrine also teach that we are "little gods" which makes perfect sense given this doctrine. Lower Christ, raise man. Man is equal to Christ. Man is God. We're back in the Garden of Eden listening to Satan lie to Eve... "You can be like God."

I have communicated this to many people over the years, even friends in Word Faith churches, and often I hear "I've never heard anyone teach that doctrine."

If it could be adequately cited that one popular major leader of a worldwide movement (Word Faith) teaches this doctrine, would that be enough to at least get you to investigate further?

Jesus supposedly "put Himself into the hands of Satan when He went to that cross, and took that same nature that Adam did [when he sinned]." (Kenneth Copeland, The Incarnation (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1985, audiotape #01-0402), side 1.)

"The day that Jesus was crucified, God's life, that eternal energy that was His from birth, moved out of Him [The deity removed from Christ; Jesus is no longer God according to Copeland; BR] and He accepted the very nature of death itself." (Kenneth Copeland, "The Price of It All," Believer's Voice of Victory, September 1991, 3.)

"Satan conquered Jesus on the Cross and took His spirit to the dark regions of hell" (Kenneth Copeland, Holy Bible: Kenneth Copeland Reference Edition (Kenneth Copeland, Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1991), 129.)

"He [Jesus] allowed the devil to drag Him into the depths of hell....He allowed Himself to come under Satan's control...every demon in hell came down on Him to annihilate Him....They tortured Him beyond anything anybody had ever conceived. For three days He suffered everything there is to suffer." (Kenneth Copeland, "The Price of It All," 3.)

"How did Jesus then on the cross say, 'My God.' Because God was not His Father any more [The deity removed from Christ; Jesus is no longer God according to Copeland; BR]. He took upon Himself the nature of Satan. And I'm telling you Jesus is in the middle of that pit. He's suffering all that there is to suffer, there is no suffering left . . . apart from Him. His emaciated, little wormy spirit is down in the bottom of that thing and the devil thinks He's got Him destroyed. But, all of a sudden God started talking." (Kenneth Copeland, Believer's Voice of Victory (television program), TBN, 21 April 1991.)

"That Word of the living God went down into that pit of destruction and charged the spirit of Jesus with resurrection power! Suddenly His twisted, death-wracked spirit began to fill out and come back to life....Jesus was born again -- the firstborn [again, "firstborn" is construed to mean "born again" which is does NOT in Scripture; it means 'preeminent'; BR] from the dead the Word calls Him -- and He

whipped the devil in his own backyard." (Kenneth Copeland, "The Price of It All," 4-6.)

"Jesus is no longer the only begotten Son of God" (Kenneth Copeland, NOW WE ARE IN CHRIST JESUS (Ft. Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1980), 24.)

"You don't have a god in you, you are one." (Kenneth Copeland, "The Force Of Love" tape # 02-0028)

"I say this with all respect so that it don't upset you too bad, but I say it anyway. When I read in the Bible where he [Jesus] says, 'I Am,' [Copeland teaches that Jesus never claimed to be God, and yet 'I AM' is the name of God, and every Bible student knows that when Jesus said 'I AM', He was claiming to be God; Copeland then claims to be "I AM" too which is utter blasphemy; BR] I just smile and say, 'Yes, I Am, too!'" (Kenneth Copeland, "Believer's Voice of Victory" broadcast on TBN, recorded 7/9/87)

"God's reason for creating Adam was His desire to reproduce Himself. I mean a reproduction of Himself. He [Adam] was not a little like God, he was not almost like God, He was not subordinate to God even." (Kenneth Copeland, "Following the Faith of Abraham" tape # 01-3001)

"Adam is God manifested in the flesh" (Kenneth Copeland, "Following the Faith of Abraham" tape # 01-3001)

"Don't be disturbed when people accuse you of thinking you're God. The more you get to be like Me, the more they're going to think that way of you. They crucified Me for claiming that I was God. But I didn't claim I was God [any serious Bible reader knows how

shockingly false that statement is; Jesus claimed many times openly to be God. BR]; I just claimed I walked with Him and that He was in Me. Hallelujah. That's what you're doing." (Kenneth Copeland, "Voice of Victory" Vol. 15, No. 2, 2/87)

"You don't have a God in you; you are one," (Kenneth Copeland, The Force of Love (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1987, audiotape #02-0028), side 1.)

"And the whole New Testament calls Him the first-born....The word "born" began to ring in my spirit; it just began to roll around: born, born. I never had let Him go through that in my own thinking....And while I was laying there thinking about these things, the Spirit of God spoke to me. And He said, "Son, realize this: Now follow Me in this, don't let your tradition trip you up." He said, "Think this way: A twice-born man whipped Satan in his own domain." And I threw my Bible down. I said, "What?" He said, "A born-again man defeated Satan. The first-born of many brethren defeated him." [again, "firstborn" is construed to mean "born again" which is does NOT in Scripture; it means 'preeminent'; BR] He said, "You are the very image and the very copy of that one." I said, "Goodness gracious, sakes alive!" And I began to see what had gone on in there, and I said, "You don't mean--you couldn't dare mean, that I could have done the same thing?" He said, "Oh, yeah, if you'd had the knowledge of the Word of God that He did, you could have done the same thing, 'cause you're a reborn man, too." [There is BIG difference between "first born" which means preeminent, and "born again" which means regenerated; BR]

(Kenneth Copeland, "What Happened from the Cross to the Throne" tape # 02-0017)

Christ "had no innate supernatural powers [Christ was not always God according to Copeland; BR]. He had no ability to perform miracles until after He was anointed by the Holy Spirit." (Kenneth Copeland, "Question & Answer," Believer's Voice of Victory, August 1988, 8.)

Mr. Copeland by all accounts seems to be a moral and sincere man. I'm not questioning his heart, motive or character. Only God knows the heart. I am considering his public message.

He is arguably the foremost leader today of the Word Faith movement and his teachings and methods of using the Bible to support his prosperity and faith ideas are repeated and emulated in tens of thousands of churches all over the world. His teaching is absorbed globally across the electronic airwaves every hour of every day.

The rank-and-file Word Faith church member may not have ever heard this doctrine preached even though it is publicly adhered to and promoted by a "who's who" of Word Faith teachers: Hagin, Hinn, Dollar, Crouch, Meyers just to name a few.

Now you personally HAVE been made aware of this doctrine. Should it be ignored? Should it be passed off as irrelevant? Should my answer be ignored as typical "heresy hunting?"

It is one thing to grant liberty about ideas you might have doctrinal disagreement with (i.e., tithing, miracles, supernatural gifts, prosperity teaching, etc.); but it is

quite another to ignore or be passive about:

- a doctrine that denies Christ's deity,
- turns the Lord into a Sinner,
- makes Jesus merely a man in need of being born again,
- and drags the Savior down to the level of sin-filled man...

All for one purpose: to elevate man to equality with God. Again, we can hear the whispers of Satan: "you can be like God."

If this many documented quotes aren't enough to establish that this doctrine is taught, how much evidence does it take? If doctrine does not constitute "another gospel" what does? If this teaching does not disqualify someone as Christian, how heretical or blasphemous do you have to get to cross the line?

Where do you draw the line with false teaching? Heresy? Blasphemy? Read 2 Peter, Chapter 2.

~~~~~

Jesus Christ – Beat Up On By Satan?

I've heard some televangelists say this and I understand it is the belief of Joyce Meyer and others that during the 3 days from His death to His resurrection, Jesus Christ went to hell, supposedly to obtain the keys of death and hell. I can find no scripture anywhere in the Bible

that Satan was ever given the keys to the gates of hell. I also hear them quite entertainingly talk of how Jesus was beat up on by the demons, and then was "reborn" as the Holy Spirit rescued Him. Have you heard of this teaching?

Yes, I have. While many misinterpretations, exaggerations and misapplied Scriptures can simply fall into the category of "false teaching" or "misunderstood doctrine," this particular teaching you ask about lands squarely in the camp of NON-CHRISTIAN. It constitutes a false Christ, thus a false Gospel and cannot be accepted or tolerated as Biblical or Truth.

That's a strong statement yes, but it must be made.

Over emphasis on materialism is one thing. Disagreements over spiritual gifts are one thing. Conflicts over points of Christian living and practice are one thing. BUT CHANGING THE NATURE OF CHRIST CONSTITUTES SOMETHING OTHER THAN GENUINE CHRISTIANITY AND MUST BE CONFRONTED, CONDEMNED AND PURGED FROM THE TRUE PURSUIT OF BIBLICAL SALVATION.

Now, having prefaced my upcoming comments with WHY I am so strongly outspoken about the teaching you speak of, let me proceed with telling you what is wrong with this "Jesus died, went to hell, got beat up and was born again" business.

Let me state the false doctrine I'm speaking of one more time to make sure no one misunderstands: "Jesus died on the cross, descended to hell

for three days to get beat up on Satan, then was filled with the Holy Spirit and born again."

It is taught primarily by those who follow Ken Hagin, Ken Copeland and similar proponents of the "Word Faith" movement. With consideration to the average person in the Word Faith movement, most apparently have never heard it before because I constantly have members of Word Faith churches tell me they've never heard it. This answer is not a broad-stroke indictment on those who attend Word Faith churches (whether overtly Word Faith, or just influenced by Word Faith). This answer is not questioning the motives, hearts or salvation of those in Word Faith churches. The sole purpose of this answer is to address a very dangerous and false teaching that is taught by Word Faith leaders (reference the list of quotes by one popular Word Faith teacher following this answer).

There are many problems with this teaching which put it plainly in the camp of false teaching:

The Bible does not teach anything even remotely close to this doctrine; it takes incredible amounts of implication, prooftexting and distortion of Scriptures

Satan is not in hell, nor does he rule over hell; God is in control of hell

The Bible never says in any way that Jesus was beat up on by demons for three days who were throwing a party in hell because they had defeated Jesus

The idea the Jesus was "born again" is pure heresy clearly implying that 1) Jesus had a sin nature that needed to

be regenerated, and 2) that Jesus is equal to MAN, not GOD.

What does the Bible teach?

[Luke 23:46](#) - And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.' " Having said this, He breathed His last. (NKJV)

Jesus Himself plainly says, "Into Thy hands I commend my Spirit;" not into Satan's hands and hopefully God would come rescue Him. He clearly stated that He was going to the Father. Consider as well what Jesus told the thief:

[Luke 23:43](#) - And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." (NKJV)

The thief would be where? When? With who? In Paradise, that day, with Jesus. Does it make any sense, or can it be support Scripturally or even logically that Jesus went to spend a little time in Paradise before moving on to get His beating by Satan?

This verse alone DESTROYS the notion that Jesus went to hell for three days to be punished by Satan. It would be ludicrous to think He stopped by Paradise for a while before going.

Now, the difficult verse related to this matter is:

[1 Peter 3:18-20](#) - 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, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of

Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. (NKJV)

These verses are sometimes used to support the idea the Jesus went to hell. Granted, there is no definitive interpretation of these verses, but we can know that it does NOT mean that Jesus went to hell and got beat up on by Satan for three days because the Bible does NOT support that idea for reasons listed above.

There are many opinions on this verse including:

Jesus went to declare victory over death to the Old Testament era persons

Jesus went to proclaim victory over the demons that were imprisoned in Noah's time

Jesus went to proclaim His Kingship to the lost and have every knee bow to Him who had died rejecting God and thus eternally condemned

There are pros and cons against each of those points. But the clear fact remains, it has NOTHING to do with Jesus going to hell for three days and being "born again" which is rank heresy. It is completely unsupported Biblically that Jesus went to hell to get "beat up" by Satan. That makes this doctrine right off the bat a false teaching.

However, to add the "Jesus was born again" aspect, is to now step over into teaching a FALSE GOSPEL which cannot result in salvation for those who believe it.

The purpose of this teaching is to lower Christ to man's level and raise man to Christ's level.

This teaching serves to lower Christ to man's status who has the need to be born again, which in turn elevates man to Christ's equal... that is the real essence and agenda of this teaching.

Lower Christ, Raise Man.

The same folks that teach this doctrine also teach that we are "little gods" which makes perfect sense given this doctrine. Lower Christ, raise man. Man is equal to Christ. Man is God. We're back in the Garden of Eden listening to Satan lie to Eve... "You can be like God."

Jesus did NOT go to hell and get beat up on by Satan. He was not "born again." He was not punished for three days as our replacement. His shed blood and death paid for our sins and was complete when Jesus said, "It is finished". Jesus didn't say, "I'm getting started, only three more days". He said, "IT IS FINISHED!"

Jesus DID go to the Father; He was in Paradise with the thief; He did "preach to the spirits in prison;" and He did raise again in a glorified body on the third day.

Let me repeat very clearly without compromise - the doctrine that says Jesus descended to hell, was beat up on by Satan and the demons for three days and then was born again - constitutes ANOTHER GOSPEL and cannot result in salvation for any who actively teach or knowingly believe it. If you come to find out that a preacher or teacher holds this view, they should not be considered teachers of true Christianity.

It is one thing to grant liberty about ideas you might have doctrinal disagreement with (i.e., tithing, miracles, supernatural gifts, prosperity teaching, etc.); but it is quite another to ignore or be passive about:

a doctrine that denies Christ's deity,

turns the Lord into a Sinner,

makes Jesus merely a man in need of being born again,

and drags the Savior down to the level of sin-filled man...

All for one purpose: to elevate man to equality with God. Again, we can hear the whispers of Satan: "You can be like God."

Ken Copeland teaching this doctrine; Mr. Copeland by all accounts seems to be a moral and sincere man. I'm not questioning his heart, motive or character. I use Copeland as the example because most of the Word Faith teachers take their cues from him. Only God knows the heart. I am considering his public message:

The Kenneth Copeland quotes are also in a previous answer...

Jesus supposedly "put Himself into the hands of Satan when He went to that cross, and took that same nature that Adam did [when he sinned]." (Kenneth Copeland, *The Incarnation* (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1985, audiotape #01-0402), side 1.)

"The day that Jesus was crucified, God's life, that eternal energy that was His from birth, moved out of Him [The

deity removed from Christ; Jesus is no longer God according to Copeland; BR] and He accepted the very nature of death itself." (Kenneth Copeland, "The Price of It All," *Believer's Voice of Victory*, September 1991, 3.)

"Satan conquered Jesus on the Cross and took His spirit to the dark regions of hell" (Kenneth Copeland, *Holy Bible: Kenneth Copeland Reference Edition* (Kenneth Copeland, Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1991), 129.)

"He [Jesus] allowed the devil to drag Him into the depths of hell....He allowed Himself to come under Satan's control...every demon in hell came down on Him to annihilate Him....They tortured Him beyond anything anybody had ever conceived. For three days He suffered everything there is to suffer." (Kenneth Copeland, "The Price of It All," 3.)

"How did Jesus then on the cross say, 'My God.' Because God was not His Father any more [The deity removed from Christ; Jesus is no longer God according to Copeland; BR]. He took upon Himself the nature of Satan. And I'm telling you Jesus is in the middle of that pit. He's suffering all that there is to suffer, there is no suffering left . . . apart from Him. His emaciated, little wormy spirit is down in the bottom of that thing and the devil thinks He's got Him destroyed. But, all of a sudden God started talking." (Kenneth Copeland, *Believer's Voice of Victory* (television program), TBN, 21 April 1991.)

"That Word of the living God went down into that pit of destruction and charged the spirit of Jesus with resurrection power! Suddenly His

twisted, death-wracked spirit began to fill out and come back to life....Jesus was born again -- the firstborn [again, "firstborn" is construed to mean "born again" which is does NOT in Scripture; it means 'preeminent'; BR] from the dead the Word calls Him -- and He whipped the devil in his own backyard." (Kenneth Copeland, "The Price of It All," 4-6.)

"Jesus is no longer the only begotten Son of God" (Kenneth Copeland, NOW WE ARE IN CHRIST JESUS (Ft. Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1980), 24.)

"You don't have a god in you, you are one." (Kenneth Copeland, "The Force Of Love" tape # 02-0028)

"I say this with all respect so that it don't upset you too bad, but I say it anyway. When I read in the Bible where he [Jesus] says, 'I Am,' [Copeland teaches that Jesus never claimed to be God, and yet 'I AM' is the name of God, and every Bible student knows that when Jesus said 'I AM', He was claiming to be God; Copeland then claims to be "I AM" too which is utter blasphemy; BR] I just smile and say, 'Yes, I Am, too!'" (Kenneth Copeland, "Believer's Voice of Victory" broadcast on TBN, recorded 7/9/87)

"Gods reason for creating Adam was His desire to reproduce Himself. I mean a reproduction of Himself. He [Adam] was not a little like God, he was not almost like God, He was not subordinate to God even". (Kenneth Copeland, "Following the Faith of Abraham" tape # 01-3001)

"Adam is God manifested in the flesh" (Kenneth Copeland, "Following the Faith of Abraham" tape # 01-3001)

"Don't be disturbed when people accuse you of thinking you're God. The more you get to be like Me, the more they're going to think that way of you. They crucified Me for claiming that I was God. But I didn't claim I was God [any serious Bible reader knows how shockingly false that statement is; Jesus claimed many times openly to be God. BR]; I just claimed I walked with Him and that He was in Me. Hallelujah. That's what you're doing." (Kenneth Copeland, "Voice of Victory" Vol. 15, No. 2, 2/87)

"You don't have a God in you; you are one," (Kenneth Copeland, The Force of Love (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1987, audiotope #02-0028), side 1.)

"And the whole New Testament calls Him the first-born....The word "born" began to ring in my spirit; it just began to roll around: born, born. I never had let Him go through that in my own thinking....And while I was laying there thinking about these things, the Spirit of God spoke to me. And He said, "Son, realize this: Now follow Me in this, don't let your tradition trip you up." He said, "Think this way: A twice-born man whipped Satan in his own domain." And I threw my Bible down. I said, "What?" He said, "A born-again man defeated Satan. The first-born of many brethren defeated him." [again, "firstborn" is construed to mean "born again" which is does NOT in Scripture; it means 'preeminent'; BR] He said, "You are the very image and the very copy of that one." I said, "Goodness gracious, sakes alive!" And I began to see what had gone on in there, and I said, "You don't mean--you couldn't dare mean, that I could have done the same thing?" He said, "Oh, yeah, if

you'd had the knowledge of the Word of God that He did, you could have done the same thing, 'cause you're a reborn man, too." [There is BIG difference between "first born" which means preeminent, and "born again" which means regenerated; BR] (Kenneth Copeland, "What Happened from the Cross to the Throne" tape # 02-0017)

Christ "had no innate supernatural powers [Christ was not always God according to Copeland; BR]. He had no ability to perform miracles until after He was anointed by the Holy Spirit." (Kenneth Copeland, "Question & Answer," Believer's Voice of Victory, August 1988, 8.)

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Judging - Are Christians Supposed To Judge?

I have received several emails about being "judgmental" when I speak directly about someone like Oprah, Joel Osteen or the Mormons. Am I being judgmental? Are Christians supposed to judge? Is judging ever called for and proper?

Christians, and good people in general from a civil viewpoint, are called to judge RIGHTLY, which is evaluating the FRUIT (behavior, choices, production) of good and evil. Why are we able to "judge" Osama Bin Laden as "bad?" Why? His actions.

Take for example my [recent comments about Oprah](#). I have been

called judgmental for them. We judge Oprah because of her public teaching. You judge her public words. You judge her publicly proclaimed false teaching as compared to a RIGHT standard (God's Word). While we do not judge the heart (this is God's domain), the actions and words of a person betray the content of the heart. Even still, we only pronounce judgment on the actions and the results of those actions, while leaving God to judge the STANDING of any given person in His eyes.

Wrong is wrong. Ungodliness is ungodliness. False religion is false religion. We are called to judge it as such, and rightly judge PERSONS who promote and practice it. We don't judge their souls, we judge their fruit, their choices, their action. God judges the soul.

Christian should quit sugar coating this fact and shriveling every time someone throws the "judgmental" label at them. Too many people avoid the Truth because they have been brainwashed by this "we are not supposed to judge" fallacy. The Bible tells us to judge, but NOT to judge unrighteously or hypocritically. In other words, you don't judge with a standard you aren't willing to apply to yourself (hypocrisy), and you don't judge by any standard other than God's (righteousness).

(Matthew 7:1-5) - "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me

remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." (NKJV);

To interpret this as saying "never judge" is sheer foolishness. If someone rapes your baby daughter, will you not judge that as evil? If someone tempts your teenager into drugs and sexual promiscuity, will you not judge that as evil? If someone shoots up your local school and kills a bunch of kids, will you not judge that as evil?

If someone sticks a needle in the brain stem of a baby in the womb and sucks its brains out as a "choice," will you not judge that evil? If politicians lie and take hard earned money from one person to give to the lazy person who will vote for them, will you not judge that as evil?

We make judgments all day long. Even the so-called "tolerant and non-judgmental" routinely judge me (and Christians in particular) as "self-righteous, bigoted, intolerant extremists." Pretty amazing "judgment" for people who daily declare that we are never supposed to "judge" people! Ironically, the most judgmental people I've encountered are always they ones who cry "don't judge" the loudest.

I approach it this way when I hear the "don't judge" nonsense thrown at me in a conversation:

"You say 'don't judge.' Would you judge Hitler as evil? Jeffrey Dahmer? Osama Bin Laden? Rapists? Murders? Why? Because of their actions. Why would you not 'judge' as evil someone

who denies God and purposely leads people to hell? Yes, I JUDGE the actions of a person who is denying Christ and causing people to doubt God. The person doing this is doing evil and we should not hesitate to say so any more than we should hesitate to judge a pedophile, rapist or terrorist as evil. In contrast, the denier of Christ, and the teacher of false religion is MORE evil than any of those because they lead people to eternal damnation. So whether it's Osama Bin Laden killing people with guns or Oprah deceiving people with false religion, we JUDGE it as evil and react accordingly."

Be discerning. Keep in mind that Christians will alienate family by speaking the truth in love. Speak in love, but don't sugarcoat or be intimidated by the "judgmental" accusation. It is a strong man that causes Christians to tremble and it should not. It is one of the weakest and most absurd accusations there is, which says a lot, doesn't it?

People who have this "you shouldn't judge mentality" are usually very hard to talk to, and you'll almost always get back answers like "well I feel" and "that's just what you believe." I posted a blog about "Truth" that will help you understand your responsibility to people like this. Remember, YOU cannot get through to people. Only God can. YOU are called to lovingly, without compromise, present the truth. They may end up angry at you, dislike you, and even "judge" you... that is a price we pay as Christians.

<http://www.brentriggsblog.com/Default.asp?t=Why-Don't-They-Get-It?!&c=Truth&ItemID=134&CategoryID=165>

Through it all, just stay loving, but firm... compassionate but uncompromising... and let God deal the heart. But learn not to “melt” when you get the silly “don’t judge” comment thrown at you.

What are your questions about “judging”?

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Judgment – God’s Judgment

Can you explain Gods judgment to me? The Bible says if we ask for forgiveness, it is thrown as far as the east to the west - forgotten... so in your opinion, how will we be judged?

There are three Judgments to consider.

Judgment of the unsaved:

Matthew 7:21-23 - “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (NKJV)

Matthew 25:46 - “And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (NKJV)

Matthew 13:40-42 - Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His

angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. (NKJV)

Romans 2:5 - But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, (NKJV)

Judgment of the saved:

Revelation 3:5 - He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. (NKJV)

Romans 8:33-35 - Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (NKJV)

2 Timothy 4:8 - Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. (NKJV)

Judgment of the works of the saved:

1 Corinthians 3:12-15 - Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it,

because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (NKJV)

Here we see clearly that even if a saved person has works that were done selfishly and by the wrong motives, he does not lose his salvation. He will suffer the loss of reward and opportunity when those works are "burned up" ... but his eternal salvation is secure because of Jesus Christ.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Justice – Why Did Jesus Die?

Why did Jesus have to die?

Because God is just. (Deut 32:4)

Imagine a human Judge. When he is considering the crimes of a rapist or murderer, does the Judge have the right to say, "Aw, that's okay. I'm a nice guy. I'll just let you off the hook this time because I'm a loving person."

Is that just? Is that fair? Is that right? Of course not.

Now, consider that God is the PERFECT JUDGE. Can He be perfect in His judgment if He just looked down on our sinfulness and said, "That's okay. I'm a God of Love. I'll just overlook your sin. Go on now."

1 Peter 1:17 - And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges

according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; (NKJV)

You might say, "Well, for me that would be okay because I'm basically good. Of course that would not be okay if I were a murderer, liar, blasphemer or adulterer. But that's not me. I'm a good person. God could just forgive me."

You're not so bad, right? Me either. Wait... let's look again.

Have you ever told ONE lie? I have. What does that make you and me? How many lies does it take to be a LIAR? One! You're a liar. So am I.

Have you ever lusted, even once? Me too. We are adulterers according to Jesus. Have you used God's name in vain, casually or without respect? Yeah, me too. We are blasphemers. Have you ever hated someone for even a moment when they wronged you terribly? That's the same as murder. Have you ever stolen ANY thing (taxes, bubble gum, your employer's time)? Hello, Mr. Thief.

So far we are admittedly liars, blasphemers, murderers, thieves and adulterers. Do I need to keep going, or are you convinced now you're NOT so good? (Matt 19:17)

What about this idea of "Well, God is God, He can just forgive us"? This betrays a lack of understanding concerning justice. When a law is broken, the penalty for it MUST be paid. There must be repayment for violation. If there isn't, the violation or sin has become ACCEPTED or OVERLOOKED, and God can NOT accept sin. You must understand this point.

GOD CANNOT JUST ACCEPT SIN. IT MUST BE PUNISHED. IT MUST BE PAID FOR. THE PENALTY MUST BE EXACTED. THE DEBT MUST BE SATISFIED.

If this did NOT occur, then God would simply be accepting or overlooking sin, and a holy God can NOT accept sin. It would make Him unholy.

Revelation 15:4 - Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, For Your judgments have been manifested." (NKJV)

The penalty for sin is death. Why? Because sin cannot exist in God's presence. It must die. We are by nature instilled with sin. All the human race is. So there are only two options: humans can "pay" for their sin by eternally being punished, or someone SINLESS can pay our penalty for us.

None of us could pay for sin because we all DESERVE to die for our sin. We can't pay for our penalty, much less others.

1 Corinthians 15:21-22 - For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. (NKJV)

That is why Jesus had to die. That is why He had to become a human, live a perfect life, and then die. His death, undeserved because He never sinned, satisfied God's JUSTICE.

God can now look at you and me and say, "I can't forgive you of your sin for no reason, but I can forgive you based on the fact that the penalty you

deserve has already been paid." (Rom 8:33; Isa 53:11; Isa 61:10; Jer 23:6; Ro 3:22; 5:18; 1Co 1:30; 2Co 5:21)

God's JUSTICE demanded that He sacrifice His own Son lest every single human end up in hell for all eternity. Here's where the "God is love" part comes in. God's love could not leave us to all die in our sin (John 3:16). So He did the only thing that could be done to pay the penalty His perfect justice demanded for our sin.

And that is why Jesus had to die.

~~~~~

## Killing – Is War Wrong?

**With the war going on, I was wondering if it was right to be in the military since the Bible says not to kill. As a Christian, can I put myself in that situation?**

Answering the question about killing still does not answer the question about military service, because most people who serve in the military are never called on to kill anyone (even though it could be argued that they "support" killing).

There are actually several questions within your question, but the one I want to address first (then conclude by answering yours directly) is this:

What kind of "killing" does the 6th Commandment ("thou shalt not kill") prohibit? Are there different kinds of "killing"?

Let's start with the latter. Consider these types of "taking a life":

- A soldier shoots an enemy soldier
- A government executes a prisoner
- God orders the killing of an entire group of people
- A man shoots another man for personal revenge
- A woman kills her unborn child

What are the differences here?

(assume typical circumstances in our examples) A soldier kills out of duty and service. A government executes a prisoner for the sake of justice. God ordered the Israelites to annihilate certain groups of people for His own reasons (which we know, but are too lengthy to describe here).

Is all of this "killing" wrong in light of the 6th Commandment? If one of the examples is an "exception to the rule" then it would not be logical to automatically declare "all" killing to be wrong. Are the exceptions based on situations?... OR, is the Commandment a prohibition against a certain type of killing (which we will address in a minute).

Of course, no man can pronounce "God was wrong" when He directed the Israelites to kill certain peoples. So we have an exception to "thou shalt not kill." It is irrational to claim that God pronounced all "killing" as wrong then turned right around and commanded His very own people to sin against His own commandments.

So it stands that there must be different types of "killing" (which is easily demonstrated), and the 6th Commandment refers to one or more of those types. Let's look again:

- A soldier shoots an enemy soldier (duty)

- A government executes a prisoner (justice)
- God orders the killing of an entire group of people (sovereignty)
- A man shoots another man for personal revenge (personal motives)
- A woman kills her unborn child (personal motives)

God ordains the governing authorities (Rom 13); God Himself has instilled in us right and wrong and a sense of justice which our government administers. Part of the government's duty is to "defend the righteous" which most certainly would include national defense. God himself lays out many military rules and regulations in Deuteronomy (not binding on us today, but showing the principle of God's use/approval of them).

There are very real wars in the spirit world (Rev 17) demonstrating that fighting for the right cause is justified at certain times even among heavenly creatures (not a single point that is definitive; but an interesting one to consider).

We see that "killing" - while terrible - is sometimes necessary and apparently allowed by (and in the past directed by) God when it originates from true duty, justice or God's reasons.

Now, consider the other type of "killing"... killing for personal reasons. It could be for revenge, sadistic pleasure, prejudice or hatred, but the overall reason is "personal." Killing for personal reason makes one person judge, jury and executioner over another person. Not a government over a person; not an authority (like a

Judge) over a person; not a nation over a person... one person over another person.

Personal revenge is forbidden (Mt 5:39-41; Ro 12:17,19; 1Th 5:15; 1Pe 3:9.), so one person killing another for personal reasons (other than true self defense) is a "wrong" type of killing... what we refer to as "murder."

Same for abortion. Upon conception, a living human being exists, regardless of all the ridiculous and horrible political nonsense that stains our country today. To purposely end that life is "killing." If motivated by personal reasons (convenience, selfishness or timing; which covers 99% of abortions; we'll leave the other 1% for God to judge), then it falls into the category of "murder."

My conclusion: any "killing" that falls into the category of "murder" is wrong and forbidden by the 6th commandment. Other types of killing, though tragic, are the consequence of a sin-cursed world and at times are necessary and allowed by God.

Now, to answer your original question... "killing" in the military in the context we have discussed, is not forbidden by the 6th commandment therefore cannot be used as an argument against military service.

You may have other arguments, but it can't be that one.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Knowledge – What Does 1Corinthians 13:12 Mean?

### What does 1Cor 13:12 mean?

1 Corinthians 13:12 - For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. (NKJV)

It means simply that we will not fully understand everything about life, salvation and the things of God until we are free of our sin nature and this sin cursed world.

It means that there will come a time when we will understand to the degree that we will no longer "see dimly," but will see perfectly clear that which God wants us to see. We will not need teaching, or revelation, or further enlightenment. We will know fully and see fully.

That doesn't mean that we will have ALL knowledge; that belongs only to God. It means that we will be at a state of perfect understanding in our existence and in our relationship to God.

We won't need the Bible because we will be in the presence of the Word. We will be face to face with perfection and we will no longer "see in part."

When will this perfect time come?  
When this life is over and we are with Jesus. May that day come quickly.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Language – Which One In Heaven?



**I have a childish question. There are many languages in this world and there are many Christians all over the world speaking many different languages. What language will we speak in heaven? What language will the devil speak in hell?**

That's not a childish question at all. I have wondered and thought about it many times myself.

First, in eternity, it doesn't matter what language the Devil speaks because he will be forever banished and lost in the Bottomless Pit (Rev 20:3) never to influence or communicate with a human again. It is poor teaching that has left Christians with the idea that Satan will be in charge and running Hell.

God is in charge of hell. But those humans who tragically find themselves in hell won't be talking to God or Satan. They will be all alone, eternally tormented, in the dark (2Thess 1:8-9; Matt 24:51; Matt 8:12).

As for the language in heaven, the only accurate answer is that WE DON'T KNOW. God didn't choose to tell us. Some options to consider:

We will all speak what we spoke during this life, but everyone will know, or supernaturally understand every language.

We will all speak our same language, but have opportunity for all eternity to learn all languages.

We will speak a heavenly language that we can't know here on earth.

We will speak the original human language, Hebrew.

That's all just fun speculation. We don't know. But whatever it is, it will be perfect and wonderful for all eternity.

~~~~~

Lawsuit – Should I Take This Christian To Court?

My ex-husband, who is anti-Christian, has never paid me what he owes for our divorce settlement. Biblically can I go to court to get what he owes. He is continually bringing frivolous lawsuits against me and costing me much in legal fees. At least I can cover some of the legal fees by getting what he owes me. Should I take him to court?

If your husband is NOT a Christian, then the principle of "Christians don't sue Christians" doesn't directly apply.

So, since there is no specific Biblical command concerning your situation, it becomes a matter of conscience. You should seek the wisdom and opinion of several wise, spiritual Christians; you should pray and ask God for wisdom; act in faith, and finally, trust God to be with you regardless of what decision you finally make with a clear conscience.

Proverbs 15:22 - Without counsel, plans go awry, But in the multitude of counselors they are established. (NKJV)

James 1:5 - If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (NKJV)

1 Timothy 2:9-10 - in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works. (NKJV)

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Leadership – Four Scriptural Principles

Could you list four Scriptural things I could do to be a good leader?

Well as a matter of fact, I can. I should probably do a devotional series on this topic, but we'll start here for now. I could list a couple of dozen things off the top of my head, but I'll stick to a quick four.

Lead by example - if you expect discipline, be disciplined; if you want loyalty, be loyal; if you want an extraordinary effort, give one. Pick any number of Bible characters to study who led by example: Joshua, Paul, Joseph....

Humility, humility, humility - remember who you are, remember where you came from, remember that you were just as lost and hopeless as anyone you are now leading; a Godly leader is never haughty, arrogant or conceited because they realize that all

they have, all they are and all they ever will achieve is by the grace and blessing of God.

Be compassionate - one of the most obvious and displayed characteristics of Jesus was compassion. He saw through surface emotions, circumstances and weakness to hurting people who needed a Savior, love and understanding. The greatest Godly leaders learn to look deeply into problems, behaviors, choices, and attitudes and discover the needs, hurts, and motives that fuels those he leads.

Imitate Christ - above all, imitate Christ so that others who imitate you will be Christ-like (1Cor 11.1). It is the responsibility of every Godly leader to wield their influence in such a manner as to have those around them see their need for greater holiness and devotion. I believe God will hold leaders accountable for that.

This is a great question, and I'll probably go ahead and do it as a series of devotional messages some time. In closing, I want to share a poem I wrote about leadership last year:

The Leader of Men

In the end, it is God
Who is the leader of men.
They take no step, He does not direct
Deciding who, and where, and when.

But darkened eyes and stopped up ears
Keep most too distant from the One;
So God in His love, equips a few,
To stand in the breach on behalf of the Son.

To know the Master and follow Him
So that others may see the way.
To keep the lost, the deceived, the
weak
From the ruin of the broader gate.

Only one message from his mouth
"Imitate me, as I imitate Him;"
The single command, the only words,
The clarion call of a Leader of Men.

G Brent Riggs

~~~~~

## Legal – Suing Christians

**Is it okay for a Christian to sue  
another Christian for defamation if  
they lie about you publicly and  
refuse to tell the truth?**

For an individual Christian, the answer would have to be NO. Christians are to rise above the standards of the world, live in ongoing forgiveness (as Christ does for us) and not bring shame to the name of Jesus by dragging our dirty laundry out in front of the unsaved world. Consider these verses:

Proverbs 25:8-10 - Go not forth hastily to strive, lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame. Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself; and discover not a secret to another: Lest he that heareth it put thee to shame, and thine infamy turn not away. (NKJV)

1 Corinthians 6:1-11 - Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Do you not know

that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers! Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated? No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren! Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. (NKJV)

Matthew 5:38-42 - "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks

you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.” (NKJV)

It’s a matter of principle, appearance and demonstrating by our behavior what Christ has done for us.

Which is better? For you to be wronged, BUT... the world sees you respond with love, forgiveness, mercy and patience?

Or for you to take your Christian brother to court because he "deserves" it? Legally, ethically and morally you would be correct in doing so. But would Christ receive the greater glory? And that is the real issue, not our reputation, feelings or "rights."

For Christians, the answer is clear. We are not to sue our professing Christian brothers lest the world, whom we will judge someday, look at Christ's Body and mock Him because His own children have to turn to "the world" to solve their disputes.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Life – When Is Someone Really Alive?

**When does the soul leave the body of one who is brain dead and is being kept alive with life support? How about those who are in a coma or in a vegetable state of mind?**

I have to be honest and tell you right up front that I have no idea what the answer is.

These are questions that I've often wondered myself and I do not believe that Scripture gives us a definitive answer for each of the circumstances.

As Christians, we are to honor life, protect life and respect life more than any other people on the earth. For me to give any sort of guidelines or opinion would ignore the incredible amount of variables and circumstances that are faced in the situations.

In the situation where a person is brain-dead and being kept alive by machines, I believe that those who have the responsibility of making decisions for that person have to make the best decision they can with a clear conscience having prayed and asked God for wisdom.

As for the person who is in a vegetative state or unresponsive yet otherwise sustaining their own life without machines, I could not support nor can I find any Biblical grounds for ever considering terminating the life of such a person.

Once you start down the slippery path, as many nations have, of deciding who should live or die based on the quality of their existence then you have opened Pandora's box and humanity will truly move in the direction of "survival of the fittest."

Matters of life and death are to be approached with the greatest of prayerful care, the utmost extreme caution and done only with the realization that each and every person involved will be accountable to God for the decisions made.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Love — Types Of Love

**I understand that there are four types of love expressed in the Bible. Agape, Eros, Philo and some other one I can't remember. Can you explain them?**

Yes, there are four: Agape, Eros, Philo and the one you can't remember is Storge. Here are some basic definitions:

Agape - agape is the noun, and agapao, the verb form of this word, speaks of Godly love. It is the type of love that comes from God or because of God and is outside of circumstance or human determination. This type of love is not spoken about in secular literature because it is a concept that starts with God and depends on God. Agape love is a love that is chosen, applied and exercised by God towards humans strictly as a manifestation of his will and attributes. It is a type of love practiced between humans in response to how God commands us to love each other. It is a word that has special significance for New Testament Christians as it is especially indicative of Christ's love shown by his sacrifice on the cross for our sins. The writers of the Septuagint use the noun 20 times and the verb over 250 times replacing the Hebrew word "hesed" (lovingkindness) with agape, a word they had to create to convey the concept of a agape love.

Eros - Eros is the name of the Greek god of love and is the word used for physical, sensual and sexual love. We derive our word "erotic" from it and it

does not appear in the New Testament. Interestingly, this is the most common form of love that you will find in a society that is moving away from Godly standards or has already departed them.

Philo - Philo is a general term for affection for attraction between people not taking into account relationships. It can be used in a general way such as "the love of God's Word," and we take its meaning in such words like Philadelphia "the city of brotherly love." ( 2Peter 2:17; Colossians 2:8)

Storge- Storge is a familial type of love such as parents to children, subject to royalty or perhaps even how a pet loves its master. The positive form can carry a meaning like devotion or dedicated, and the negative form can communicate the concepts of heartless or without love. (Romans 12:10; Romans 1:31; 2Timothy 3:3)

~~~~~

Magic — Right Or Wrong?

What is your opinion of magicians and magic shows? Are they just fun or should we be more concerned about them? I'm not asking about those who profess to have "powers," just those who pull rabbits out of hats type stuff. The kind of things you know are "tricks," and it's fun to see if you can figure out how they do it.

First, you are right that there is a difference between the fun, sleight of hand, card trick, pull a rabbit from a hat type of "magician" and the ones who give the appearance of demonic or black-magic power.

There are some guys today like David Blaine or Cris Angel who make the hair stand up on your neck. Some of their illusions are without a doubt meant to give you the impression they are tapping supernatural power... whether they are or not, is doubtful, but indeed possible. However, they certainly want to leave you with the opinion that they possess "powers," not simply skills. Even their dress, vocabulary and demeanor are meant to give an aura of "unknown power." They appear sinister, not fun.

In those cases, even if it is all smoke and mirrors, they are TRYING to give the impression of black magic or demonic power (even if they wouldn't label it that), so it is most certainly not befitting a Christian. This type of appearance and practice is condemned in Scripture: Isa. 8:19; Isa. 44:25; Isa. 47:12-15; Deut. 18:10-12; Acts 8:9-24; Acts 13:6-11; Acts 19:13-20; Rev. 21:8; Rev. 22:15. The magicians condemned in the Bible were sorcerers attempting to use demonic power or wanting people to think they were supernaturally connected. They weren't doing card tricks, they were attempting to use (or pretend to use) demonic power to deceive or gain power.

As for the common "magic tricks,, birthday party magicians, illusionists and card trick specialists... there is typically no appearance or attempt to display demonic or supernatural power. It's a trick, a sleight of hand, a

skill... and no one thinks or is deceived into believing otherwise. These are illusions or skills, and represented as such.

Like all things, there has to be some discernment. If you simply label all "magic tricks" as unChristian, then it can be taken to ridiculous extremes. My two and three year old think they can wave their magic finger at the van door, and open it themselves when I'm behind them pressing a button on my key chain. Is that practicing or teaching sorcery? Is a really cool card trick demonic? Is making an elephant "disappear" black magic?

It is a quantum leap from having a coin magically appear from a kid's ear, to the illusion of levitating which clearly suggests supernatural power. However, should you see an illusionist who is also dabbling in the occult, or "black magic," you should have nothing to do with them. Again, the keyword is always the same: DISCERNMENT.

Again, God doesn't give us checklists. He gives us a conscience, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and His Word. With those three things we are equipped to discern the difference between innocent sleight of hand, fun entertainment... and the attempts by man to appear supernaturally (demonically) empowered.

~~~~~

## Marriage — Is My Husband Really A Christian?

**I have remarried my ex-husband, and he is now incarcerated in another state. I want to hold on to my marriage. He says he has turned his life over to God. I pray this is true but wonder if it's because he is locked up. Any advice?**

First of all I commend you for wanting to keep your marriage together even in difficult and uncertain circumstances.

Incarceration is not grounds for a divorce. While some may argue this is tantamount to abandonment, I think that is quite a stretch, especially if the spouse is not seeking divorce (sincere motivations or otherwise). Granted, I've been around long enough to know that people in no-win situations (be it imprisonment, drug addiction or similar circumstances) can all of a sudden start making promises that often have no lasting foundation.

However, it seems that combined with your wish to keep the marriage intact, your husband's current state of "finding God" at least seems to open the door for some spiritual possibilities.

I would send him plenty of good solid Bible teaching about Christian character, integrity, work and family. I would find other Christian men who will visit him, correspond with him and hold him accountable for his Christian walk and responsibilities.

1Cor 7:16 - How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

In context, this isn't specifically about your situation, but the principle can certainly be applied. Through your example as a faithful, loving, dedicated Christian wife, even if your imprisoned husband's new found "religion" isn't genuine, your example may very well be what God uses to show him TRUE Christianity.

So take heart. Even if your efforts don't "pay off" in the long run relating to your marriage, God knows your heart and you will be eternally rewarded for your love and faithfulness.

Remember, your husband's salvation is even more important than your marriage. So your first priority is to "imitate Christ" (1Cor 11:1) so that your husband can know what a real Christian looks like. By doing so, God can use your example to penetrate your husband's heart and bring him to true salvation if he is not already there.

If he is truly saved, then your faithfulness will come with double reward in the form of his salvation and your restored marriage.

The alternative offers nothing. If you give up, you break your marriage vows, you give up on being God's instrument in your husband's possible salvation, and if your husband is sincere at this point, you destroy a marriage that was on its way to be healed by God's love.

Pray for him. Encourage him. Keep him fed with solid Christian teaching. Let him use this time to grow spiritually. Find men in your church who will mentor him and hold him accountable.

Should everything fall apart anyway and his "faith" be found empty in the end, you will have a clear conscience that glorifies God because you will have done everything "right" that you knew to do.

You are welcome to print off and bind any number of my devotionals for him if he is allowed to have them.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Marriage – Repenting Of Divorce

**My husband and I have divorced after 20 years of marriage. But about two months later we got back together. We were able to work things out while we were separated and we had a lot of help from God. He changed our hearts about a lot of issues we've had with each other. But unfortunately we jumped the gun and our divorce became final. At the time that is what we wanted until we really started searching for God's will be done in our life. He reconnected our hearts and things are better now than they have ever been in 20 years. I know God hates divorce but since we did get back together will God still be disappointed in us as his children. We are both Christians and have repented and asked for God's forgiveness. We have also forgiven each other for everything. But we are still legally divorced. Do we need to remarry in**

**the church or with a Justice of the Peace? Do we also need to go forward in our church to ask forgiveness from them? We want to do what is pleasing to God. Thank you.**

God is concerned about our hearts... repentance, submission and obedience.

Taking you at your word, we will assume for the sake of this answer that you have repented of your sins, reconciled your marriage and shown your willingness to follow God's Word.

So, should you get remarried? Yes. At church? That is a personal choice. My opinion is that no, you should not have some big wedding with a white dress, etc.; but I think that a simple ceremony with your congregation sends a good message and sets a good example to all present that two people who are willing to turn to God for help, can reconcile a broken marriage.

It would be a great time for you both to share the testimony of God's faithfulness to all present.

Your church family should be thrilled to be a part of a marriage that was "rescued" by God. All too often our churches are the first to shun people who have had extreme problems in marriage. This is a shame.

Should you "go before the church and ask forgiveness?" Is the Lord prompting you to do so? Did either of you do anything publicly shameful like adultery? Do either of you feel convicted to do this?



This is a matter of personal conviction in my opinion. If you feel like you have weakened the witness and testimony of your congregation by your behavior, then asking forgiveness shows the world that we belong to Christ because of our love and concern for each other.

If you are undecided, then take your concern to your Elders. Tell them of your willingness to do anything needed to honor the Lord in this situation. They will pray to God on your behalf and give you wise counsel.

~~~~~

Marriage – Leaving Father And Mother

During a marriage ceremony when the officiate asks, "Who gives this bride in marriage?" What does this really symbolize and is it proper to include anyone other than the "parents" such as a sibling?

Any answer about this is subjective because I cannot PROVE Biblically what the words mean, or where they originated, however....

I think it is pretty clear that it is in keeping with the idea of "leaving father and mother:"

Mark 10:6-9 - But from the beginning of the creation, God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore

what God has joined together, let not man separate. (NKJV)

Once the Bride is "given" to the Groom, she and the Groom have left their parents and are now joined together.

Given this, obviously the parents are the proper choice to "give away" the ones getting married, but in the absence of that opportunity, I see nothing wrong with representing what it symbolizes through the use of a non-parent.

A reader sent in the following good addition to this answer:

"This question and its response symbolizes not only the full blessing of the parents, but also the transfer of responsibility to the groom by the father. A daughter is under the authority and responsibility of her father until she is married. (Numbers 30:4-8) It is, therefore, the father who transfers this responsibility to the groom. "So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well..." (1 Cor. 7:38).

Therefore the question could be expanded (as I have done similarly)

TO THE FATHER: By walking down the aisle with your daughter, are you and your wife affirming that you are giving your full blessing to the marriage of your daughter with this man? (followed by response from father)

Are you also hereby transferring your God-given responsibility for the care and protection of your daughter to this man?

(followed by response from father)

Source: The True Significance of The Wedding Covenant, . 12, IBLP Box One, Oak Brook, Illinois 60521

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Marriage – When Does God Recognize It?

What constitutes a "marriage" in God's eyes? Does a loving, committed relationship between a man and woman still count even if there has been no "ceremony"? When did our current marriage "ceremony" become recognized?

Marriage in God's eyes is final when the intent of marriage is consummated by sexual union (Gen 2.24).

However, we are also commanded to obey our authorities and governments (Rom 13.1; as long as the laws don't violate God's Word) and the civil ceremony is what identifies a couple SOCIALLY as being married.

Therefore, for us today in America, the Godly OFFICIAL act of getting married would include the civil ceremony, the spiritual intent, and the physical consummation.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Marriage – Divorce Because Of Pornography

Would it be Biblically permissible to divorce your husband if he is indulging in pornography?

No matter how I answer this, I will get hammered. But here goes....

God hates divorce. Divorce should be a last resort. It seems to be the plain message of Scripture that God allows divorce in the case of adultery and abandonment by an unbelieving spouse, although He still hates it. (Matt. 19:3-12 Mark 10:2. Luke 16:18; 1 Cor. 7:10-17)

Entire libraries of arguments have been written for and against that position. But for the sake of your question, let's assume this position.

Now, some would argue that viewing pornography is adultery because Jesus said that lusting in your heart is adultery (Matt 5:28). While the premise is solid, it certainly pushes the point of your question because the logical extent of that thinking would make every marriage "Biblically qualified" for divorce. Why? Because just about every person who is married most surely has lusted in their heart at least once.

So that makes the "pornography=adultery" argument void in my opinion.

Having said that, there is no specific Scripture that declares indulging in the pornographic is grounds for divorce. So that rules out any direct command to appeal to.

So my answer would be "no" your husband viewing pornography is not "Biblical grounds" for divorce.

BUT... the problem here is that the wrong question is being asked. The question should be "my husband views pornography... how can I respond or act in a way that most glorifies Christ?"

The original question leaves the distinct impression that a divorce is wanted FIRST, instead of as a last resort.

No doubt it is very hard to deal with this problem, especially if your husband claims to be a Christian, and especially if he does not admit the problem or want help.

You need to seek the wisdom, prayer and advice of your Pastor/Elders of your local church. That's what they are there for.... to spiritually shepherd you.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Marriage – Domestic Discipline

My husband has been reading a lot of Christian "Domestic Discipline" where the husband has the duty not just to lead, but also to punish (including spanking) his wife. He says he feels led to bring this into our marriage as his duty. I have always been submissive to him and obeyed just like my mother obeyed my father. Is "Domestic Discipline" really a Christian thing to do and must I submit to be a good wife?

Proponents of this ridiculous, almost comical idea of "Christian Domestic Discipline" love to claim this is a Biblical practice that has gone on since Adam and Eve.

The "Christian" sites that promote this absurdity go to great lengths to emphasize that it is part of a "Biblical marriage" and that men must "love their wives as themselves" (a juvenile contradiction that would make for a great laugh if they weren't actually being serious about it). It's hard to even stomach a straight answer about something so utterly and blatantly unBiblical and clownish.

It's rather revealing that the prominent "Christian" website that promotes this garbage never quotes the Bible in any way for support, but does quote all sorts of secular sources INCLUDING THE KORAN. Spend about five minutes researching the news about Muslim women who are raped, beaten, disfigured, discarded and abused all in the name of avenging some imagined disrespect or transgression determined by a man, often her own family.

It is also very enlightening that warnings about eroticism must be presented on these Domestic Discipline sites. Even the primary "Christian DD" site admits to the erotic element of this embarrassing practice. From my experience across the board, I would be very suspect of the sexual morality of any man who took this nonsense seriously because there is an obvious vein of sexual deviancy running through it.

There is NOTHING Biblical or Christian about a man who wants to exercise his "authority" over his wife

by administering corporal punishment (or any sort of physical punishment) defined as spankings in three degrees: playful, maintenance and punishment.

Particularly disturbing is the idea of "maintenance spanking" where punishment is administered to establish authority, remind the woman of her place in the marriage, and punish her for infractions that may not have come to the attention of her husband.

I joke sometimes that I have to give my kids a spanking once a week just in case I missed something. However, that joke doesn't seem to be very funny anymore in light of the fact that there are people who actually do this, not only to their kids, but to their own wife.

This type of so-called "authority" is a gross and shameful misapplication of the true Godly authority and responsibilities of husbands to serve their wives and love them as Christ loves the church. It is not authority. It is perversion and dereliction of duty on the husband's part.

Biblically, wives are to submit to their husband's leadership as this is their ROLE in the marriage (Eph 5:22-24). It does not make them inferior or subservient to a childish husband who wants to spank his wife like a child to get her to behave. This role is part of God's design to model our relationship with Christ and to counteract the effects of the sin curse within the marital relationship.

The GREATER duty and responsibility falls on the man to lead, serve and

love his wife as Christ loves us. (Eph 5:25-33)

Men, this silly and destructive idea of Domestic Discipline in a Christian marriage is just that: silly and destructive. It appeals to the domineering effects of sin on men: to lead without love, and rule without compassion.

NO CHRISTIAN MAN SHOULD EVER CONSIDER ENGAGING IN THIS PRACTICE, and I have no problems categorically stating that any Christian husband who does is sinning, destroying his marriage and shaming Christ (because you are supposed to be imitating Him in your marriage and home). There is no Biblical grounds or precedent for this practice, and plenty of Scripture to contradict it (take your pick of any passage about marriage, any passage about serving each other, any passage about love, any passage about relationship).

Any man who feels "led" to engage in this foolishness, is being "led" by his own pride, perversion or ignorance. Take your pick.

Am I being too subtle?

(If you want a great book on marriage, check out Rafe's book on marriage listed below.)

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Marriage — Compassion For A Widow

I have a friend whose husband died in a fishing accident on the ocean 3 years ago. His body was never

found and the government will not issue a death certificate until he has been missing for 5 years. She has recently fallen in love and wants to re-marry. Her lawyer has told her that the only way to remarry before the 5 years is up, is to divorce her husband. She wants to get on with her life, and she is angry that her only option is a divorce. I don't know how to begin to advise her. I know what the Bible says about divorce, but I can't begin to imagine her situation. Do you have any words of wisdom that I can share with her that might help??

Wow... that will certainly win the "unique question of the month" award.

Of course in a situation like this, I can only speak from opinion and general wisdom... and my opinion is going to generate some heated responses from those who believe that appealing to the SPIRIT of God's commands is tantamount to RELATIVISM if the LETTER of the law does not appear to be followed (such as when the Pharisee's criticized Jesus for healing or picking grain to eat on the Sabbath - Luke 6:7).

In this advice, I will argue that the SPIRIT of God's commands on divorce and remarriage (liberty, conscience) would not be violated even if the technical act of a legal divorce (letter of the law) were pursued.

I answer with this advice based on the following assumptions:

Your friend is a mature, committed Christian

The death of her husband is not in question in ANY way

The man she is wanting to marry is a mature, committed Christian.

Given those assumptions, I think we are left with a matter of conscience and liberty (Heb 13:18; Gal 5:1). God's principles about divorce are to assure commitment, fidelity and security in the institution of marriage and family. The SPIRIT of His commandments on divorce/marriage create lifelong dedication and loyalty between two humans who enter into the holy and ordained covenant of marriage.

Again, making the above listed assumptions, I do not believe that the technicality of the government requiring a certain time period to pass to declare widowhood constitutes a violation of God's principles on marriage and divorce. The "divorce" in this case is legal technicality when in fact, your friend is a WIDOW, not a divorcee, and thus allowed to remarry another Christian (1Tim 5:14; 1Cor 7:39).

Let me re-emphasize: IF THE DEATH OF THE SPOUSE IS NOT IN QUESTION IN ANY WAY. If there is any doubt that he may have simply skipped out on the marriage, then we have a whole other issue. I do not say that to be insensitive towards your friend, but only to make sure that my advice is taken in context.

In my evaluation:

she would not be violating God's commands on divorce because she is in fact a widow;

she would not be violating God's command to obey the laws of the land because she is FOLLOWING the law by "divorcing" before remarrying.

I believe your friend, assuming she is a mature Christian, has the liberty in this very special circumstance to be able to follow her conscience and know whether or not she is proceeding without violating the SPIRIT of God's commands concerning divorce and remarriage.

She should pray and ask God for wisdom, examine her heart, make sure her conscience is clear before God, and then proceed in her convictions knowing that God is the judge of a pure heart that wants only to serve Him in spirit and truth.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Marriage – Always Fighting And Annoyed

My wife and I seem to always be annoyed or irritated with each other, just on the edge of arguing or getting mad all time. We love each other, and divorce is not an option (or something we want) as Christians. Any advice on how to change this part of our relationship?

I'm happy to hear someone say, "Divorce is not an option." This should be the norm for Christians, but sadly,

is not. Having a foundation of lifelong commitment puts you in a good position to make some changes in your relationship that will help with these feelings you are having towards each other.

There is truth in the saying "familiarity breeds contempt." People are people. We get on each other's nerves. Living with someone all the time gives plenty of opportunity for it.

Half the reason for being irritated is justified (fleshly speaking) in that the other person can be thoughtless, unkind, inattentive, selfish, impatient, sloppy, lazy, etc. The other half of the reason is our own fault: I am impatient, I am selfish, I am easily irritated, I am looking out for my own interests first. Put the two halves together, and you are experiencing something that is very common in marriage and eventually probably happens to almost all of us: we find ourselves impatient and with a low level, underlying "annoyed" feeling towards our spouse.

We cannot change the other person directly, only ourselves. I say "directly" because I believe that INDIRECTLY we can influence our spouse to change simply by the change that occurs in us.

So, if you want your spouse to stop being irritable, you stop. If you want your spouse to stop being easily annoyed, you stop. If you want your spouse to be loving, patient and kind, YOU be loving, patient and kind. If you want your spouse to be affectionate, complimentary, encouraging and happy, YOU BE ALL THOSE THINGS FIRST.

As humans, our relationships and spiritual life fall prey to the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics: things deteriorate unless some outside organizing or improving power reverses the deterioration (I know that's a loose definition, but appropriate for this discussion).

Since we are sinful human beings, our spiritual life and Christian walk will deteriorate if we cannot actively working to improve it. As well, our marriages and relationships will degrade if we aren't actively seeking to improve and strengthen them.

For our marriages to go bad, we don't have to do a thing. They will go sour all by themselves. We can help the deterioration to occur faster by our negative behavior, but even in "neutral" things will decline in quality.

Our marriages (or any relationship for that matter) are a series of repeating and clearly defined CYCLES... either good or bad. Whatever type of cycle we are in tends to feed itself. Let me explain.

If you are impatient and sarcastic, it will cause your spouse to have hard feelings, bringing out similar bad behavior. Their increased level of negativity will only cause you to sink further into destructive attitudes and behavior, in turn causing them to be worse. And round and round it goes. It will not stop until one or both spouses choose to change the cycle.

A negative cycle in a marriage tends to get started and become a "problem" before either spouse even recognizes that it is occurring.

A positive cycle on the other hand, usually is something that has to be a

willful, purposeful choice by both parties. We have no problems being negative. We have to work at being positive.

My advice?

Determine that you will begin a "positive" cycle in your relationship

Change yourself regardless of what your spouse does

SAY and DO those things that you would normally say and do when your FEELINGS of "being madly in love" are present. In other words, regardless of how you FEEL, say loving things, do loving things, talk affectionately, be romantic... ACT (words and actions) like you are madly in love and that your spouse is the most wonderful, patient, caring, loving person on the planet and you cannot stand to be apart from them one more minute.

(Act? Isn't that dishonest? NO!!! When you first fall in love with someone, it's because both of you choose to ACT in such a way that causes the other person to fall in love. Magically, tragically and stupidly, AFTER the wedding, we reverse the process and declare that we must FIRST feel like we are in love BEFORE we will act in such a way as to create an atmosphere of "falling in love.")

Make sure that you are both working on your spiritual lives, individually and as a couple, or it's going to be next to impossible to create any lasting positive change

Pray together; the percentage is sky high that couples who pray together are happier and dramatically FAR less likely to divorce.

A positive cycle feeds on itself just like a negative cycle. In my experience, positive cycles actually intensify and repair a relationship FASTER than a negative cycle tears it down.

Say words, choose behavior and plan things that will cause your spouse to feel good, feel loved and cause them to "fall in love" with you. It may take them a little while to "figure out what's going on," but give it time, be consistent and don't give up. In a typical relationship, your spouse will begin to warm up to this new development and the "seeds of love" you are planting will soon begin to grow.

Here are a few things I try to say and do for my wife on a regular basis, daily if I'm on the ball (though we have our "negative cycles" too!):

Of course, say "I love you" many times a day

Say "I'm sorry" often and quickly; and mean it!

I tell her that she is beautiful and that I'm physically attracted to her

I tell her that I'm happy; it's very important for your spouse to know that you have a happy life because they realize they are big part of that

I tell her specifically that I'm happy to be married TO HER, and that I wouldn't want life any other way

I tell her that I'm glad we are married, and that I can't imagine my life without her

I tell her that she means the whole world to me and that there is no one else I would rather be with

Now, given the stresses of life, do I always FEEL, I mean literally FEEL this way? Of course not. I get sick, I get tired, I get too busy, I get overwhelmed some times. Oh yeah, and sometimes I'm selfish and not very thoughtful. But regardless of how I FEEL, I know all these things are still true, so I say them even if my feelings don't happen to be all ooey-gooey at the moment.

By saying these things, I cultivate the emotions and so I end up actually feeling this way even if I didn't start out with them. When I do NOT have these feelings, it becomes even more important to say them so that it creates an atmosphere that will rekindle them.

It is my very strong personal opinion that married couples can quickly and definitively get out of a period of frustration and irritability by choosing to say and do those things that they would do if they were in that "falling madly in love" period of their relationship.

Try it and see if you don't notice a big difference quickly (once your spouse gets over the shock!).

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Marriage — Interracial Okay?

Is there scripture in the bible that each race should not date or marry outside your own? Aren't we all equal no matter who you want to be in love with? Isn't love color blind? Please help.

The Israelites were commanded not to marry outside of God's chosen people. It was not based on race (more on that in a minute) it was based on religious commandment. As Christians we are not to be "unequally yoked" (2Cor 6:14) but that has nothing to do with skin color. It has to do with Christians marrying non-Christians.

"Race" is a concept that comes from evolutionary thinking. Evolution teaches that man evolved to different degrees of humanity and that some skin colors and peoples are inferior to others. Of course this is complete and utter nonsense, a lie straight from the depths of hell itself. There is no such thing as "race." The differences in human beings are simply the degrees to which various genetic traits are emphasized or deemphasized. Skin color, facial structure, types of hair and things of that nature are nothing more than different constructions of genetics.

The reason why we have this question today of race, skin color and marrying a "different kind" is because society as a whole, including Christians, have been brainwashed in the theories of evolution. They accept them without question or at least without understanding.

Given that things like skin color are simply genetic differences makes the question of whether or not a black could marry a white, or an Indian could marry an Asian, irrelevant with regards to physiology. Of course we are all equal, and while the phrase has been completely overused and its meaning watered down, Godly love is indeed colorblind.

That doesn't mean it's a clear-cut issue though. First of all, as a Christian you absolutely should not consider marrying someone who is not a genuine, committed Christian. That leaves us with the questions that have to do with social and cultural difficulties.

The fact is different groups of people (skin color or location or language) have developed different cultures, and some of the specifics of given culture can be difficult to mix. There is also the question of whether or not a couple wants to endure the ridicule they may receive for being of two different skin colors or cultures. Even more, a couple should seriously consider whether or not they want their children to have to endure the inevitable tormenting and insulting from foolish and ignorant people.

Two of my children are orphans from Guatemala. While the overwhelming majority of people are kind (and sometimes overly kind to show that they approve of our "mixed" family) we have definitely seen the stares and witnessed the mumbles of, "We don't need any more Mexicans in this country." These types of comments just go to prove that there are difficulties and considerations that must be evaluated and decided on before creating a family of mixed skin color and nationality.

As our two Latino babies grow, we will have to teach them the reality of what our culture is, molded by the "fact" of evolution. Rather than a society of loving, God-fearing people where all are truly "created equal," the evolutionary worldview has created an entire generation who believe, if not passively promote, the

idea that some people of certain skin colors have a greater inherent value to God than others.

This is of course one of the great abominations of our time. In summary, this is not a Biblical issue for you to consider but it is a social and cultural consideration.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Marriage – Is Sex Okay If You Are Engaged?

Once you are engaged and have committed yourself to the other person in front of God, why can't you act married (sexually) before the wedding date? In my son's mind he is totally committed to this young lady and vice versa and he feels that in God's eyes they are already married so why can't they act like it?

If you were to live in a time and culture where there was not a civil law aspect to marriage, then I believe that two persons who "agree" they are married before God with all good conscience, would indeed "be married."

But that is not the case in America, or most of the world. Marriage is a civil contract that has to meet legal criteria to be recognized. God ordains rulers and governments (Matt. 22:17–21; Luke 20:25; Rom. 13:1–7; Tit. 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13–172), so the laws

concerning marriage must be obeyed by Christians so long as they don't violate God's Word.

The fact is, no matter how sincere, two people can call off a marriage right up until the second of saying "I do." So "acting married" up until that point has no real binding effect, regardless of how sincere people may be, and is tantamount to fornication.

The consummation of a marriage, the speaking of marriage vows in front of friends and family, the signing of marriage licenses, etc. - all serve to give an official stamp and finality to the covenant of marriage.

Once we start allowing people to "act as if" something is true before it actually is, we will have opened Pandora's box. That concession with regards to marriage would put us a breath away from simply "shacking up" before marriage.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Miracles – Our Great Miracles?

I hear preached all the time that John 14:12 means that Christians, some if not all, should and could be doing greater miracles than Jesus. Is that really what that verse means?

You are correct, it is frequently and consistently taught in many churches and on TV that this verse means Christians will and should be doing greater miracles than Jesus:

John 14:12 - "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father." (NKJV)

To answer your question, let me clarify what I am NOT answering:

I am not answering whether or not miracles occur today

I am not answering that if there ARE miracles performed today, are they done by God directly to a person; or through one person to another person

I am not answering whether or not I believe that today's self-proclaimed miracle-workers are authentic

What I will answer here is: Does John 14:12 mean that we (Christians) are capable of, or should be doing, greater miracles than Jesus?

No. Plainly, No.

First of all, the verse does not say "miracles," it says "works." Now certainly it COULD mean miracles, but it doesn't have to necessarily mean miracles. So does it mean miracles? Clearly not. Why? There are a few reasons to consider:

The verse doesn't specifically say "greater miracles"

there is a lack of additional Scriptural support for this idea that we will do GREATER miracles than Christ

to assume "works" means "miracles" is not in context with the overall point of the passage, and

the common human experience does not bear out that anyone is actually doing "greater miracles" than Jesus.

While we have many folks collectively claiming to do thousands of miracles every day, the fact remains that those who claim this either refuse to, or cannot, produce the evidence to back up those claims. If there was ONE undeniable, irrefutable case - with evidence - of a missing leg appearing, or a destroyed eye becoming new, or a dead person being resurrected, you can bet the fact that this evidence would be documented, televised, put on the Internet, put in print and enshrined for all to see. But it's not - because it doesn't exist.

Note: now, let me re-emphasize at this point, that I am speaking specifically about those who claim to be the CONDUIT of miracle power that is then delivered to others - those who claim to have the gift of imparting or performing miracles to others. I'm not speaking of the individual who claims that God did a miracle directly for them. That is a completely different topic.

So the common experience of the honest observer is that there is no one on earth, much less multitudes of people, doing "greater miracles" than Jesus. According to proponents of this view, we should have Christians today who are routinely doing miracles GREATER than:

- Turning water to wine - John 2:1-11
- Healing critically ill children - John 4:46
- Cleansing the terminally diseased - Matt 8:1-12
- Raising up the invalids and paralyzed - John 5:1-16
- Causing the weather to obey them - Matt 8:23-27

- Curing internal diseases - Matt 9:20
- Restoring sight to genuinely blind people - Matt 9:27
- Feeding the multitudes of starving by multiplying small quantities of food miraculously - Matt 14:15-21
- Restoring the ears of the deaf and speech to those who can't speak - Mark 7:31-37
- Reattaching dismembered body parts - Luke 22:49
- Healing people who simply touch them even if the healer isn't looking or aware - Matt 9:20-22
- Raising people from the dead - John 11:1-46

Is this occurring today? According to those who teach this doctrine about John 14:12, it SHOULD be. But it's obviously not. It's a lack of faith according to them. But is this what John 14:12 even means?

What does "greater works" mean? If it means "greater miracles," then what exactly is greater than restoring sight or curing disease instantly? What could possibly be greater than raising someone from the dead?

Perhaps "greater miracles" means greater in QUANTITY; that is a common interpretation - we will do "greater quantities of miracles." But again, the obvious and undeniable conclusion is that "greater quantities of miracles" of the same type Jesus performed are NOT occurring today. Add that to the fact that "greater quantity of miracles" is simply guessing at the meaning of the verse, or worse, making it say what you want to fit a predetermined opinion.

So what does the verse mean? It means what it says. It means that we will do the work that Jesus did, and do it even greater, in some way.

What was the work Jesus did? He came to save the lost. It fits the meaning and context and reality of the verse to interpret it as saying that Jesus came to do the work of saving the lost, and every person who believes in Christ will do the same work as well.

What about "greater works?" This could be a reference to quantity because Jesus knew the Church would grow and be established over the whole earth, and while thousands received salvation from hearing Christ personally, millions would receive salvation by hearing his followers in the future.

It may also reference the fact that salvation, the Gospel, is a "greater work" than any miracle. How much greater is salvation for all eternity, than any temporal miracle performed on the perishing flesh?

To make John 14:12 refer to "greater miracles" is to simply insert a meaning that is 1) not there; 2) out of context, and 3) not reality. You have to MAKE it say "greater miracles," for that is not the meaning that naturally and comfortably fits either the context or the facts or the rest of Scripture. Yes, some of Jesus' works were miracles, but from our discussion, we see that miracles were not the subject in mind IN THIS VERSE when it speaks of "greater works."

John 14:12 refers to the "greater work" of salvation over miracles, and the "greater work" relating to the

numbers of people who would hear the Gospel through Jesus followers after His ascension to heaven. That is the plain, unstretched, natural and contextual interpretation of Jesus' words.

Note: This answer will compel many readers to send me their stories of miracles that are intended to refute my answer. Again, I am addressing the issue of what John 14:12 means, and specifically the common idea taught today that every Christian SHOULD be performing miracles, even "greater" miracles than Jesus. I am also addressing the situation we have in Christianity today of self-proclaimed miracle-workers using this verse to support their claims of miracle power.

For the record, I believe that God most certainly CAN, and most likely still does miracles directly in the lives of Christians where it pleases Him to do so for His reasons and His glory. Miracles, true miracles, by nature and definition, are going to be rare and undeniable. So my answer does not mean that I DENY the possibility of miracles today, only that I refute the teaching in question about John 14:12.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Money – Money Changers

I have a question about the note you sent out last week announcing the sale of your new products to support the ministry. Isn't that making you a "money changer" like the ones Jesus drove out of the temple? Your ministry is your "holy

place" and I think you are mixing business and God's work, and I think you'll regret it. Are you "money changing"?

With all respect, and honesty, no.

For those who may not understand the question, let me give you an explanation. Jesus rebuked the merchants in the Jewish temple who had set up shop (John 2:14ff) and had 1) turned the worship of God into a business venture, and 2) used the requirements of God related to Jewish worship opportunistically to require, and make convenient, the purchase of goods for profit. They had indeed turned God's house into not only a "market" for themselves but a "convenience store" for those coming to worship. So Jesus rightfully went sideways on them and beat them out of the Temple with a whip.

For the following reasons I don't think offering my own products for sale on my ministry site is even remotely similar:

My website is not church or worship in the corporate sense of the Bible command to gather together (Heb 10:25). It is a teaching website.

I am not withholding the Bible teaching content to anyone for the sake of support, profit, or selling products.

I am not opportunistically taking advantage of a time, place or circumstance where God has commanded people to bring something for worship that I am conveniently providing for a profit.

To the contrary, I think there is solid Biblical precedent for my choice. The Apostle Paul was a tent maker by trade (Acts 18:3). He made it clear that even though he did not solicit support for his ministry work 1) he had the right to receive support (1Cor 9:12), 2) he chose to support his ministry by the work of his own hand to stay above reproach, and 3) no doubt he received some gifts of support anyway. It's natural to assume that people would have enthusiastically purchased his "products" to help support him while he went about God's work.

Think about it. Let's say your elder, minister or some hard working servant in your church supported their own ministry effort and you knew it. If they owned a business or service that you knew provided the support for their ministry would you not patronize their business for the purpose of support? Would they be "money changers" for letting people know about their service or products? The Apostle didn't seem to think so.

Without belaboring the point, here are my reasons for offering the products (from my business, products that I personally create) on the SeriousFaith.com site:

I want to follow the example of the Apostle Paul which certainly must be a good example to follow.

There are so many "ministries" today using every marketing technique available to extract donations and support; I don't want to be a part of that.

I don't want my messages or ministry to be obligated, stressed or influenced

because of financial support (strings-attached giving).

Ironically, I don't want the ministry work tainted by having it look like getting donations or support is the motivation (which the "money changer" question implies); I'd rather support the work myself through hard work and honest business.

I do receive, and probably will continue to receive a modest amount of support from some faithful Christians who have no interest in the products. I could not be more grateful and appreciative of those who invest eternally in the ministry work. I trust that those who are led by God in that support will continue to do so, and my appreciation will only grow.

Unfortunately (and I don't say this self-servingly but just as a matter of fact), generally speaking Christians are consumers today and not givers. We take everything ministry servants will sacrificially give then move on when the well runs dry. For ministries that are unwilling to stoop to incessant pleas and marketing gimmicks, they are left with either a "tent makers" approach, or simply trusting God for provision - either of which are viable and appropriate. (of course, you trust God for blessing and provision as well with a "tent makers" approach, but it is a different model). God has blessed me with business experience and ability, so I choose the "tent maker ministry" model that Paul demonstrated for us.

I'll have the "support links" on the site and in the monthly update, but that will be the totality of asking for support. Any other support will come from "tent making."

~~~~~

## Moral Responsibility – Confronting Sin In Others

**I know of someone where I work who claims to be a Christian that is committing adultery. Should I stick my nose in, or is it none of my business? How should a Christian respond?**

We live in a "morally coward" world today. It's ironic that everyone wants to KNOW ABOUT the "dirty secrets" but when it comes to taking a stand or getting involved, we are quick to invoke "it's not my business" or "I don't want to be judgmental" routine.

As Christians, this is wrong on both counts. We are not to want to know all the "dirt" that is going on. Adultery, fornication, homosexuality, cheating, lying, stealing... it's all titillating and juicy. It feeds our flesh to be in on all the gossip and secrets.

However, let it fall to us to actually do something about it, and then we begin to pontificate about "casting the first stone" and "picking the stick out of our own eye." This is simply moral cowardice, plain and simple.

The exact opposite should be true. We should avoid all the "dirt" our society seems to revel in, and we should be unwavering in our actions and moral responsibility when it faces us. So with that preachy soap box disclaimer in place, here's my advice:

YES, it is your business if you know someone (and the parties involved) engaged in adultery, especially when they are professing Christians. As I said, it has become common place today to say, "It's not my business," or "I'm not getting involved," or "I don't need the hassle." More cowardly is the comment, "They will get mad at ME if I expose them." Oh, the persecution.... someone might get mad at us.

In my personal experience (through this ministry, counseling and personal friends) I have known a fair number of people whose spouses committed adultery and ALL SORTS of people knew about it but never told them. I have known instances where twenty or thirty people knew about a cheating spouse and every single one of them had the typical excuses for ignoring it ("not my business"; "I don't want to judge"; "they will get mad at me").

It amazes me that we are so "scared" of our moral and Christian duty (or so enamored with our feelings and reputation) that we would rather the victimized spouse suffer humiliation, heartache and ridicule than risk having the adulterer "be mad at us." Heaven forbid, an adulterer just called me "self-righteous and judgmental"... my life is ruined.

As Christians it is our duty to confront sin in our Christian family. The world cannot be expected to act any differently (however, I still hold the firm opinion that even an unsaved person deserves to know if their spouse is cheating on them).

James 4:17 - Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin. (NKJV)

I can't tell you specifically how you should handle the situation, but I can tell you that because you are aware of it, you now have a duty as a Christian and friend to respond. The "professing Christian" adulterer must be confronted and ideally (but not likely nowadays) should be subject to church discipline (Matt 18:15-18; 1Cor 5:3-5; 1Tim 1:20).

You should seek the counsel of your Godly leaders about how to specifically proceed in your particular situation, but I will leave you with an example of how I chose to respond when I found myself in the same position.

It was at my place of employment. The male involved was a single, professing Christian. The female involved was married and a professing Christian but not exactly living up to her profession of faith (the single male "appeared" to be).

As a manager, I had heard a few whispers and comments about them. I was a social friend of the male and actually was moderately good friends with the female and her husband (and two kids).

One day I saw their cars at the office on a weekend, which normally wouldn't be too suspicious but in this case was. So I actually let myself in the locked doors quietly with the stated purpose of "catching" them, thus giving me a reason to confront them.

I found them in an office with her sitting in his lap. Now if this had been

boyfriend/girlfriend, then "none of my business," but since it was single male and married female (even though in their words "they weren't doing anything"), obviously the gig was up.

In their embarrassment, they quickly departed. That Monday, I tracked them both down separately. Armed with the assumption of their infidelity and adultery, I confronted the male first.

I told him that it was now public knowledge that he was committing adultery with a married female co-worker. I told him this was shameful on his part both as a Christian and employee. I told him that if he did not immediately cease, I would do whatever I had to do to expose his behavior to the management of the company because his choices were detrimental to the business itself. I also rebuked him as a Christian and implored him to seek forgiveness, counsel and accountability. He didn't like me very much. Told me to keep my nose out of his business. (Obviously my assumption was true since he did not deny it.)

Since the female was married and had children, I was a bit more demanding of her. After discussing how her behavior shamed her professed Christianity, I simply told her she had 24 hours to tell her husband or I would. She would have shot me dead if she could have.

I told her I would not sit by and allow her husband to be the victim of her choices. I told her that SHE was the wrong doer, not him. He deserved to know. I told her that if I did not receive a call from him within one day telling me that he knew of her



adultery and with WHO, I would meet with him and tell him. MY CONCERN WAS FOR HIM FIRST, THE VICTIMIZED SPOUSE, NOT THE REPUTATION OR THE FEELINGS OF THE WRONG DOER.

Of course, my first concern was simply obeying God, and I felt it clear that I had a moral and spiritual obligation to act as I did.

In the vernacular of my teenagers, she absolutely "hated my guts" for quite a long time after that. In the end, years later, I received a nice card from her, thanking her for what I did. They are still married today, over 10 years later.

Now, every story is not going to end up happy. That is not the point. The point is, when you are faced with a situation that calls for moral courage and obeying God's commands, this "it's none of my business" and "who am I to judge?" nonsense just doesn't fly.

Pray, seek counsel, get advice, read your Bible.... the specific answer of HOW to respond may not be easy to determine, but your duty to respond and act is.

~~~~~

Morality – Purity In Marriage And Parenting

I was looking at my husband's page on MySpace.com. There is a post from a female that contains a sexually explicit picture. My husband says it is a co-worker, and

the post is an advertisement for her exotic dancing. I am a Christian and we have a 13 year old daughter. I'm really concerned. What is your advice?

You should be concerned.

First of all (and this will get me a lot of email), MySpace.com is quickly becoming SomePlace that Christians ought to think twice about participating on.

Granted, the whole site is not bad. Yes, you could have a page, or hang out there, and never do anything wrong. And you might not see a bad video on MTV. And you may never actually see any sex scenes in R-rated movies. I know, you can go into a bar and not drink, and you can read Playboy for the great articles. There are all these worldly things that we can do and not actually do the "bad" part (I hope you're seeing the sarcasm here).

Chances are, you WILL encounter the increasing amount of blatant immorality, mindless time-wasting or raw worldliness available at MySpace (and your kids? how about the growing number of sexual predators masquerading as other kids). At MySpace, chances are you're going to get an eye full - both eyes most likely.

That's my PERSONAL opinion about MySpace. Take it for what it's worth.

As for your husband having a sexually explicit post on his page, (I'm assuming he professes to be a Christian), it's just wrong, wrong, wrong. I don't care if his "co-worker" is raising money to save her mother from dying from cancer. A sexually

explicit picture for any reason on a married man's "my page" is wrong. Period. (or on anybody's webpage anywhere)

It's DOUBLY wrong that your husband defends it with such a lame excuse. By the way, if the explicit post is from a "co-worker" and it's for "exotic dancing," where exactly does your husband work? That might be the real problem.

Your 13 year old daughter is a whole other issue. Your husband is conveying his attitude about women to her, passively or otherwise. He is pitifully failing in honoring his wife and teaching his daughter. He is sending her a silent message about the standard of modesty his daughter will be expected to adhere to ("do as I say, not as I do!").

I really don't know how to answer you or give you advice, because the problems with all this are all too obvious. My guess is that your marriage, your spiritual relationship with him, and his spiritual life are suffering across the board. I would advise you to seek PASTORAL marriage counseling, and serious Bible teaching on Christian living and parenting.

That leaves me with two thoughts:

Christians: be careful about the world's fads. MySpace is very concerning for both adults and especially children. Yes, I know, "But Brent, I have a page on MySpace and there's nothing wrong with it." Everyone is the exception. MySpace opens up a whole world to your kids that you better be aware of and gives opportunity for all sorts of fleshly

indulgence to kids and adults alike. Be warned.

Men: stop with the lame excuses and mind games concerning sexual immorality, in particular, on the Internet where it is available in truckloads in less than 2 seconds. Be a man. Stop looking at half-dressed and naked women. Have eyes only for your wife. Teach your daughters by your actions how much you respect and revere women. You can't expect modesty and purity from your daughters, or fidelity from your wife, if you allow yourself to indulge in illicit imagery.

Sorry, there's not a whole lot of "preaching" or Bible verses in this answer. What is wrong with this situation should be fairly obvious even to new or immature Christians. My main goal was to warn you to be careful about MySpace. As Christians, you should be.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Morality – Should I Let My Adult Children Share A Bedroom With His Live-In?

Should I let my brother and his live-in girlfriend share a guest room with separate beds? I don't want to be condemning and feel Jesus would want me to welcome them while they are visiting.

Compromise.

This is the great downfall and sin of the weak, affluent, seek-friendly

church. Most often, it is done in the name of making people feel comfortable and accepted, in other words, not condemned or judged.

The Bible makes no such distinction or allowance about sin. Sin is always condemned, the sinner always judged. Loved? Yes. Given the good news of salvation? Yes. Told of God's mercy upon repentance? Yes. Given a pass about sinful behavior in the name of acceptance or comfort? No.

Ephesians 5:3 - But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. (NIV;)

Other versions say of sin, "Let it not even be named among you." Granted, this verse and verses about holy behavior are directed at Christians because non-Christians are SLAVES to their sinfulness. They have no choice but to sin. Christians on the other hand, have the power of the Holy Spirit indwelling them which enables them to choose goodness and righteousness.

In my opinion, what you are left to consider in this situation is your own personal witness and testimony to your faith.

Do you compromise the standards of verses like Ephesians 5:3 in order to make a sinner, even a family member, feel welcome or comfortable?

Are you making them less welcome by having them in your home, but preparing separate rooms for them to sleep in, stating your Godly reason for it:

"We are so happy you are here visiting us. We want you to feel welcome and make yourself at home while you are here. We have prepared separate bedrooms for you to sleep in tonight. We know that you already live together and that is your choice, but in keeping with our Christian faith, we need to ask you to stay in separate bedrooms while you are here."

If that makes your guests, even family, uncomfortable, so be it. By not compromising your faith and morals, you are:

Making your brother and his girlfriend uncomfortable in their sin, perhaps awakening them to consider their choices and the state of their souls

Honoring God by placing His will and standards OVER comfort and compromise

Now, if you have children, my advice continues. Your children (appropriate for their age) should be made aware, and taught, that what their uncle and his girlfriend are doing is wrong, and why.

Our children are not stupid. They may HEAR us say "this is wrong" but if we do not put actions to our words and accept discomfort and persecution to uphold our beliefs, they see our passive compromise as unbelief. In the eyes of children, if we aren't willing to back up our standards with action, even if it offends someone, then we are teaching them:

We don't really believe what we are saying; what we really believe is what we are doing

Or, that it's okay to compromise your beliefs when it is uncomfortable or for convenience.

Either of those will sabotage any spiritual influence you want to have on your children. They must see us making sacrifice to be consistent from our mouth (what we teach them) to our hearts (what we demonstrate in our lives).

Bottom line: if there is something "wrong enough" to put them in separate beds in the first place, then don't show them or your children compromise by putting them in the same room (which in effect gives the APPEARANCE of moral standards, but in truth is just a show).

Lovingly, hospitably, warmly, but without compromise, tell your brother he is welcome in your home, but any "hint" or appearance of him sleeping in the same room with his live-in girlfriend represents a compromise of the Godly standards your family is committed to.

If he rejects this out of hand, and refuses to visit, then take comfort in the fact that you have chosen God's glory over your own comfort, or your brother's sin.

In any case, your children (age appropriate) should be aware that even if "Uncle" lives with someone out of wedlock, it is sinful.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Morality – Is Admiration Of Beauty The Same As Lust?

In a world of constant sexual allurements, it seems a male's eyes are constantly being bombarded with female flesh. In the summer on hot days, females now dress like they're at the beach. It is difficult not to look, there is a temptation to allow the thought into one's mind about what one would like to do with the girl being looked at. I realize that this is lust. I've confessed the sin to God and believe that He has forgiven me by the blood of Jesus. If I admire a female's anatomy without making up sexual exploits about her, am I living in the sin of lust? I really want to walk in purity.

Short and sweet answer....

Show me a person who says they can consistently and regularly "admire" the body of the opposite sex "without making up sexual exploits".... and I'll show you a liar (especially given how people dress nowadays).

Okay, there might be a few females who would be able to do this; but I wouldn't bet on one out of a million for the guys.

Again, I say, **WRONG QUESTION!** We shouldn't ask, "Can I look and not sin?"... we should be asking, "How can I most glorify Christ?"

"Keep away from sexual immorality. All other sins that people may commit are done outside the body; but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Do you not realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you and whom you

received from God? You are not your own property, then; you have been bought at a price. So use your body for the glory of God." 1 Corinthians 6:18-20

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Movies – Harry Potter & Lord Of The Rings

What do you think of Harry Potter and Lord of the Rings?

Despite many Christians going to great lengths to find moral and Biblical "themes" in these movies, the facts are undeniable....

Both of these movies are full of occult themes, lessons, messages and entertainment. Demons, witches, warlocks, spells, magic, incantations... it's all there in abundance.

No amount of trying to find symbolic parallels to Christian themes changes the truth about the occult content of these films. If it walks like duck, quacks like a duck and looks like a duck... it ain't no chicken. It's a duck.

Does this categorically make it sinful to watch or own these movies? That is a matter of personal conscience between each Christian and God.

No doubt many Christians would consider this a "cut and dried" issue because of the Biblical prohibitions against dabbling in occultism. Many of those same Christians wouldn't blink an eye about Christmas trees, birthday candles, Easter bunnies or

even "trick-or-treating"; all of which have occult origins and symbolism.

It is a classic "meat sacrificed to idols" issue in my opinion; and each Christian should follow their Holy Spirit led conscience. (1 Cor 8)

Side note: I drove by a "fundamental, evangelical" church just last night whose entire front of the building and front lawn is decorated with a Halloween theme (a holiday celebrating death, horror, bloodshed, witches, occult, demons, evil and darkness; no matter how "innocent" you think "trick-or-treating" might be). Amazing... and sad.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Movies – Da Vinci Code

I just saw the DaVinci code and was wondering your opinion. My devout Catholic uncle obviously disagrees with the content, but enjoyed the movie as a work of fiction. Do you see it the same way, or do you see it as blasphemy that Christians should avoid?

It's just another attempt to disparage the accuracy of Scripture and cast general doubt on its historical reliability... not to mention using film to get people to "wonder" if something else happened to Jesus.

It's like the JFK movie... people see it and wonder if it's true or, because of how real the filmmaking is, simply take it for truth.

I don't have to use the word "blasphemy" to make my point because the film is based on conspiracy theories, myth, propaganda, anti-God bias and not a shred of historical fact. And yet, millions will be deceived by its message.

Should Christians be "entertained" by such a thing? You tell me.

Here's a summary from another writer:

By Jennifer Rast - Contender Ministries

<http://www.contenderministries.org/discrepancies/davincicode.php>

Dan Brown's fictional best seller, The Da Vinci Code, sat at the top of the best sellers list for weeks. Goddess worshippers and Christian haters around the globe have not only given it rave reviews, but offer it up as proof that Christianity is a lie. You might be wondering how a fiction novel can have such an impact. It can because Brown makes the claim that the book is based on fact. In bold letters in the front of the book Brown alerts the reader that what they are about to read, while being a fictional story, is based on historical fact. Many have argued that we shouldn't be so concerned about a work of fiction, and in one sense they are right. If people knew their history, their Bibles, and studied their own religion thoroughly, we wouldn't need to be concerned about this book. However, many of the numerous factual errors and boldface lies in Brown's books won't be obvious to the general public. Brown knows that the majority of readers will accept his conspiracy theories and distortions of history, because he

knows most people don't know, for example, what the Gnostic gospels even are. Most people wouldn't pick up on the fact that Brown can't even get the date of the Dead Sea Scrolls discovery right. To counter Brown's attempt to deceive the lost and attack Christianity, I have compiled a list of some of the errors found in the Da Vinci Code. It is by no means an exhaustive list, but it will give you an idea of the poor scholarship and deceitfulness of Dan Brown. Hopefully, it will also equip you with some of the information you will need to battle the revival of paganism that has, no doubt, been helped along by this book.

Error #1: More than once in the book, the protagonist, Teabing, makes the claim that the canonical gospels are not the earliest gospels. Instead, he claims, the suppressed Gnostic gospels are the earliest written gospels and the canonical gospels were selected from among 80 other gospels.

First, there were only less than half that many books written about Jesus life. The two Gnostic gospels Brown relies on most heavily weren't written until the second century A.D., long after the New Testament gospels were written. It makes sense that the Gnostic gospels came about in the late second century, as this is when Gnostic thought was most prevalent. However, the New Testament was complete before the end of the 1st Century.

As a side note - The Gospel of Peter, one of the very Gospels that Brown claims as an earlier writing, blames the Jews for the crucifixion. Another

Gnostic Gospel, the Gospel of Thomas, claims women must become men in order to receive salvation. Apparently Brown's Gospel is not only anti-Semitic, but also chauvinistic.

Error #2: The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in the 1950's.

This one's priceless. It seems Brown can't even get a simple date right. The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947, not in the 1950's.

Error #3: The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Gnostic texts found at Nag Hammadi are the earliest Christian Records.

Another howler. The Dead Sea Scrolls are strictly Jewish documents. They don't contain any gospels or anything even mentioning Jesus. There is also absolutely no evidence that any of the Gnostic documents were written before the late second century AD anyway.

Error #4: Jesus Christ never claimed to be divine and was never worshipped as a deity until the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D.

This is just plain false. Jesus is called God (theos) seven times in the New Testament and is called Lord in the divine sense several times. Everyone knows that the texts of the New Testament predate the Council of Nicea, and that these were first century beliefs.

Error #5: Christianity borrowed its beliefs from the pagan religion of Mithraism. Mithraism worshipped the pre-Christian God Mithras, called the Son of God and Light of the World, who was born on December 25th,

died, was buried in a rock tomb, and then resurrected in three days.

Scholars of Mithraism would strongly disagree with Brown on all of these points. Nowhere is Mithras given the title Son of God and the Light of the World. Brown apparently made this up because it sounded good. Mithras was born on December 25th, however this proves nothing. The New Testament never associated December 25th with the birth of Christ. The early Christians chose to celebrate the birth of Christ on this day intentionally to oppose the pagan mid-winter festival of Saturnalia. They never claimed Jesus was actually born on that date. The claim that Mithras died and was buried in a rock tomb is just not true. Scholars will tell you that in Mithraism there is no death of Mithras at all. So, there was no rock tomb and no resurrection.

Error #6: Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene.

The New Testament never mentions Jesus being married or even suggests it, so Brown uses one of the Gnostic gospels, the Gospel of Philip, to support this claim. We only have fragments of the text he uses as his support and that text reads as follows: "And the companion of the...Mary Magdalene...her more than...the disciples...kiss her...on her..." (Philip 63:33-36). Philip 58-59 seems to indicate that the kiss would have been on the lips. In 1 Corinthians 16, Paul mentions this kind of chaste kiss of fellowship, and this is likely what is meant here. However, we need not rest on that argument.

The protagonist in Brown's book

claims that the word “companion” in this verse actually means spouse because that’s what the Aramaic word really means. I kind of feel sorry for Brown here. This document wasn’t written in Aramaic. It was written in Coptic. The word used for companion is “koinonos” and means companion, not spouse.

Error #7: Christianity honored the Jewish Sabbath of Saturday, but Constantine changed the day to coincide with the pagan veneration day of the sun.

Once again, Brown is just flat wrong. All available evidence shows that Christians were honoring Sunday as the Sabbath long before Constantine. Brown may be confusing Paul’s trips to the synagogue on the Sabbath to preach to the Jews. If you wanted to preach to the Jews about Jesus, where would you find a large gathering of Jews to preach too? Perhaps the synagogue on the Sabbath? In any case, it is clear from scripture that the Christian Sabbath is on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 16:2).

There are many more errors found in Brown’s book, but this should be sufficient to demonstrate that his scholarship is poor, his theories are not based on fact, and, in my opinion, his intention is to discredit Christianity by promoting goddess worship and paganism based on heretical texts. It’s important that Christians expose these kind of attacks on our faith and imperative that we educate people on the true history and message of the Word of God. We have an advantage. Because our faith is built on God’s Word and on truth, we can depend on facts to

present our case. We don’t have to resort to lies, conspiracy theories, and revisionist history.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Music – Instruments In Worship?

In the Old Testament music instruments were used during worship and we can find even in Psalms an exhortation to sing His praises with different instruments. Is it wrong to use instruments during worship service?? Is there a reference to support or restrict the use??

The question of the use of musical instruments primarily is a doctrinal position of the Church of Christ.

First of all the question should be answered, what is God’s known opinion of musical instruments in worship to Him (not addressing the issue of New Testament church worship corporately)? You answer that question yourself in part.

There are dozens of favorable references in the Bible concerning musical instruments used in worship to God; they are found all throughout the Old Testament, especially in Psalms. It is not necessary for me to give a complete reference list here, as they are easily found by anyone doing a casual search.

So we are left with the question, should Christians use musical instruments during the assembled

worship service in the New Testament age?

The position of the Church of Christ is "no," we should not. It is based on several premises which include the fact that we do not have specific New Testament command to do so; we do not have New Testament example nor first century church example to do so; and the assumption is that since the Bible is silent on the issue, that we are in a sense are "adding to Scripture" by doing something in worship that is not specifically commanded.

Ephesians 5:19 - speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, (NKJV)

We are commanded to sing and make melody in our hearts through Psalms and hymns, and it must be granted to the Church of Christ position that the New Testament has no specific command to use (or not use) musical instruments.

Given that, I do not personally have any problem with a local church that, through the conviction of a clear conscience, has decided not to use musical instruments in their worship service. Obviously, they are in no violation of any scriptural commander principal, and therefore, any Christian who condemns them for this decision does so with no Biblical support.

On the other hand, I have a significant difficulty with those of the Church of Christ who have made the matter of musical instruments a test of salvation. I do not know what percentage of the Church of Christ congregations do this, but I do know

that some do (and more so in the past). Any time a Church or an individual Christian makes something other than Jesus (faith, repentance, obedience with regards to Christ) the test of salvation or the measure of fellowship, they have stepped off into the chasm of legalism and Pharisaism.

Past the core issues concerning salvation, we must not condemn or judge each other for matters of conviction and liberty. This is not wishy-washy ecumenism (unity for the sake of unity regardless of truth), this is the true nature of Christian liberty, bought and paid for with the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

Galatians 5:1 - Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. (NKJV)

The overriding principal in matters that are not clearly and plainly defined in Scripture is "whatever is not of faith, is sin." (Romans 14:23)

My personal opinion is that musical instruments used in worship are perfectly acceptable to God. Why? Because we learn from the Old Testament that musical instruments are pleasing to God, and we learn from the New Testament that musical instruments will be used for the worship in heaven for all eternity (Rev. 5:8, 9; 14:2, 3; 15:2, 3).

Given that, along with the absence of any prohibition in the New Testament against musical instruments, I find it illogical to conclude that the use of musical instruments now is somehow wrong or sinful. But, again let me clarify, I have absolutely no quarrel with a Christian or a Church (or the

Church of Christ) that comes to this conclusion through honest conviction and a clear conscience. It is as much their liberty to draw that conclusion as it is my liberty to draw mine, given the fact that the Bible does not give a plain answer.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

New Age – Harmless In Schools?

In my children's Physical Education and Guidance classes in Public School, they have been practicing calming techniques such as thumb and finger massaging and also hmmmimg as a Hindu would do. I am attending a meeting on this and would love to have any information to back up why I do not want my Christian children doing this. Also, what about other children who do not know any better?

Yes, you should be concerned. These are practices that are based in religious beliefs, no matter how much your school wants to characterize them as "physical fitness."

What is so maddening about this is that ANYTHING that even remotely smacks of being "Christian" is immediately shot down with the "separation of church and state" machine gun.

It has gotten to the point where NOTHING is off limits EXCEPT Christianity. You name it... Islam,

witchcraft, new age, evolution, yoga, native religions... is all acceptable under the guise of "tolerance" and "education." But not Christianity.

It is a blatant, evil, double standard, and, realistically, it is only going to get worse; much worse as we no doubt head into these last days.

Yoga, humming, chanting, "meditating"... are all ways to get children exposed to and desensitized to new age and eastern religious practices.

From one parent to another, about the only thing you can do is start complaining to the education officials and local politicians, start raising awareness, start trying to rally other parents. But in the end, it may be a choice to remove your kids from an increasingly antagonistic public school system. Or heavily educate your children about these issues, and give them permission to refuse to participate even if they fail the class.

That puts a heavy burden on your children, but at some point our children have to learn that "fitting in" isn't the highest priority. Tough job, tough decisions, tough situation.

You are going to be characterized as a religious kook and a trouble maker, so be prepared. You just have to lovingly stick to your guns, do what you can do, and in the end make a choice to let your kids stay in public school and refuse to participate; or find alternative education sources for them.

Again, let me say to you definitively.... make NO mistake, these practices ARE based in RELIGION... don't let anyone tell you different. And be prepared to

receive the "how stupid can you be!" treatment. These practices are doorways to the eastern and metaphysical religions. You should not be tolerant or accommodating in any way for your children's sake. There is no such thing as "innocent" dabbling in false religion.

Here are some links that will help you understand these practices:

<http://www.watchman.org/na/nateaachinginschools.htm>

<http://www.ankerberg.com/catalog/new-age.html>

<http://www.equip.org/free/DN118.htm>

A careful search on the Internet will uncover countless good Christian resources that explain the "new age" religions.

~~~~~

## Obedience — Is It Necessary?

**Do you think people who claim to be Christians but never enter a church door to worship or tithe a dime are really Christians? Their whole world revolves around themselves and family. I have close family members like this and am very concerned for them.**

You have several mini-questions here, so let's tackle each one.

First, you start out by asking my opinion about who might be a Christian, and who isn't. Only God knows the heart of someone who has

made an outward response to Christ. We know that some people who "look" like Christians really aren't (Matt 13.38), but only God can tell the difference, not us.

However, we do know that obedience is a sign, an indicator, of those who are truly saved (1John 2.4). So we can safely make the observation that a person should certainly "evaluate" their profession of faith (Phil 2.12) if it is not accompanied by obedience.

So obedience is a crucial sign of true salvation. However, this must be obedience to God's Word, bathed in the liberty we have in Christ - not shackled by religion or tradition that goes BEYOND God's Word. We are bound only by Christ:

Galatians 5:1 - Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. (NKJV)

Now, let's take a look at the things you list: going to church, worshiping and tithing.

We are not commanded to "go to church." We are commanded to "assemble" or meet together.

Hebrews 10:25 - not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. (NKJV)

"Church" is the most common manifestation of this command - what we typically think of as a building or location where a group of Christians meet on a regular basis and this location becomes known as a "church."

We are not commanded to "go to church," We are commanded to NOT FORSAKE (purposely neglect or give up) the "assembling" of ourselves together to exhort (encourage) each other as we anticipate Jesus return. We find this was the habit of the early Christians:

Acts 20:7 - Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight. (NKJV)

"Assembling" can be done in a building (what we commonly call a "church"), in a home, outdoors or anywhere that two or more Christians are gathered and Christ is there (Matt 18:20).

Simply failing to "enter the door of a church" does not necessarily constitute disobedience to God - forsaking the assembly of fellow Christians certainly does.

The "worship" issue is a little easier to answer. We are obviously commanded to worship God countless times in Scripture. A person whose life is devoid of worship to God certainly should be concerned about the authenticity of their salvation. However, "church" is not the only place worship can occur. It can occur in any "assembly" or in private worship.

Concerning "tithing" as New Testament Believers, God tells us:

2 Corinthians 9:6-8 - But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in

his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. (NKJV)

There is much argument about whether or not Christians are bound by the "tithe" - but there is no doubt we are commanded to give. A Christian who never, or rarely, or grudgingly gives to God certainly should do some soul searching about their salvation.

Philippians 2:12 - Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; (NKJV)

Again, obedience is tied closely to salvation. Obedience is evidence of true salvation and we can use it to evaluate our spiritual state.

When we observe other people, it is perfectly reasonable to be concerned about someone's salvation who has no visible demonstration of obedience... but we must be careful that we are judging that obedience by God's Word - and not by our religious tradition, ignorance or bias.

~~~~~

Obedience – Surrendering To God

Can we truly seek the will of God without surrendering completely

to him? If we have our own agenda, if obeying God interferes with our own selfish desires, how does this affect doing His will?

I'm glad that we can still "seek the will of God" even without "completely surrendering to Him" or we would rarely ever seek God's will at all.

I guess it depends on one's definition of "completely," but if taken at face value, it would be hard to find a person or a group of people who could claim to consistently AND COMPLETELY surrender to God at all times, or even most of the time.

As finite, prideful, sinful and frail humans, we have to be careful when using all-encompassing words like "completely." In fact, we are only safe using them when and where God does it for us.

I'm not sure it is even possible (again, depending on how you define it) for anyone encased in this sin-cursed flesh to truly and COMPLETELY surrender all to God. In the purest definition of "complete" that will only happen once we are free of the curse of sin.

That's the logical extreme answer. The practical answer is that TO THE DEGREE IN WHICH OUR OWN SELF-AGENDA EXISTS, IT WILL INHIBIT AND FRUSTRATE OUR EFFORT TO FIND AND DO GOD'S WILL.

And to your point, the opposite is true. To the degree that we do God's will, it is easier to deny and mortify (put to death) the sinful will of our flesh.

Galatians 5:16-18 - I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the

lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (NKJV)

Romans 8:13 - For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (NKJV)

So my final answer to this question would be: YES, "self" (flesh) interferes with knowing and doing God's will. So strive to surrender your will to God, and the more you do that, the easier it becomes to both do the surrendering and to know and to God's will.

It can be a self-perpetuating cycle either positive (the more you surrender, the easier it is to know God's will) or negative (the more you follow the flesh, the harder it becomes to know God's will).

~~~~~

## Obedience In Marriage

**My son and girlfriend live together with her 5 yr. old son. I do believe they love each other and trust in the Lord, however they are not abiding by His way of marriage. Can you please discuss this?**

Here is the entire question:

My son and girlfriend live together with her 5 yr. old son. My son has always had a deep faith, the girl is

teaching Sunday School. Both were hurt in previous marriages 5 yrs. ago, the girl is ready to get married and make it alright in God's eyes, my son I fear still has a fear of a marriage going wrong. I do believe they love each other and trust in the Lord, however they are not abiding by His way of marriage. Can you please discuss this?

We live in the era of the lukewarm church where obviously sinful behavior and choices are routinely followed by the exclamation "but they really are a good and godly person in their heart."

We would do well to simply call situations like they are, instead of deceiving ourselves or making excuses - even if they are our own loved ones.

If two people are living together out of wedlock, it is both antithetical to professing Christianity to claim a "deep faith" and simply hypocritical to be teaching a Sunday school (where is the church leadership?). Does the paradox go unnoticed of someone living in fornication and/or adultery teaching a classroom full of Sunday school children that they should obey God?

Trust me, I am not unsympathetic to people who have gone through marital agony, but it does not negate God's clear commandments for moral behavior. Nor does a fear of being hurt allow us the liberty to live together and indulge in sexual sin while ignoring God's commandments about marriage. All too often this "fear of being hurt" is nothing more than a convenient excuse not to

become spiritually and contractually bound to a marital covenant.

Given your description, I would have to be concerned about whether or not they are truly saved (notice I said "concerned" not convinced; only God can judge the heart), and whether or not they actually love each other... or are they simply enjoying the benefits of marriage without the responsibility of it?

True Christian love does not actively disobey God. So for those professing to be Christians, it is especially problematic to claim that you have a "deep faith" and a "genuine love" that is truly godly when you're manifesting that faith and love and obvious disobedience of God's clear commands.

Simply getting married "make things right in God's eyes" is in my opinion mocking God. "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked for whatsoever a man sows that shall he reap," (Galatians 6:7). Of course marriage is the right thing compared to fornication, but to think that simply getting married in this situation will make everything all right and the marriage will be magically blessed by God, is naïve.

That's not to say the marriage is doomed and cannot work, but the issues of rebelliousness, disobedience and hypocrisy in the lives of a couple would also need to be dealt with.

Of course a couple, even one professing to be Christian, could theoretically be ignorant about God's commandments concerning fornication and marriage. This does not seem likely for two people

described as having "a deep faith" and teaching Sunday school. It would seem more of a case of simply thumbing their noses at God's requirements, mistaking his mercy and patience for disinterest.

The going conclusion about God's opinion of our sinful choices today is that "it is easier to get forgiveness than permission." So we simply do whatever we feel like doing with the intention of asking God to forgive us later. How convenient.

Since they are professing Christians, it is every Christian's duty as a part of their lives to confront them over this sin and try to convince them to repent and make the necessary changes. Biblically, if they refuse to make those changes, the church should enact Christian discipline (Matt 18) against them with the purpose of restoring them and their relationship.

If they are in a church teaching Sunday school, it is highly unlikely that this church will ever enact Christian discipline for obvious reasons.

I'm not really sure what my advice is other than if you are a Christian, then it is your duty to confront them with biblical truth concerning their sin with firmness and love. And of course continue to pray that God will convict them and they will return to true obedience and faith in God.

~~~~~

Occultism – A Harmless Interest?

I have an OLD "Time Life" book collection that I purchased about 10-15 years ago when I was not living for Jesus. The series is all about mystical things, searching for the soul, witches & witchcraft, etc. Absolutely none of it is Biblical and quite frankly, one might consider the entire series on the Satanic side. My question is, even though I do not want to have them in my house any longer, if I sell them, which my husband wants to do (the entire set might be worth a lot of money, as they are in mint condition), I may lead someone else down the wrong path. A Christian friend suggested that I burn them, but my husband disagrees. What should I do?

I would answer the question in two parts: first, what does the Bible say about witchcraft and other occult things; second, should you sell the materials or destroy them?

The Bible categorically condemns all involvement with, entertainment by, or dabbling with, occult things.

Of course that has hardly slowed the modern Christian's participation in such things, particularly movies and books. Harry Potter, Ghostbusters, Ghost, Haunted Mansion, horror flicks... even Lord of the Rings, Star Wars and Matrix are filled with occult symbolism and content (lest I play the hypocrite, I admit I have seen most of those movies myself).

We have become so desensitized to it, that considering a "Disney" movie "satanic" would be considered

laughable, and yet by Biblical standards all the movies with "magic," fairies, warlocks, "good" witches, "spiritual masters," psychics and the like are clearly forbidden by Scripture; and that's not to mention the more blatant horror and demonic movies about Satan, vampires, demon possessions and evil entities of all sorts.

Consider what the Bible says about such things and ponder how NUMB we have become to occultism in literature and entertainment:

Exodus 22:18 - "You shall not permit a sorceress to live." (NKJV)

Leviticus 19:31 - Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not seek after them, to be defiled by them: I am the Lord your God. (NKJV)

Deuteronomy 18:10-12 - There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord, and because of these abominations the Lord your God drives them out from before you. (NKJV)

Isaiah 8:19-20 - And when they say to you, "Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter," should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. (NKJV)

Ephesians 5:11-13 - And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. (NKJV)

That doesn't leave a whole lot of wiggle room for "exceptions" or "mild" involvement. There is no doubt that we have, in the modern church, become extremely desensitized to occult material. In our materialistic world, we do not give sober consideration to the "spirit world" that thrives on the "occult education by entertainment" that saturates our society with sorcery, magic, witchcraft and demonism. It is rampant in literature, movies, music, clothing, art, jewelry, body art; even exercise (yoga) and self-help materials...

...AND OCCULTISM OF ALL MANNERS HAS CREPT INTO THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH MANIFESTING ITSELF IN MANY VERY PUBLIC FORMS THAT ARE BROADCAST ALL OVER THE WORLD EVERY MOMENT OF EVERY DAY... but that is an answer for another time.

Should you sell the books in question, give them away or destroy them?

Well, from a practical standpoint, why would you want to give something sinful and evil to another person?

Second, why would you want to profit from the sale of wicked materials? God certainly doesn't need the money. Money that comes from something God calls evil will never bring blessing...

Proverbs 10:2 - Treasures of wickedness profit nothing, But righteousness delivers from death. (NKJV)

But most of all, we have a direct example of New Testament believers who faced the same situation. Here's what they did:

Acts 19:19 - Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. (NKJV)

Destroy the books and thank God that He has given you an opportunity to be a witness to those around you about how Christians should treat occult material.

Follow up response to readers' comments I have received about this answer:

The question... are we supposed to follow these old Testament laws about executing those who practice witchcraft, or "drive them out" of our midst? If yes, then are we supposed to kill homosexuals and rebellious teenagers?

BR response:

No, we are not.

We don't follow the Levitical regulations/law in the "law" or commandment sense. Those laws were specifically for the Israelites living before Christ came.

However, we do look to the Old Testament and Mosaic laws for principles and indications of God's opinion about certain things. We

don't kill adulteresses or witches, nor do we execute homosexuals or rebellious kids.

But by reading God's entire Word, we get an accurate idea of what God thinks about such things and strive to have the same opinion of the sinful BEHAVIOR while applying the grace and compassion that we have through Christ.

It's a worn out cliché, but an accurate one: "Hate the Sin; Love the Sinner."

~~~~~

## Pagan Rituals – Cremation

**Is it okay for a born again Christian to be cremated? Some say it is from a pagan ritual; others say that it no longer is. Is it wrong?**

Let me answer from two aspects, first the "pagan" issue, then the question of "is it okay?"

The "pagan ritual" argument comes into play with cremation, Christmas, Easter and other traditions. So the question is: does a pagan origin necessarily make a tradition or practice "wrong" from a Christian standpoint?

One argument is that we no longer recognize them as "pagan" but see them and sincerely practice them as "Christian." The other argument is that we are "deceived" and are furthering pagan ritual by mixing it into Christianity ala what Rome and Constantine did.

I believe that God is more concerned about our motives, our willingness to conform to Truth, and our efforts to follow our Holy Spirit led conscience to the utmost of our ability.

So if you believe that a practice or tradition is "pagan" or that because of its pagan roots makes it dishonoring to God, then you should not do it. It's an "eating meat sacrificed to idols" issue (read Romans 14:14-23).

Be consistent though. Don't get on a pedestal about Easter being "pagan" while smirking at the person who says the same thing about Christmas.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Parenting – Children Questioning Your Faith

**My son, age 14, is in a critical stage of his development in which he questions everything and yet believes he "knows" it all already. In a discussion on sin, I explained that the Bible teaches that it begins in a man's thoughts. "As a man thinketh, so is he..." He dismissed that immediately by saying that's not right. Even after showing scriptures to him and praying about it, he doesn't appear to be accepting it too well. What advice can you give us to share with him? Thank you.**

Being the father of four teenagers currently, (and in 12 years I'll have two more; my youngest are one year

and two years old) I have experienced your situation and understand it fully.

It is a frustrating phase and even more frustrating when you deal with it the first time. I have been through times where my teenagers didn't seem to care about our faith or what I taught them. There were times when the existence of God or the exclusivity of Christianity was questioned. There were plenty of times when the opinions of their friends seemed to matter much more than the experience or wisdom of their parents.

The teen years are what I call the "perfect storm" in the process of growing up. A teenager has the mental intellect to process thoughts and develop ideas the same as an adult but lacks the life experience, maturity and discernment to discipline that thought process and objectively evaluate the evidence. They are overly influenced by peer pressure, political correctness and suffer from a raging pride that comes with the ability to formulate opinions like an adult, while lacking the self-control that reigns in and constrains that pride. As well, they typically lack the Biblical knowledge and spiritual depth to keep them from thinking that they "know it all" and are much smarter than anyone around them.

I often joke (but it's true) that from the years of 13 to around 20 in my children's growth, I suddenly become the most stupid, uninformed, out of touch and completely ridiculous person on the face of the planet. Then amazingly starting around 18, 19 or 20 all of a sudden I become the guy who can answer all their questions and help with all their problems.

It's frustrating when you're in the "teenagers are right and parents are idiots" phase of child rearing. I don't know if everyone goes through it, but I do know that an awful lot of people do. I used to think that good Christian parents didn't deal with these kinds of problems until I experienced it myself and also witnessed some of the most spiritual and Godly parents that I know experienced the same thing.

On a side note, parents nowadays are handcuffed and suffer from the message that society (Hollywood, Madison Avenue) sends concerning teenagers. Just about every movie, sitcom or magazine that deals with teenagers sends out a very clear message that "teenagers are smart, teenagers have rights, teenagers are open-minded, teenagers opinions and thoughts are of equal value to any and all adults; parents are out of touch, close minded dolts whose entire life would be better off if they would simply take the advice and wisdom of their teenagers and apply it to their own lives." It is part of the degeneration of our society that dishonors old-age and maturity and elevates youth and physical appearance.

My advice to you is to just keep planting Christian teaching and Godly thoughts and do not try to convince him or change his mind. At his age and with his "I know everything" attitude you will find it to be an exercise in futility to get him to agree with you and change his ideas. Nor is it necessary.

The good news is that if your children see you living out your faith and you continue to educate them about God and point out to them the evidence

that authenticates our Christian beliefs, they will have that knowledge planted in their head and as they grow they will see things that validate what you have told them.

It is very fulfilling and gratifying to have your children come back to you as they grow out of this phase and tell you both directly and indirectly, "You were right, and I see that now."

Be patient, don't get frustrated, don't worry and don't let it get to you. Just love them, teach them, plant spiritual seed and trust that God will manage the growth.

~~~~~

Parenting — Counseling Adult Children About Who They Date

My daughter confessed to her boyfriend something that happened two years ago. He has tortured her for a week with hateful emails and telling her she gets what she deserves and their relationship has been a lie. He said she needs to own up to it even though she has begged his forgiveness. He is dragging her on by saying that he has to think about it and for her to return a promise ring he gave her. The confession was a kiss....nothing else. What can she say to him to make him forgive her and move on?

Well, I hope by "move on" you mean for him to move on out of her life, at least for now.

I don't know the ages involved, but if we are talking about anywhere close to marrying age, then this young man is nowhere close to ready for marriage if he is responding this way over this issue. (If we're not talking about marrying age, why are they involved in such a serious, exclusive relationship at too young an age?)

Your daughter cannot say anything to make him forgive her. Forgiveness is a personal, individual choice. If your daughter admitted her wrong, asked for forgiveness and received torment in return, then she is lucky he has responded this way....

Why? Because this young man's true nature and character has been exposed. Does that mean he will ALWAYS be this way? No, it may simply be immaturity, but if his response has been this negative and immature, then for your daughter's sake, she should put some time and distance between them before she becomes even more emotionally invested.

Luke 6.45 45 O A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Or as I like to say, "If you squeeze a lemon, you get lemon juice..

It doesn't matter how nice you act when things are going your way. You find out what is in someone's heart whenever pressure, discomfort,

inconvenience or heartache is applied to them.

If she was dating this current young man two years ago when "the kiss" happened, then I would venture a guess that this is not the first time his childishness has appeared. (In two years you've never seen signs of this deep immaturity?) If he treats her this way after two years of dating, then that is all the more reason to move on from the relationship.

If she was NOT dating this current boy at the time of "the kiss," then it's simply none of his business to begin with. Either way, his behavior is a sign of REAL problems with the relationship and with his maturity level.

My advice? She should simply say "I'm sorry" and "goodbye." As a parent, you can use this as a learning opportunity for both you. She needs to learn about these types of indicators concerning the character of the boy she might end up marrying; and you learn to see things like this as a time to instill spiritual lessons and maturity in her, rather than simply how to put a Band-Aid on a dating relationship.

Now, to what I REALLY want to say about this question.... this type of situation exposes why the modern routine of "dating" is so absurdly destructive (in general). You have young men and women investing themselves in relationships as if they were married, often including sex.

They go through this series, "emotional investment, heartache and breakup", draining their emotional capacity, making them suspicious,

self-protective and cynical, robbing themselves of what should be rightfully saved for a relationship WITH ONE PERSON, for a lifetime via marriage.

This is where the idea of courting SHOULD come into play. When a young adult is ready to consider marriage, they are "courted" through a series of "light" get-to-know-you relationships that never progress to physicality or deep emotional investment. As well, the parents help the young and inexperienced to determine if the suitor has the desired qualities of being a life-long, faithful mate. Only when a suitor has been identified as "marrying material" by all involved, should a careful and guarded relationship begin.

I don't have time to here to go through the whole "courtship" thing, but if you're interested, there are many Christian sites where you will find more about it.

The amount of heartache and emotional damage that could be avoided is beyond estimation. The current routine of "dating" typically has one goal: how fast can the physical relationship be escalated by the boy, and how quickly can they "fall in love" for the girl.

Parents, know this, and learn it well: BOYS PLAY AROUND AT LOVE TO GET SEX, AND GIRLS PLAY AROUND AT SEX TO GET LOVE.

Every parent thinks their kid is the exception to this rule... and yours may well be, BUT DON'T ASSUME IT OR TAKE IT FOR GRANTED. To ignore this truth is to do so at your own peril.

Adolescents are VERY sexual and physical today; Christian youth groups are TYPICALLY not much different. I visit many churches and the youth groups are very comparable to the world in their dress and the amount of physical affection they display to each other. Don't be naive... this is not simple affection and caring for each other. This immodesty in dress, and overt physical contact (full body hugs, arms around each other, playful kissing etc.) is an indication of inflamed sexuality under the surface that is fueled and stirred up by an out of control sexual culture.

Christian kids and families are not immune to it. They are BOMBARDED constantly with the message that "sex is okay, your parents are trying to keep you from having fun."

These long term and cyclical "dating" relationships are fraught with danger and pitfalls. I know that for most it will be virtually impossible to convince your young adult children NOT to date, but at least you can go about advising and teaching your kids proactively, instead of wading aimlessly through this never-ending parade of pretend marriages that kids indulge in today.

Now, for those of you who simply think it's easy for me to say this because my kids never dated or had problems, guess again. Even though I did everything I could do to convince my kids of the dangers of "dating," my grown children have all chosen this route with their share of heartache to prove my point.

So I speak from experience but as a realist knowing that most kids are going to do it anyway. You can still

plant the seeds, teach them and be on spiritual alert for them.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Parenting – Your Children's Friends

My 17 year old was saved two years ago. Ever since we have struggled with her non-Christian friends that she insists on seeing. She goes to a small Christian HS and does not see her classmates out of school because it is in another county. Her non-saved friends listen to rap music. I have tried unsuccessfully to warn her of the perils of this music but to no avail. I still find a CD or a song on her iPod that has unacceptable lyrics. I am at my wits end with fighting this battle. Any advice?

To no avail? How do you know that?

As our children get closer to being the age where they are legally able to make their own choices, we transition from controlling them to teaching and influencing them.

Don't think your warnings "are to no avail." She hears you, but on the other hand she simply hasn't reached a point of conviction or spiritual maturity... and as she is nearing adulthood, that becomes more the work of the Spirit and less the work of parents.

One thing I've learned with six kids and advising countless parents with

teenagers, is that we have to be wise about when to plant seeds, warn, and speak the truth in love... but NOT attempt to simply remain in "protective control" as they near adulthood.

Don't get me wrong... I'm not talking about being permissive or lenient towards sin or immorality, but your role needs to transition from "controller-protector" to "mentor-coach-teacher." Part of growing up is experiencing bad choices and the subsequent consequences. Part of growing up as a parent is allowing this process to occur in a wise and Godly manner.

You made bad choices when you were young (have you stopped yet?), probably in spite of your parents warning or dismay. So did I. It's a natural part of parenting and growing up. Again, that does NOT mean you take sin lightly, or become permissive, nor do you enable the sin (i.e. you don't buy the inappropriate music for them)... but it does mean that you recognize the "reins of power" are switching from earthly father to Heavenly Father in your adult-child's life.

Warn, but don't nag. Teach, but don't lecture. Plant seeds without digging up the heart.

It's easier said than done, I'll grant you that. It's tough watching your kids do things that you know are going to hurt them no matter how lovingly or fervently you warn them about it. I have a situation right now with one of my adult children where they are doing something terribly destructive despite just about EVERY person around them warning them. I really

struggle with taking my own advice that I'm giving you right now. They have chosen to learn the hard way - and they will. I find myself praying the lesson will come hard and fast, rather than long and slow. Sometimes that's what we have to do. It's part of realizing, and recognizing, them as emerging adults instead of dependent children.

Start transitioning your parenting from "protective-control-constraint" to "mentor-teach," warn when necessary, and plant seeds (putting God's Word in their heart through your conversations and actions).

Now, my down-and-dirty, how do you handle it on a day-to-day basis advice? Keep planting seeds about how destructive that kind of music is spiritually, and simply tell her when you find those songs on her iPod, you will make her delete them. No arguing, lecturing, fighting... just calm and cool:

"Honey, please delete these songs. They do not honor God. What goes in your head, goes to your heart."

That's it. No more need to "fight a battle" (except in prayer). She knows. Pray that God will convict her. Trust God to "father" her. As she grows up, she will resent your control, and respect your influence. This is natural, and right. Parents do well to learn this lesson.

~~~~~

## Parenting – Godly Parenting

### How can I be a good Christian father? What does the Bible say about parenting?

Well, I don't typically answer a question by simply pointing to someone else's book, but it is by far the best way I can help you.

First, my good friend, John Barnett, writes a wonderful book on how to have a Christian Family. He's got a bucket load of kids himself, and his life is a living example of honoring God through your family. His book:

[The Joy of a Word Filled Family](#) - you can buy it off the site [here](#). Be sure to visit his website too at <http://www.dtbm.org/>.

Another book that really gets to the true heart of parenting is [Shepherding a Child's Heart](#). This book does what most other parenting books don't, and that is teach you that parenting is not just about the discipline or teaching, it's about understanding that a child's behavior stems from the condition of their heart. You can get that book [here](#).

Two more... I would highly recommend [How to Bring Your Children to Christ & Keep Them There: Avoiding the Tragedy of False Conversion](#) by Ray Comfort ([purchase here](#)) and John MacArthur's [What The Bible Says About Parenting Biblical Principle For Raising Godly Children](#) ([purchase here](#)).

I could write you one answer here, but getting these books will give you years of good advice and Godly direction.

~~~~~

Parenting – Boys Fighting

What do you think about young boys fighting to defend themselves or to get someone to quit bullying them?

Wow. There's a lot more to this question than meets the eye, and a pretty good chance I'm going to get myself a lot of "feedback" on this topic (if you know what I mean).

There are a host of issues that go into this: love, turn the other cheek, Christian witness, the feminization of men and boys in our country, the violence of today, courage, and raising boys to be "manly" and Godly men.

As a former Drill Sergeant, black belt and athlete, you might be tempted to think I have a very skewed perspective that oozes of testosterone, but that is not the case. I know, have witnessed, and have experienced the difference between being "manly" in a Godly way versus being "manly" from a fleshly standpoint. I know the difference between Godly spiritual "strength" and fleshly, pride-derived strength.

The Softening of Men

We live in a culture today that seeks to soften and feminize men. That's just a fact (and one might contend it is part of Satan's plan to confuse and weaken the human race). Unfortunately, we are so indoctrinated with feminism, male guilt and political correctness that typically our immediate response is to start defending why it is good for men to act like women (sensitivity,

expressing emotions, crying, being feelings oriented, etc.).

Not only does this "feminizing" of men confuse them, it also blurs the definitions and roles of male/female established by God. Combine all this and you get exactly what you see today: disintegrating families, confusion in marriage, rampant sexual confusion, gender perversion and boys and girls who "grow up" not having a clue what being "men" and "women" is all about (and if they do, having to constantly apologize, explain and fight embarrassment over it).

We see an alarming famine of courage, chivalry, patriotism and manliness (and missing for ladies is propriety, true femininity, love for motherhood and loyalty to husbands).

Modern Violence

The modern onslaught of violence in entertainment and real life also adds to the confusion of what being a real man is all about. The gang codes about so-called "respect" teach young men that being a man is all about never allowing "disrespect" and then meeting any disrespect with instant violence. This isn't respect; it's how wild animals act.

We have religions that teach violence and killing is the ultimate act of being manly (and Godly) and will result in eternal paradise filled with the delights of man (sex, indulgence).

We have games, movies and music that teach "being a man" means exploiting women and stomping on anyone that gets your way of getting what you want.

Weak Church, Weak Role Models

All this has affected the Church. We have weak teaching and weak role models to demonstrate for our young men how to grow up to be "manly." Many churches have succumbed to the pressures of political correctness or feminism and have not only quit teaching boys that it is okay to be MEN, but have also turned Jesus into a prissy, pretty, timid hippie that is better suited for the "summer of love" than for saving the world.

The Godly Man

Teaching our boys to be "manly" is simply teaching them to be what God wants a man to be (among other things):

- Godly - Titus 2:12 - teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, (NKJV)
- Holy - Romans 12:1 - I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. (NKJV)
- Loving - John 13:34-35 - A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (NKJV)
- Courageous
- Chivalrous - 1 John 3:16 - By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (NKJV)

- Serving - 1 Corinthians 10:24 Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being. (NKJV)
- Honest - Proverbs 12:22 - Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, But those who deal truthfully are His delight. (NKJV)
- Hardworking - 1 Thessalonians 4:11 - that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, (NKJV)
- Bold - Hebrews 13:6 - So we may boldly say: "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" (NKJV)
- The leader - 1 Corinthians 11:1 - Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. (NKJV)

Keeping in mind that those qualities are being taught, I come back to the original question. Should boys be told its okay to fight (not sport fighting like boxing, but street fighting)? My answers: sometimes.

Fighting is never appropriate:

- As part of peer pressure
- As a dare or for the enjoyment of street fighting (as opposed to controlled, athletic sport)
- To humiliate or pick on someone
- Because it's "cool" or to be accepted
- To inflict your personal will on someone else
- Out of anger
- To dominate someone for the pleasure of the "power" you feel

However, I believe there are times when we have to stand up and

physically fight, and thus, our boys should be taught the same:

- To defend a weaker person
- To defend yourself
- When it cannot be physically avoided

The last two reasons are closely related. If a man finds himself in a situation where the choice is to stand there and be pummeled, or to defend himself, then I believe we have the Godly right to physically defend ourselves.

Wait! Doesn't the Bible say to love your enemies and bless them? Yes, but notice I didn't say, "Hate the person and curse them." I said, "Defend yourself."

There may be times when you cannot defend yourself or God clearly leads you not to. Ask Paul and Jesus. They suffered specifically for the cause of Christ. And we will too. In those times, God may lead us to endure it, and at times, to defend ourselves. There is no "one size fits all."

As a GENERAL PRINCIPLE part of teaching our boys to "be men" is teaching them that it is appropriate to fight, sometimes to defend ourselves, or if it genuinely cannot be avoided.

As for the issue of defending the weak, I do not believe there is anything more cowardly than coming up with any excuse, including personal safety, to avoid fighting to defend someone weaker who is being hurt. This is a point I have hammered home to my sons since they were little, and it is a tough thing to live up to today in our schools and society. There is hardly

anything more cowardly to teach our boys than to have them stand by and watch while a weaker kid is being beat up, picked on or otherwise humiliated. I unapologetically teach my sons that.

In the end, the "fighting" question must be left with each Godly father to determine on a case by case basis. My admonition is that the times we tell our boys to "fight" be few and far between and for reasons that will promote and cultivate both their Christian witness and their spiritual upbringing. And yes, I believe there are times when both are served even in a fight.

I'll leave you with an example from my own fathering experience.

One of my boys had been coming home for several weeks in a row telling me about a boy two years older than him who was picking on him every day at school.

No matter what my son did, didn't do, say or didn't say, this older boy would push him around, "dare" him to fight, and generally humiliate him in front of the older kids.

My son is no "sissy" neither in size or demeanor. At the time, in 9th grade, he was six feet tall, 180 pounds, strong as an ox and pretty tough from years of rough-housing with his Dad and older brother (much to the chagrin of mothers, I believe rough-housing, horse play and competition is healthy between fathers and brothers).

After a time of instructing him how to respond and avoid this bully, I finally decided it was the proper time to tell my son it was okay to stand up and fight (or at least be prepared to).

I explained to him how most bullies are really cowards and all talk. I told him this was probably true in this case because the boy was older and bigger than my son.

I gave him permission to respond, "Okay, let's fight," the next time the bully challenged him but warned him it should be no idle invitation. I told him the bully would probably back down, but if not, he must be prepared to back his words up.

A few days later, in front of a group of kids, the bully started in on him again. He began taunting my son, then pushing him and "daring him" to fight. So my son surprised him with, "Okay, let's go," and proceeded to take his coat off.

My son told me the bully acted shocked but at that point had to either choose to back off (and lose face) or actually fight. So they fought.

My son was thrown to ground a couple of times by the bigger boy, but in the end, my boy pummeled the kid with a few well timed haymakers. He showed the bully that no matter how many times he threw him down, he was still going to be looking at fight when he got on his feet. In the end, the bully said "enough" and hasn't bothered my son again.

Following that, I sat my son down and told him, "Don't get proud." It is the tendency of boys who win a fight to become the bully and start strutting around with a chip on their shoulder enjoying their new found "power" among their peers.

I told him that he did what he needed to do to deal with the bully. The fight served its purpose but now the

fighting was over and it was time to try and become friends with the bully if possible.

I sternly warned him (as I had many times before) about EVER being the bully, fighting without real reason, or standing by and watching someone weaker get bullied.

In this case, I cannot see where my parenting choice did anything but instill Godly character, discipline and courage into my son.

Fighting should be a last resort for specific reasons and with the right motivation, but yes, I believe there are times when part of growing up to be Godly men may involve a fight or two.

~~~~~

## Parenting — Over Protective?

**I have a 13 year old daughter. She wants to attend events and hang out with her friends but resents the fact that I ask "who, what and when" and check up on the facts before letting her? Am I being over protective?**

Depends. If you insist on accompanying her to every single thing she does, yes... otherwise, you're simply being a smart parent.

Thirteen is a very impressionable age in our society. She is just old enough to want to do things, and begin to experience things that our society pushes at kids far too young. However, she is still emotionally immature and has insufficient

experience and character to say "no" to tempting friends and desire, not succumbing to peer pressure.

The fact that she tells you to "butt out" and doesn't want you asking questions should raise a few red flags. There is a difference between the simple embarrassment of having your parents ask questions, versus defensiveness that comes from a kid KNOWING they are wanting to do things they shouldn't be doing.

It's one thing for you to insist that you are going to accompany her at all times and never let her begin to have a chance to build trust and develop decision making abilities. That WOULD be over-protective and counterproductive.

However, asking questions, checking up on the facts, doing a little reconnaissance on occasion and knowing the "who, what, where and when" is not only proper, it is VITAL, especially in today's world.

Don't let your teen pressure you and bully you into feeling guilty for doing this. You need to be "Ronald Reagan fighting the Cold War" when it comes to your teens: TRUST, BUT VERIFY.

Don't let them, or anyone else tell you that to "verify" means you do NOT trust them. Hogwash. Trust has to be earned. In today's world, only the foolish parent falls for the favorite teenager guilt trip, "You don't trust me." Darn right I don't, not until you've proven you are trustworthy. You're a parent first, not their "buddy."

My advice? At that age, decreasing the oversight as they grow and earn the trust, you need to be diligent about:

- knowing who they are with at all times
- knowing where they are at all times
- knowing when they will be home
- knowing the friends and the families of the friends they hang with
- insisting that any change of plans be approved first

Then, and this is important, make sure they know that AT ANY TIME, randomly, you will go to where they say they are, and you will verify that everything that have told you is true. And you must actually, literally, do this.

More often at first, less often as they grow up and earn your trust. It's important you verify their stories. Don't wait a couple of years "trusting them" only to find out you've been schnookered.

No doubt you'll get read the riot act about how "lame" you are and how you embarrass them in front of their friends. But you can be discreet about your verification. If she has a cell phone, show up outside the event, call her, and tell her to come out confirm to you she is there. Or, if you can simply go there and keep your presence unknown, then do so. Yep, SPY on your kid. Oh, the horror. (Have you forgotten your child's "right to privacy"??? Funny, I don't recall having that right when I grew up. When did that amendment get passed anyway?)

However, TELL YOUR CHILD you checked up on them and give them details to prove it. You WANT them to know that you could pop up at any

time to verify their story and that randomly, but predictably, you do.

Trust but verify. If it worked on the Russians and kept us from nuking each other off the planet, it will work on your teenagers!

~~~~~

Parents — Honoring Them When It Is Hard

I'm having a difficult time "honoring my father and mother" while trying to also teach my children that God created all people equal. My parents are Southern Baptist and have always said the right thing or acted "appropriately" in front of others, but they are very racist. When they visit my home they very plainly use language, regarding people of different color, that I don't want around my children. We live in the north, and this is strange to them. My problem is I don't know how to broach the topic without making my parents feel like I'm disrespecting them. I do however want my children to know that I don't approve of this language or way of thinking, but I don't want them to see me as showing my own parents disrespect either. Mostly I'm worried about the example they are setting and the confusion this could cause my children. How would you handle this?

It is a matter of priorities.

For example, the Bible says to obey the government (Romans 13:1), but the higher priority is to obey God. Where God's commandments differ from the government, God is to be obeyed.

Similarly, you need to get your priorities straight. Yes, you need to honor your father and mother, but in the right order of Godly duty. Your priorities are: God, your spouse, your children, then your parents. Where your father and mother violate those priorities, you are to RESPECTFULLY respond in whatever manner appropriate.

You have several things to consider, none of them easy:

By your own admission, your parents are being hypocrites by "acting appropriately" in public, then being racist in private (and I'm assuming we are talking about TRUE racism here, not the politically correct ridiculous oversensitivity that the media flames up). As Christians, regardless if those in question are your own parents, you have a duty to rebuke a fellow Believer for such behavior.

I have known people who have used racist language for so long, that they don't even realize it. Sometimes just a calm conversation will change the situation. I personally have experienced this, choosing to very gently ask someone to quit speaking that way around my children, and they did. I think it just took them realizing that people really do get offended at true racism. Genuine Christians have NO BUSINESS

participating in, or passively condoning real racism.

Regardless, you need to teach your children exactly what I'm teaching you: honor your parents, but honor God first. Teach them that just because parents say or do something wrong, it does not mean we "honor" it anyway, even by ignoring it. Wrong is wrong. It doesn't matter who it is, and honoring Godliness is more important than honoring any person, including our parents. Teach your children that "honoring father and mother" is Godly, but honoring God is a higher priority in a situation like this. This is not showing your parents disrespect - it's teaching your children the proper Godly order of things.

Next, teach them WHY racism is bad: there is no such thing as race! "Race" is a concoction of EVOLUTION. Evolution teaches that there are different classes of people primarily distinguishable by skin color. The fact is, skin color is nothing more than a varying amount of melanin brought on by genetic selection. Humans are humans, PERIOD. Culture, language, religion and genetic selection (such as skin color, eye shape, hair type, etc.) make us look and act different... but a human is a human is a human.

Christ died for EVERY HUMAN no matter what skin color, eye shape or hair type. For any person of any color to think they are superior to any other person of another color is simply devilish pride or ignorance. So teach your children why "racism" is wrong and why "races" don't even exist. That is evolutionary thinking that has permeated our culture, and the Church.

God is not the author of confusion (1Cor 14:33). When you teach your children the truth, there will be no confusion. When you have this truth firmly grounded in your own mind, there will be no confusion.

I think you obviously need to have a talk with your parents and tell them your concerns. Do it with love and respect - THAT is the way you show honor. Your Christian duty comes before their feelings. Your children come before their feelings. The truth comes before their feelings. So tell them with love and respect that you'll have no more racist language or comments in your home.

Here is my personal advice: if they respond favorably, then all is well. If they get mad at you and respond negatively, then tell them that if they insist on continuing with the racist language, you will point out to your children immediately that racist language and comments are wrong, in front of your parents if necessary, even if embarrassing.

Tell your parents with the greatest respect, that your Christian faith and your children come first, even at the price of them being mad or uncomfortable.

Remember an over-arching principle: AS CHRISTIANS WE ARE NEVER TO PROVIDE A COMFORTABLE ABODE FOR SINFUL BEHAVIOR. No matter who it is, or how uncomfortable for us, we are never to sit idly by while sin is provided an unchallenged haven... especially in our own homes where our impressionable children are ever watching.

You honor your parents the most
when you teach your children true
Godliness.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Peace – Will There Ever Be World Peace?

**Am I right according to God's Word
there will never be world peace?
How does the answer to my
question fit with President Bush's
comment during the Inaugural
speech that "Freedom Is Necessary
for Peace And Everybody Deserves
Peace" and "America Declares
Peace Throughout All The World?"
I'm puzzled by all this and look
forward to your answer.**

There are differing opinions on the
Biblical answer, so let me give you a
summary of them, and a little
commentary of my own. The Biblical
answer depends on your view of
eschatology (the study of the "end
times").

If you believe in some form of
"millennialism" then it goes with that
viewpoint that there will be a false
peace leading up to the time of the
Great Tribulation when God's wrath
will be poured out on earth.

1 Thessalonians 5:2-3 - For you
yourselves know perfectly that the
day of the Lord so comes as a thief in
the night. For when they say, "Peace
and safety!" then sudden destruction
comes upon them, as labor pains upon

a pregnant woman. And they shall not
escape. (NKJV)

Luke 17:26-27 - And as it was in the
days of Noah, so it will be also in the
days of the Son of Man: They ate, they
drank, they married wives, they were
given in marriage, until the day that
Noah entered the ark, and the flood
came and destroyed them all. (NKJV)

In the "days of Noah" there was a false
sense of peace because everyone was
doing their own thing, living however
they wanted, drinking, marrying and
engaging in blatant immorality.

Jesus will return when people are
proclaiming "peace and safety." This
verse fits well with the other major
eschatological view that is called
"amillennialism" or the "preterist"
view.

This view basically holds that the
prophecy in Scripture has already
been fulfilled and that nothing
remains except for this world to end
and eternity to begin.

It is NOT in the scope of this answer to
even begin to explain those positions
in any detail. In light of our answer,
the Millennialism would say, "No,
there will be no true peace, however,
there will be a false peace shortly
before the world ends."

An Amillennialist could answer either
way. Yes there will be peace because
Paul said in Thessalonians people
would be proclaiming "peace and
safety" near the end of time. This
could be a real peace or a false peace
given the preterist viewpoint.

Now, would you like my opinion? I
thought you'd never ask....

IF I were an Amillennialist, I would say "NO" there will never be true peace until eternity begins after Judgment Day. Man is incapable of true peace on a worldwide scale because of our sin nature. In all of human history, we have hardly been capable of peace in our families, our communities or countries - much less peace in the whole world. It's a false dream for fallen, sin-cursed humans.

IF I were of the Millennial/Tribulation viewpoint, then I would still say "NO" there will never be true peace. This viewpoint holds from Scripture that a false peace will exist based on a severely deceptive global religion even while the earth is full of wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, etc. Mankind will cry "peace" but it will all be a facade. They will cry "safety" but much like today (?) that cry will be used to strip men of their freedom giving a temporary false sense of "peace and safety."

Then, according to this view, a demonic world leader will bring about a period of very real, but false, peace followed by a short but terrible time of God's wrath being poured out on the earth against all mankind - reminiscent of Noah's flood which brought God's wrath on the earth at that time.

After those events, a true peace will come as Jesus Christ reigns on earth for 1000 years. At the end of this reign, a very brief time of war will commence in which Satan and all rebellious humankind will be vanquished. After that, the Judgment and Eternity.

No matter which theological position is held, it is clear that man is incapable of TRUE world peace.

As for President Bush, whom I admire and pray for, his statements about world peace are at best sincere personal desires and at worst political wishes based on a lack of knowledge of Scripture, (or a misunderstanding of it). Granted, there is nothing wrong with WISHING for world peace, but to be the most powerful man in the world and actually try to implement it, is futility at best, foolishness at worst.

Finally, as for his statement about how everyone "deserves" peace, it is again a mixture of misunderstanding, and well-intentioned personal desire.

It is well intentioned because it is certainly okay to think that we all "deserve freedom" from a sense of simply wishing the best for people, loving your neighbors and your enemies, wanting everyone to be able to worship God and just being a good person. In this sense, there is nothing wrong with saying everyone "deserves" freedom.

In another sense, we don't "deserve" anything except God's judgment because of our sin. The word "deserve" is used ad nauseum by advertisers and politicians because it appeals to our basic selfishness and narcissism. Only those who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb "deserve" anything good, and that is not any of our doing, but Christ's alone.

In short, President Bush means well, but is naive in those statements either on purpose, because of politics, or

inadvertently, due to a lack of Bible knowledge.

There will be NO TRUE UNIVERSAL PEACE until the Prince of Peace has judged all, re-created all and reigns over all for all time.

2 Peter 3:10-13 - But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (NKJV)

~~~~~

## Persecution – Modern Persecution Of Christians

**You mentioned in your answer today that thousands of Christians are tortured or killed for their faith in other parts of the world. Could you point us to some resources that would help us know more about this?**

2 Timothy 3:11-12 - persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of

them all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. (NKJV)

[Foxes Book of Martyrs](#) should be REQUIRED reading for Christians!

[Tortured for Christ](#)

[Voice of the Martyrs U.S.](#)

[Voice of the Martyrs Canada](#)

[Christian Martyrs on Wikipedia](#)

[Crying Voice](#)

[By Their Blood: Christian Martyrs from the Twentieth Century and Beyond](#)

That's plenty to get someone started learning about the history and the current world of Christian persecution.

Warning: you will be blessed, convicted, saddened, horrified and strengthened by learning about your martyred brethren.

~~~~~

Piercings – Right Or Wrong?

I'm 22 years old and completely support myself. A lot of my friends are getting piercings, and I want to as well but my parents say it's wrong. Is it wrong?

On topics like this, parents are usually labeled "fuddy duddy" at the moment of impact, but years later the kids decide they actually knew what they were talking about.

Before I answer, I'll go ahead and admit defeat. Everyone who wants a piercing is going to think my answer wrong. Every parent who didn't have the nerve to tell their kids "no" will be convinced of my legalism and narrow mindedness. Liberal Christians will think I'm being judgmental. Conservative Christians will think I'm being wishy washy.

But that's never stopped me from opening my big mouth!

Biblically, there are couple of Levitical verses that could be invoked as a prohibition, but that's a problem because we aren't under Levitical law. For those of you who want to use those verses, make sure you're following ALL the Levitical regulations and not just the ones that suit your lifestyle.

The New Testament principle of honoring and caring for your body because it is the temple of the Holy Spirit has some legitimacy. However, it can be argued that ear, bellybutton or nose piercings are hardly destroying your body (although it can be argued also that dozens of piercings in every imaginable spot is not defacing your body).

The argument against piercings comes more from a social and "send a message" point of view. We have to be honest about the social consequences and what message it states about you a person.

As I state the following opinion, I fully realize there are mobs of people who are going to howl and holler and tell me how wrong and judgmental I am. But I present these observations after years of dealing with people as a

business owner, a Drill Sergeant and a Bible teacher.

Multiple piercings, and more extreme piercings, do send a message of rebellion, but that is less and less true as piercings become more mainstream. As the popularity increases, it simply shows an acceptance of the world's practices without discernment.

More telling, piercing in world history seems to become more prevalent as a society moves away from God. It is a common phenomenon that the more superstitious and pagan a culture is, the more extreme piercing is a part of it. This would seem to be proven today as once-Christian nations embrace pagan practices.

As well, I can tell you from a general business sense how piercings are perceived by the responsible sector of society. They are not well received and typically you start out with a strike against you with business adults.

Is it wrong? Is it a sin? The physical act cannot be specifically condemned for Christians using Scripture, but if the motivation is unGodly (rebellion, impurity), then it most certainly is sin. Beyond that, it's more a social choice, and you have to live with the consequences which definitely can be negative.

A Christian must also be discerning, and even if the motivation for getting a piercing is not rebellious, you must consider the "message" you are presenting.

My advice is this: don't do it if you're a guy, especially if you aren't 100% sure you want to live with how

professionals (potential employers, more conservative folks) will stereotype you. More importantly, I think you can't avoid the worldly message it sends out. Ladies, obviously earrings don't fall into that category but the same principle applies about multiple or extreme piercing.

~~~~~

## Prayer – What Is Praying For The Dead?

### What verses in the Bible talk about "praying for the dead?"

There aren't any.

It is a Catholic practice supported only by one verse (2 Maccabees 12:44) found in the Apocrypha which Protestants do not recognize as canonical. The Catholic Encyclopedia states the following:

"There is no clear and explicit warrant for prayers for the dead in the Scriptures recognized by Protestants as canonical."

The Catholic Encyclopedia is correct.

"Praying for the dead" is wholly a Catholic practice "authorized" by their church tradition and council, not the Word of God.

~~~~~

Prayer – Does God Listen To Non-Christians?

How does God hear the prayers of people who aren't Christians?

Growing up, I was taught that He only heard the prayers of His children, but I know that He hears the sinner's prayer of salvation, so this can't be entirely accurate. I know that pop culture would have us believe that anyone could and can turn to God at any time with a prayer and He will listen. What does the Bible say?

God hears the prayers of non-Christians when GOD CHOOSES to hear the prayers of non-Christians.

Unlike God's children who have been PROMISED access to the Throne (Heb 4.16) and PROMISED the Spirit as an Intercessor (Rom 8.26), non-Christians have no such promise. While not universally true, generally speaking God does not "hear" the prayers of the unrepentant.

Now, of course God does "hear" in the sense that He knows all, sees all, hears all. But He does not "hear" in the sense of accepting and answering... except when it pleases Him to do so and brings Him glory.

It is a generally true statement that God only hears the prayers of His children, but even then it is conditional:

Sin must be confessed (2Chron 6.26; Psa 66.18; James 5.1; Prov 1.28)

Unforgiveness must not be present (Mark 11.25)

We must be asking for the right reasons (1John 5.13-15; James 4.3)

We have to have faith in Christ (John 15.7)

We ask in Jesus name for His glory (John 14.14)

We have to be obedient (1John 3.22)

We must ask God in belief (Mark 11.24)

You must be treating your spouse in a Godly manner (1Pet 3.7)

Let me comment on two of your statements. First, Biblically speaking there is no "sinner's prayer" that God is obliged to listen to. The "sinners prayer" has been an invention of the modern evangelism movement. Don't get me wrong, there is certainly nothing wrong with a sinner praying and asking God to save him. But we need to be careful about instituting and accepting as "Biblical" things that have simply become tradition. The sinner's prayer has developed from evangelistic methods, not from a Bible example or command.

Further, if a person has reached a point of praying for salvation, then God has already turned His face towards them and is actively involved in the process:

John 6.44 - No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. (NKJV)

God has already drawn anyone who responds in faith, moreover, it is impossible to respond to God unless He has drawn that person to Himself. So of course if God draws someone, He will be inclined and ready to hear and respond to any prayer of faith or repentance that is offered.

No one can turn to God "anytime, anywhere" and have God unconditionally be obligated to hear prayer, whether saved or unsaved. As well, God hears the prayers of the unsaved when it suits His purpose, pleases Him or glorifies Himself.

We must be careful not to ever box God in and say what He can and can't do, will or won't do... unless God Himself has specifically declared it in His Word.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Prayer – Why Doesn't God Answer?

When you pray for something and years pass by...but God does not answer your prayer, is he saying NO. Should I continue to pray for it?

Well, you're assuming the answer is NO. That's not necessarily true. Until God clearly reveals to you the answer is "no", then the answer might be "wait", "not yet" or maybe even an answer that we can't understand. The prayer of the righteous is very effective, and as feeble humans we have very little understanding of God's timing. "Many years" seems like an awful long time to us, but to God it's a fraction of a speck of a blink of nothing.

Should you continue to pray? I would say yes if what you are praying for is Godly, appears to be God's will to the best of your ability to decide; and if

the things you are praying for is the desire of your heart.

Perhaps God will have a surprising and delightful answer for you when you see Him face to face!

James 5:16b ...The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. (NKJV)

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Prayer – Should We Pray For Ourselves?

Is praying for yourself everyday being selfish with your prayer time? I pray for others, and I pray for myself. What is too much?

Well, if all you do is pray for yourself, or the main focus and priority is simply praying for your own personal needs, then yes, I think you would need to evaluate whether or not your prayers are selfish.

There are many things to pray for and about. We need to adore and worship God. We need to confess sin. We need to thank God for all things. We need to pray for others. We need to pray for the lost. We need to pray for our leaders, government and spiritual. We need to pray for the suffering Christians.

Oh yeah.... and we need to pray for our own personal needs.

Balance, humility, unselfishness... that is the key.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Prayer – Can We Pray Directly To God?

I've always been told that we as humans cannot pray directly to God because we are sinful beings. God, being so pure, cannot be associated with us. This is why Jesus is our intercessor. Am I wrong about this? A friend told me that after we are mature Christians we can speak directly to the Father. I'm confused. Can you clear this up for me?

First, let me categorically state that the idea of "after we are mature Christians we can speak directly to the Father" is completely and utterly false, without any Biblical support whatsoever, and in fact, is contrary to Scripture.

There is some truth to the idea that sinful humans cannot be in God's presence, hence the need for salvation and justification. So in light of that, unbelievers have no "direct access" to God.

It is a tricky issue to say when/if God hears "all" prayers or "no" prayers of a particular person or group. There are times when God hears the prayers or calls of unbelievers (Acts 10:31), because 1) God hears all, and 2) God chooses to hear and respond to the unbeliever simply because GOD CHOOSES TO. That is all the reason He needs.

There are other times when God chooses not to hear the prayers of Believers, such as when a husband is

not honoring and loving his wife (1Pet 3:7).

In reality, there is a difference between God "hearing" (He hears all) and God listening to and responding to prayers. He hears all because He is omniscient and omnipresent, but may for various reasons not listen or respond to a prayer.

As for Christians, here are some verses to clear up your questions about prayer and Jesus the Intercessor:

Philippians 4:6 - Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; (NKJV)

Ephesians 2:18 - For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. (NKJV)

Hebrews 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (NKJV)

Hebrews 7:25 - Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. (NKJV)

Jesus is our Intercessor in the sense that He prays for us, on our behalf. Of course, He knows exactly the right thing to pray and what a GREAT encouragement that is. I know that Jesus is praying the right things for me, even if I'm way off the mark myself.

Jesus is not a "broker" or "filter" for our prayers. Our prayers, as Believers, our lifted up to and heard directly by

God. Jesus' intercession is in addition to our prayers. He is not an intermediary in the sense that we pray to someone, then that "someone" forwards our prayers to God on our behalf. That is more of a Roman Catholic idea (i.e. praying through Priest, or to "saints", or the "virgin Mary").

Be blessed dear Christians that you have direct access to the Father from the moment of salvation and that Jesus Christ our Saviour Himself is offering up additional prayers on our behalf!

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Prayer – Can Prayer Really Change Things?

I wanted to ask you about what you believe about the power of prayer, since that is often all you ask for. It has always been confusing to me to pray when God already knows His plan and our days are numbered exactly. Can prayer really change the outcome of a situation? Do you believe the more people that pray, the better the chance of an answered prayer?

Prayer is communication with God. We don't surprise God with anything or inform Him of something He isn't aware of, so while prayer is a pleasing act of worship that God enjoys, it's primary benefit is for US. It reminds us of who we are dependent on. It keeps our focus on God. It reminds us

to ask God for help, direction and wisdom.

I say primary BENEFIT... for God, it is His desire and enjoyment of relationship and communication with His children. When our earthly children call us for advice or to ask for our help, it doesn't really "benefit" us, but we enjoy it because it builds our relationship with them, which we long for.

Yes, God knows our plans, our thoughts and the outcome of EVERYTHING, but GOD HIMSELF commands us to pray, so the fact that He "knows" must not be relevant to "why" we pray. Since our prayer, in reality, is not "needed" (in the strictest sense; God NEEDS nothing) by God, then we know that God tells us to pray because it is what is best FOR US.

Can prayer "change" an outcome? Depends on whose eyes you are viewing from. From God's, no... He already knows the result, so philosophically, prayer cannot "change" what God already knows will occur because He already knows "the change" ahead of time, so it's not really a change to Him.

However, from OUR perspective, the fervent prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective... from OUR point of view. We are commanded to pray, God tells us pray, so prayer must be beneficial and useful. We know in fact from mountains of anecdotal evidence that prayer affects every aspect of life, from our point of reference.

Do we think if MORE people pray, our daughter Abby will be healed for

example? No. I've addressed this in the past several times. We are not trying to coerce God, or force His hand. His Will will be done and, in fact, was determined before the foundations of the earth were ever laid. We continually gather more praying friends into the fold because we have seen how many lives have been touched, how many hearts have been strengthened, how many spirits have been renewed and how many people have shown love and received love because of one little girl laying in a hospital bed in Oklahoma.

It is a testament to the power of God that He can affect so many lives and bond so many together in a common act of love. I mean really... in the grand scheme of things, humanly speaking, what difference does it make if one little four year old orphan girl has cancer? Humanly speaking, NONE, except to her family. So what does it say about the spirit and love produced by Christianity that tens of thousands of people can be knit together in common prayer because of this one insignificant (humanly speaking) child? What joy must our Heavenly Father get to see a large multitude of His children come together in love on behalf of ONE of their little sisters?

We constantly grow the circle of love around Abby because of what it does for US, for THEM, for YOU, for HER. It has also resulted in so much encouragement and love for Abby, Michelle and me. We don't do it for that reason, but we do not discount this benefit.

For everything there is a season. Michelle and I have enjoyed seasons

of giving, serving, teaching, loving and sacrificing for others. We count it all joy that during this short trial for us, God has given us a season of support, encouragement and a multitude of new friends. For everything there is a season.... You reap what you sow. Bless God that his promises are true.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Prayer – Praying For “Favor”

Recently I had a girl tell me that we should pray for favor. I'm not sure what this means. Is this different than praying for God's will?

She is referring to praying for God's blessing and His positive opinion or approval towards us.

That is not the same as praying for God's "will." Praying for God's will is trying to determine what God would have you to do; whereas praying for God's favor is asking for His blessing on what you have already decided to do.

It is a waste of time to ask God's favor for something that violates His known will found in His Written Word - the Bible.

It is certainly an appropriate part of prayer to ask God's favor (approval, blessing, help, protection and attention) for our lives.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Promises – How Do We Know When The Bible “Promises” Something?

How do I know which promises in the Bible are for me and which are not?

That is a great question because we have much incorrect teaching today based on "promises" that are jerked out of context from all over the Bible.

When it comes to Bible "promises" as spoken of today, there are really two categories: promises and principles.

Promises are direct statements that always come true, period. For example, when we are truly saved, we receive eternal life. That's a promise. It is a result that always happens, period.

A principle is a general truth that has typical results, but differs from a promise in that it is not as cut and dried as "if you do A, then B will happen."

For example, "train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov 22.6). This is generally true, but as many Christian parents can tell you, it's not a universal promise because when children grow up, they have a choice to serve or reject Christ. And not all kids raised in good Christian homes end up being Christians.

All through Proverbs we have principles that say if a Godly man is honest and works hard, he will prosper. But the sin curse that has

infected the world sometimes causes even hard-working Godly men to lose everything they own, be cheated or suffer disaster.

Once you determine whether something is a promise or a principle, you then have to ask if it applies to YOU specifically, or you in general, or not at all.

Many verses from the Old Testament that were promises (or principles) that were given explicitly to the Israelites are taken out of context and preached to Christians today. Some are taught as promises, when at best, they should be presented as a general principle. For example:

2 Chronicles 7:14 - if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. (NKJV)

This was a promise specifically given to Solomon by God explicitly for the Israelite nation. We don't hear much about the surrounding verses that talk about bondage, dispersion and suffering that will occur if God is forsaken.

While it is generally true that God will bless a nation who honors Him (i.e., America), this verse is not a PROMISE for us specifically. It was a promise for the Israelites, which also could be a general principle for us to live by.

No matter, the point is, we need to be very careful about taking promises in the Bible meant for a specific people of a specific time... and saying they are the same promises for us today. I'm not saying it's always incorrect, or

that there are no promises for us, there are... I'm saying we need to be MUCH more careful because there is MUCH false teaching built around this technique claiming promises.

Principles spring from God's nature. Because God has certain character traits, then it is generally true that He will respond/act in a certain way given certain actions/choices on our part.

Promises are direct condition/result statements in Scripture, and determining who those promises were made to, is paramount. We can't "claim" every promise in the Bible - only the ones that apply to us. We can't "claim" every principle as a promise.

In summary:

Is this a promise or a principle?

Who is it specifically being presented to?

If not New Testament Christians, does it still generally apply to us today?

~~~~~

## Prophecy – Is America In The Bible?

**My question is this, why is the United States of America not mentioned anywhere in the Bible? Or am I just overlooking it? It seems as though we should be found somewhere in the Bible since we play such a huge part in**

## **the world and because of our defense for Israel.**

There are prophecy teachers who say that the United States IS mentioned in the Bible, but those references are subjective at best and guesses at worst.

Yes, we have defended Israel, and unless you believe that the "church replaced Israel", then you are correct to imply that God has used and blessed the United States greatly because of her support of Israel.

If you believe God is through with Israel, then you are left to explain away a mountain of unfulfilled and specific prophesy concerning them, not to mention the absolute MIRACLE that this tiny, unimportant, rag-tag group has survived and flourished despite dispersion, oppression, discrimination and genocide for thousands of years. THAT FACT ALONE DEFIES ALL ODDS OF CHANCE. God has preserved them for a reason.

(I don't come by that position easily; I was raised, taught and believed for decades that God was finished with Israel and that all the prophecies concerning them now apply to the "symbolic Israel" [the church]).

There are no direct or plain references to the United States in Scripture. If there were, I'm afraid that we stand a better chance of being mentioned in the same manner as Sodom and Gomorrah than anything else.

In an indirect way, the United States would be grouped with the "whole world" that comes against Israel at the battle of Armageddon; so our current

support for them evidently will falter in the end (signs of which are already appearing).

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## **Psychology – What About Rick Warren?**

**What do you think about Rick Warren? He gets criticized but everything I've read or heard of his seems Biblical to me. Do you have any thoughts?**

I get hammered routinely for tackling controversy, and truthfully I get a little weary of it. This question opens up a topic I have been burdened to write about for quite a long time and I have hinted at it many times in the past. So here goes...

In short, there are LOTS of "Christian" leaders, teachers and writers out there who are heretics and false teachers. If there was a nice way to say it, I would, but that is just the plain and simple of it.

Warren is not one of them. He is evidently sincere, no doubt loves the Lord, and at times, teaches a clear and truthful Gospel. Much of his teaching is sound, and it appears his heart is genuinely motivated by wanting to serve God.

However, he has succumbed, like a growing number evangelical teachers, to humanistic psychology, and his writing/teaching is full of it. The problem is, the Church is being saturated in this unBiblical and thoroughly unGodly worldview. So

called "Christian psychology" is not Christian at all. It is the same humanistic theory that the world teaches, wrapped in Christian lingo, propped up with some out-of-context Bible verses and made "spiritual" by some accompanying prayer.

Psychology was founded and created by God-hating, occult-entangled, drug addict, sexual deviants (all or most apply to the following): Freud, Jung, Rogers, Maslow, Abrams, etc. (Note: I use the term "psychology" hence forth generically to mean "psychotherapy"; there is some legitimate psychology, an example would be how people react to colors or respond to the layout of a building or mechanical interface).

The Church has embraced the fallacy of psychotherapy right about the time the world is starting to see it as the farce it is: creating its own diseases, conjuring up its own diagnosis, then wrapping it all in a pseudo-scientific air of authority steamrolling anyone who disagrees or proclaims it is not "scientific." The very premise that psychotherapy is scientific is absurd. Thoughts, emotions and behavior are not physical or chemical, they are derived from the mind and soul. If they were purely chemical, as is the basis of many of the humanistic theories, then we would be at the mercy of our brains, waiting around, wondering what chemical reaction was going to produce what thought, what wicked act, or what mood.

Warren has embraced "Christian psychology" and pop psychology ideas just like vast numbers of Christian leaders, teachers and Pastors have. Men like James Dobson bring an air of sincerity and authority to it, but make

no mistake: psychology is psychology... there is no such thing as "Christian psychology." There are only people who profess Christianity and attempt to integrate and make compatible the Godless, (and 100% incompatible) humanistic, atheistic and often times occult ideas of psychotherapy.

Psychology very simply is a replacement religion complete with a worldview (humanism), a god (man), it's claim of authority (science) and a church (clients). How Christians can attempt, or even want to attempt, to integrate it with Biblical Christianity is an utter mystery to me.

Jim Dobson seems to genuinely love the Lord. He has a heart for people, that's obvious. So does Warren. But they have simply and plainly erred by introducing and indoctrinating millions of Christians in the idea that Bible is NOT sufficient for EVERY aspect of our mental, emotional and spiritual life. Make no mistake, the message of psychology is loud, clear and undeniable: the Bible alone is NOT enough; Pastors and the Word of God are insufficient; Spiritually mature Christians armed with prayer, Scripture and the Holy Spirit need the help of "trained mental health professionals."

I don't think these men (Warren, Dobson, Osteen, Swindoll, etc.) are malicious pawns of Satan, knowingly diluting the Church and our reliance on God's Word, but that is IN FACT what they are doing when they attempt to integrate Christianity and psychotherapy, or humanistic psychology concepts (like self-esteem). I do NOT question the salvation or motives of these fine men,

I just disagree with them about psychology.

Yes, there are some who ARE malicious and teach a blasphemously false Gospel like Schuller. Even though Warren used to claim Schuller as a mentor, he now distances himself and does NOT teach the heretical Gospel heard in the Crystal Cathedral. I want to make it clear, that as of this date and time, I don't put Warren and Dobson in the same category as Schuller, Templeton and some of the "latter rain" leaders (Wagner, Wimber, Bentley, etc. as well as a host of the more extreme prosperity teachers).

Dobson is the leading spokesman of "Christian psychology," promoting its "selfisms" that are, in my opinion, in contradiction to Scripture (self-esteem, self-love, self-forgiveness, self-acceptance, self-image, etc.) Dobson states on one hand that a lack of self-esteem is the greatest problem we have (particularly women), and on the other, says that any Christian wanting to be trained in psychology better be strong enough to withstand the humanistic ideas. Huh? But let me state again, lest it be misunderstood... I don't question Mr. Dobson's motives or salvation. We just disagree about psychology. I'm sure he is mature enough to accept that people may disagree.

Warren's books such as "Purpose Driven Life" are full of pop psychology, and he repeatedly quotes the humanistic Bible paraphrase "The Message" which is "the Bible according to Eugene Peterson." Not only is "The Message" a very poor paraphrase, it is saturated in pop psychology (which makes it

understandable why Warren quotes from it and why so many Christians and Pastors today embrace it).

As well, Warren employs many culturally popular, sales-and-marketing and worldly-success-techniques that put his church at the forefront of the seeker-friendly and emerging church movements which are in a nutshell "give the world what they want so they will come to us to hear about Jesus." Sounds great from MAN's perspective - it's pragmatism ("if it works, it must be right"). It works in business and it works making money - so if it works to fill pews, who can argue with success? If it "works," then it MUST be blessed by God, right?

There is one big problem though: psychology does not, and cannot line up Scripturally. In many ways it is dangerous, transforming a message of "sin and the need for repentance" into a prosperity-laden, features-rich, Jesus-will-improve-your-life Gospel that leaves a very troubling question: Can this new "positive" Gospel result in genuine converts who come to Christ because they are "poor in spirit," laying down their life, taking up their cross, and surrendering ALL to the Lordship of Jesus Christ?

The problem is not Warren, or Dobson, or even Schuller and Peale. The problem is a Church that has gradually eroded sound and serious Bible teaching which has resulted in a loss of discernment. INCREASINGLY, THE CHURCH DOESN'T EVEN RECOGNIZE OR IS AWARE THAT THESE INSIDIOUS DILUTIONS OF THE GOSPEL AND CHRISTIANITY ARE OCCURING.

What I am writing today will be met mostly with eye-rolling and “huh?” People will write and say “Christian psychology has helped me, so you are wrong.” Then throw in a little “well my Pastor doesn’t agree with you” and “who do you think you are????? You’re not a doctor or scientist. You haven’t even gone to seminary!” And for most, that will end the discussion (and probably their subscription). My reply:

“I’m nobody... You’re right. I haven’t been to seminary, I’m not a doctor or scientist or professional clergy. I have a God-given mind, a Holy Spirit led conscience, the infallible and sufficient Word of God, and I trust the Word of the Creator of the Universe more than I trust the theories of atheists, occultists and drug addicts, even when it’s been embraced by sincere and kind Christian men and wrapped in a scientific cloak with pious sounding Biblical vocabulary.”

The Bible is the Truth, revealed and solidified for us, SUFFICIENT for EVERY emotional, spiritual and mental need:

2 Peter 1:2-4 (NKJV) - Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NKJV) - All Scripture is given by inspiration of

God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Corinthians 2:14 (NKJV) - Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.

Philippians 4:13 (NKJV) - I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

1 Peter 5:10 (NKJV) - But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.

How much clearer could the Bible be? Are these verses TRUE OR NOT? Does “all” mean ALL? Does “every” mean EVERY? Is God casual in throwing around all-inclusive terms that He doesn’t really mean? Do those verses, or the following leave any gaps, any loopholes, or any insufficiency whatsoever?

Psalms 19:7-11 (NKJV) - The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward.

That is just a taste of Scripture that declares the sufficiency of God's power, Word and Spirit for EVERY aspect of our "life." Regardless, we are told that we need "professionals" that have discovered and been trained in additional "truth" and without it, we cannot deal with depression, habits, mood swings, "addictions" and the tragedies of life. The Bible is good, but everyone knows that psychotherapy and worldly counseling by "trained professionals" is necessary to really deal with life's problems, right? Especially the really difficult ones? Right?

To whatever degree you believe that atheistic, humanistic, Godless ideas of worldly psychotherapy are NEEDED to round out God's Word and Christian discipleship, that is the degree that you do not believe in the sufficiency of Scripture for life, fulfillment, happiness and Godliness that is categorically and plainly declared cover to cover in God's Word. My, that's really judgmental isn't it? Divisive? Mean spirited? Unloving? The extreme words of an untrained simpleton, ranting about that which he neither knows nor understands. All I can say is "guilty as charged." I must have "religious delusion simplicity extremism disorder." At least it's not my fault... I'm sick... a chemical imbalance is causing me to say these things.

One last thing... the clarion call you'll hear trumpeted over this issue is "All truth is God's truth." This pious sounding, open-minded, fool-proof mantra is repeatedly endless until it is no longer a debate. Like Al Gore and global warming, "The debate is over."

Is "all truth God's truth?" On the surface, of course we would say "yes," - philosophically - but we then we have to stop and really consider what we are saying. Evolutionists believe (and a large majority of Christians, sadly) that Darwinism is FACT, scientific fact. It is TRUTH. Therefore, it is now part of God's truth evidently, since great efforts are made to make the Bible fit this "fact."

In the same manner, psychotherapy is "scientific fact" - therefore "truth" - therefore part of God's truth... so goes the logic and argument. First of all, let's reiterate, psychotherapy cannot be "science" because it is not physical... but dressing it up and making it sound like science gives it automatic authority and credibility to the undiscerning. Second, even if it was TRUTH, is "all truth, God's truth?"

NO.

The Bible never claims to be an authority on car mechanics or brain surgery. Therefore the "facts" (truth) of those cannot be included with what the Bible declares as its area of authority (life, emotional health, holiness). Two plus two equals four, but this "truth" is not part of "God's truth" that gives us "all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2Pet 1:3). The Bible claims authority and completeness over the TRUTH that saves, that changes lives (Rom 12:2), that perfects us (Psalm 19), and that allows us to live a fully contented and pleasing life (Heb 13:5).

The "truth that sets us free" (John 8:32) is not "the sun rises in the east." The Truth that "sets us free" is Truth about eternity, about the Word that pierces the heart, and can transform

lives. With respect to Christianity, "All truth is NOT God's truth." The Bible proclaims authority and total sufficiency about the truth of salvation and sanctification. To add the "truth" of God-hating atheists (the psychotherapy principles founded by Freud, Jung, etc.) to the Truth of Scriptures is to unquestionably declare the Bible as insufficient for living a holy, emotionally health and fulfilling life, and thus to call God a liar and the Bible a farce.

So, what do I think about Rick Warren? I think he has fallen for these humanistic ideas that erode God's Word, dilute the Gospel and sadly, end up weakening and deceiving millions of Christians who are looking outside God's Word and the Church for those things that God has specifically and completely equipped US to deal with internally. As much of the blame (or more) lays at the feet of Bible teachers, leaders, Pastors, preachers and authors as it does for the masses of Christians who now depend on and chase every fad, theory and movement that comes along, continually eating away, eating away at our reliance on God's Living Word.

Warren is not alone. A growing majority of the Church has fallen into this trap: Word Faith leaders offering the prosperity Gospel; seeker-friendly leaders offering the watered-down, "Jesus will improve your life" pragmatic Gospel; heretics like Schuller, Peale and Templeton offering the positive confession, new-age Gospel; the "latter rain" leaders offering the metaphysical, experiential Gospel; the cults like Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons offering "earn your way to heaven" by being in the right group Gospel; and the

Roman Catholic Church offering a "Jesus plus tradition" Gospel.

In closing, let me leave you with a quick bullet list, and you decide if the pop psychology of Warren, Dobson, Schuller, Peale, Templeton, Freud, Jung, Maslow, Abrams, Rogers, Smalley, Minirth-Meier, etc. is compatible with Christianity:

The founders of humanistic psychology did not believe in God, and were in fact hostile towards Christianity.

The major founders were atheists, occultists, sexual deviants, and drug addicts (each in various parts and ways).

None were Christians, none believed in the Bible at all, much less the sufficiency of Scripture.

Psychology is based on the premise that man is physical, whereas the Bible says we are spiritual.

Psychology starts with the premise that man is good and external factors, experience and chemical imbalance are the cause of our behavior. The Bible teaches that man is inherently sinful, and that the sin nature is the root of our problems.

Psychology does not recognize the role of God, the Holy Spirit or any divine power in overcoming problems or living a victorious, fulfilling life.

Psychology labels sin as disease, disorders and syndromes thereby excusing the sinner who now knows they are "sick", not wicked.

There is NO such study course, or body of teaching known as "Christian

Psychology;" Christians are trained in the exact same Godless theories even if they do include some prayer or Bible verses in their practice of it.

The world has already begun to see the fallacy of "self-esteem" and other "selfisms" while the Church is currently jumping in with both feet.

Psychology cannot and is not a "science;" science is physical. Thoughts, emotions, moods and motives are not physical.

Psychology has hundreds of competing theories, and studies show that none of them are particularly effective, and many are harmful. Even if they did "work," pragmatism does not replace God's Word.

It's easy to see why people like Schuller and Templeton preach this heresy... they don't believe in the true Gospel. However, it's genuinely heart-wrenching to see the sincerity and love of men like Warren, Dobson, Smalley and Minirth-Meier who obviously believe in God, preach a Biblical Gospel message... but then hamstring Believers with the power-sapping and maturity-eroding theories of human-derived psychology.

I've been hinting at this topic for a long time, and frankly it will mostly likely be one of the most controversial I've addressed. I get a little weary of being a punching bag, but if I were to avoid this topic, I would be just as culpable as those who embrace the error I've addressed. I have to give an accounting to God, so no matter what the fallout, I consider this to be one of the most critical, important and urgent things I've ever written.

I do NOT believe that this will ever reach, much less affect, the major leaders of Christianity like Warren or Dobson. I'm a VERY small fish in great big pond. I think even if it did, it would be roundly criticized and immediately dismissed. After all, I'm NOBODY, and I'm the first one to admit.

I lack the self-esteem to think I'm somebody (pun intended). The eyes of the Church today are much the same as the eyes of the world: we look for the same credentials and qualifications that the world holds dear before we will listen to or give consider to something. This is abundantly clear as we see throngs of Christians being referred to as "professional therapists" by Pastors and Shepherds who are no longer confident or seen as competent to tend to the flock.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Purity — How Can You Get Rid Of Sexual Impurity?

**How do you get rid of sexual impurity in your life? I would venture so far as to call myself a sex addict. How do I get help? Should I confess my transgressions to my wife?**

You ask a question that I believe highlights the "dirty little secret" in the Church today. With the onslaught of entertainment, cable TV and especially the Internet, pornography has become epidemic.



Our society is SATURATED with sex, and the typical Christian has become so desensitized to it, that things that don't even make us blush now would have been considered the height of gross immorality as little as 10 years ago.

So what do we do? Well, first we can be sure that it is the very clear will of God that we be sexually and morally pure:

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 - For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; (NKJV)

First, there are practical steps: get accountability from wise mature Christians; make the decision to not view sexual material in entertainment; get software that prohibits your ability to view it on your computer.

Accountability - ask several mature, no-nonsense Christian brothers to hold your feet to the fire; give them permission to ASK YOU specific questions about your activity in this area.

Entertainment - the simplest solutions are always the hardest and causes people to scream the most: QUIT WATCHING MOVIES WITH SEX SCENES, BIKINIS, SEXUAL BEHAVIOR AND THE WHOLE HOLLYWOOD IMMORALITY-FESTIVAL. If that means never watching another movie, then you're better off. If that means nothing but the History Channel and CSPAN, then nothing lost.

Mark 9:43 - If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched— (NKJV)

What does that mean? It means DO WHATEVER IT TAKES NOT TO SIN. Quit making excuses; quit rationalizing; quit justifying. You aren't going to die if you never see another movie, or quit watching Bay Watch, or miss these filthy reality TV shows.

Do you have to have the Internet? Or maybe you just want it? That's okay. TURN YOUR MONITOR AROUND WHERE EVERYONE CAN SEE IT. Make promises to your accountability partners that you will not be on your computer alone, at night, when no one is looking. Put accountability software on your computer.

Leave yourself no room for the old behavior. DO WHATEVER IT TAKES! Until you hate sin more than you love sinning, you will have a hard time changing. Until you love God more than you love personal pleasure, you will have a hard time changing.

If you have not truly turned to God, believed in and obeyed Jesus Christ - then you are still fighting sin with your flesh instead of with a renewed heart (Titus 3.5) and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Go to your Elders or Pastor and be honest. You need help. Trying to do this alone is disaster in the making. No, do not tell your wife until you have sought the advice and counsel of several wise, mature Godly men. Then follow their advice.

~~~~~

Race – Is Interracial Marriage Wrong?

Is there any place in the Bible where God says that interracial relationships is a sin?

No.

The Israelites were forbidden to marry outside their religion, and Christians should not be unequally married to non-Christians. Outside of that, there is no prohibition against marrying another "race."

Race is an EVOLUTION-BASED concept anyway. Evolution teaches that the races are different types of people that "evolved." That of course, is patent nonsense. Every human being contains the entire gene set for all human traits. When God separated the languages and people at the Tower of Babel, certain physical characteristics became accentuated in certain groups. Yellow skin, thick lips, blue eyes, red skin, almond eyes, black wiry hair... all nothing more than accentuated genetic traits.

Biologically, we are all the same. Culturally, it may not be the wisest choice to marry into other cultures; this is often true of even black/white marriages. The more disparate two cultures, the more stress it places on the marriage, and especially the children. But Biblically, NO, there is no prohibition against not marrying simply based on skin color.

Ignore the silly racist arguments about Ham being cursed and Negros being inferior creation; that's all white supremacist hogwash. All humans are created by God, in need of the same Savior (Jesus) and enslaved by the same sin nature until set free through Christ's blood.

~~~~~

## Races – Where Did All The Skin Colors Come From?

**My teenage granddaughter asked this question because she and her friends were having a discussion. She is bi-racial and asked the question: If Adam and Eve were the first people, how did we get the different races?**

I'm going to break my usual rule not to "borrow" answers. I like to do my own study and answer questions in my own way; however, this question has to do with specific scientific information, and it does not serve any purpose for me to simply restate others' work. So the following fine answer can be found at:

<http://www.answersingenesis.org/Home/Area/AnswersBook/races18.asp>

---

## Regeneration – The Difference Between Born Again And Regenerated

**What is the difference, or is there a difference, between "regeneration" and "born again"?**

Well I wish I could come up with some really deep, impressive sounding answer, but the plain answer is "no," there is no difference between the two terms.

Both terms mean the same thing: it is the supernatural recreation of the eternal spirit inside of the man who responds sincerely (only God knows whether a person is sincere) in obedience to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In our conversation we might have different mental pictures: born again is a whole person becoming a new person; regenerated sometimes is talked about as the "heart" being made new.

But these are just different ways to say the same thing: the eternal entity in man no matter how described, is the part that is recreated and made new.

Here is just a sample of applicable verses:

Titus 3:5 (NKJV) - not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,

John 3:3 (NKJV) - Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

1 Peter 1:23 (NKJV) - having been born again, not of corruptible seed but

incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,

---

Here are some definitions from reference books:

Regeneration — only found in Matt. 19:28 and Titus 3:5. This word literally means a "new birth." The Greek word so rendered (palingenesia) is used by classical writers with reference to the changes produced by the return of spring. In Matt. 19:28 the word is equivalent to the "restitution of all things" (Acts 3:21). In Titus 3:5 it denotes that change of heart elsewhere spoken of as a passing from death to life (1 John 3:14); becoming a new creature in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17); being born again (John 3:5); a renewal of the mind (Rom. 12:2); a resurrection from the dead (Eph. 2:6); a being quickened (2:1, 5).

This change is ascribed to the Holy Spirit. It originates not with man but with God (John 1:12, 13; 1 John 2:29; 5:1, 4).

As to the nature of the change, it consists in the implanting of a new principle or disposition in the soul; the impartation of spiritual life to those who are by nature "dead in trespasses and sins."

The necessity of such a change is emphatically affirmed in Scripture (John 3:3; Rom. 7:18; 8:7-9; 1 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 2:1; 4:21-24).

3

---

4Easton, M. (1996, c1897). Easton's Bible dictionary. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

---

**REGENERATION:** (Lat., 'rebirth'), a term associated with human hopes and longings for the dawn of a new day, the establishment of a better world, and the creation of a new humanity. The term and concept were prominent in the Hellenistic world of the first century a.d. For biblical writers, the hope of regeneration is linked to faith in the Creator, who is understood as the source of new creation through the power of his word and the work of his Spirit. These writers have very little confidence in human potential for self-regeneration.

Although the term 'regeneration' does not occur in the OT, the OT prophets focused attention on an appointed hour in the future when God would make all things new, reconstitute human disposition, make resistant hearts supple, renew his covenant, and refresh spirits through the outpouring of his Spirit (e.g., Isa. 65:17-25; 66:22; Jer. 31:31-34; 32:38-41; Ezek. 36:25-28; 37:1-14; Hos. 6:1-2; Joel 2:26-32; Zech. 13:1; cf. also Isa. 2:1-5; Ps. 51:10-12). With this appointed day, the radical renewal of God's people would dawn; God's promises of judgment and blessing/salvation would be fulfilled.

NT writers declare that this day has dawned in the life (e.g., Matt. 10:7-8; 11:4-6; 12:28; 18:3; Luke 4:18-19), death, and resurrection of Jesus. The

---

technical terms for 'regeneration' are found in a few key texts, all of which are relatively late. God causes us to be 'born anew,' we are 'born anew [by God]' (1 Pet. 1:3, 23; cf. 2:2); God 'saved us...by the washing of regeneration' (Titus 3:5); it is necessary to be 'born from above' (John 3:3, 7; cf. also 1:13; 3:5-6, 8; 1 John 3:9; 5:1-12; James 1:18, 21; for the translation 'above' rather than 'anew,' cf. John 3:31; 19:11, 23). These are the classical locations for this terminology, but the scope of importance of regeneration in the NT is not limited to them.

Language regarding new creation and a new eschatological (promised end-time) existence dominates the fundamental orientation of all NT preaching and writing. The locus of this orientation is the resurrection of Jesus; the new creation has dawned with the dawn of Easter (e.g., Rom. 6:3-14; 8:10-17; 12:2; 1 Cor. 12:13-14; 2 Cor. 1:20-22; 3:18; 4:16; 5:17; 6:16-18; 13:3, 5; Gal. 2:19-21; 3:27-29; 6:15; Eph. 2:10, 15-16; 4:24; Col. 2:12-15; 3:1-12; Heb. 10:22; 1 Pet. 1:3-5; Rev. 1:5-6). The means through which this new reality becomes the new existence for human beings is articulated variously and with different emphases. It is imparted through the power of God's word and his Spirit, received through faith, experienced sacramentally (baptism and the Eucharist), is lived out in the obedience of responsible living, and is in constant conflict with the old existence (a future resolution of this conflict is a dimension of hope; e.g., Rom. 7:14-25; 8:21-25; cf. also Matt. 19:28-30).

Here, as elsewhere, early Christianity conducted an earnest conversation

not only with its OT heritage but also with the popular religion and philosophy of its environment. Then, as now, the hope for regeneration and renewal cut a deep and wide furrow in the hearts and minds of people everywhere

5Achte-meier, P. J. (1985). Harper's Bible dictionary. Includes index. (1st ed.) (Pages 858-859). San Francisco: Harper & Row.

---

**REGENERATION.** The Gk. noun *palin-genesia* occurs only twice in the NT (Mt. 19:28, rsv 'new world', av 'regeneration'; Tit. 3:5, 'regeneration'). In the Mt. passage it is used eschatologically to refer to the restoration of all things, reminding us that the renewal of the individual is part of a wider and cosmic renewal. In Tit. the word is used with an individual reference.

Elsewhere various words are used to express the change which the Holy Spirit effects. *gennaō* (with *anōthen*, Jn. 3:3, 7), meaning 'to beget' or 'give birth to', is used in Jn. 1:13; 3:3-8; 1 Jn. 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18. In 1 Pet. 1:3, 23 the word *anagennaō*—'to beget again' or 'to bring again to birth'—is found. These words are used to describe the initial act of renewal. The words *anakainōsis* (Rom. 12:2; Tit. 3:5) with the verb *anakainōō* (2 Cor. 4:16; Col. 3:10) denote a making anew or renewing. The references will indicate that the use of these two words is not limited to the initial renewal but extends to

---

the resultant process. We may note with reference to the result of the new birth such terms as *kainē ktisis*, 'a new creation' (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15), and *kainos anthrōpos*, 'a new man' (Eph. 2:15; 4:24). Twice we have the term *synzōopoieō*, 'to make alive with' (Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:13), which hints at a change, not only as dramatic as birth, but as dramatic as resurrection. *apokyeō* (Jas. 1:18) denotes to bear or bring forth.

Surveying these terms, we notice that they all indicate a drastic and dramatic change which may be likened to birth, rebirth, re-creation or even resurrection. Several of the terms in their context indicate that this change has permanent and far-reaching effects in its subject.

6Wood, D. R. W. (1996). New Bible dictionary (3rd ed. /) (Page 1005). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

~~~~~

Reincarnation – True Or Not?

What is your opinion of reincarnation?

To be blunt, it is hopeless nonsense.

The Bible aside, what proof or evidence is there for reincarnation? No scientific evidence. No credible evidence of any type.

It's simply a religious idea based on the "hope" that we get a second

chance. I'll place my hope on the truth of the Bible which is supported by MOUNTAINS of evidence as to its authenticity and supernatural origin.

What does the Bible have to say about reincarnation?

Hebrews 9:27 - And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, (NKJV)

Matthew 25:46 - And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (NKJV)

Here are some additional comments from a reader that I chose to include:

Many church members wrongly assume that the biblical resurrection and reincarnation are simply two forms of the same idea.

I point out to Bible students that the goal of the resurrection is a physical bodily resurrection. But the goal of reincarnation is to escape permanently from the physical into a nothingness, or to be reabsorbed into the great, impersonal being. The two concepts are thus direct opposites.

For advocates of reincarnation, the greatest possible (eternal?) good is to escape from the prison house of the body, thus for them, an eternal bodily resurrection would be considered the greatest possible bad—permanently imprisoned in a body.

David J. Pelletier

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Relationships — Dealing With Difficult People

My husband's a pastor. His mom attends our church. She is constantly critical of him and other members of our church and she meddles a great deal in our personal lives. Some examples: (The reader included a list of incidents that YES, were some seriously meddling, busybodyness and of a critical spirit.) I struggle with how to respond to her - how to "smooth things over" when she offends people at the church, how to address this issue with my husband, and if/how I should address the situation with her. She is a Christian. She's a leader in our church. But it's becoming a divisive thing where people don't want to participate in activities that she plans or attends. How do I be a godly daughter-in-law, pastor's wife, and sister-in-Christ in this situation? Thanks for whatever help you may have to offer.

There are several things in your email I want to comment on before giving my advice.

First, you say your husband is "Pastor." Does this mean he is the sole leader/authority/Shepherd in your congregation? If yes, this is one of the primary things that is wrong with this unBiblical structure (i.e., one man being the sole leader/authority of a congregation).

Scripture clearly calls for a plurality of Shepherds in the local church (look up Scriptures about Elders; it's always plural in context). This situation is a perfect example (but not a primary

one) of why. If you had a group of Shepherds (Elders) then they could deal with this situation as they would deal with any divisive member of the Lord's church.

2 Timothy 4:2 - Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. (NKJV)

Hebrews 13:17 - Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. (NKJV)

1 Peter 4:15 - But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. (NKJV)

1 Timothy 6:4-5 - he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wrangling of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself. (NKJV)

James 3:14-17 - But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. (NKJV)

If you do have Elders, then the answer becomes relatively easy: the

Shepherds should deal with your mother-in-law as a divisive, contentious Believer, regardless of her "status" as "the Pastor's mother."

(Note: We refer to our "teaching Elder" as "Pastor" too, but it's more of a tradition than any distinction. He is an Elder, a Shepherd... one of several in our church; but he is the one who teaches publicly to the congregation so many people refer to him as "our Pastor.")

My next comment is about your mother-in-law being a "leader." Much of her behavior is in violation of the qualifications of any sort of leadership in the Church. Most of all, she is not demonstrating humble servanthood which automatically disqualifies a person as a "leader."

Matthew 20:26 - Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. (NKJV)

Since you don't qualify what type of leadership she is engaged in, I won't comment here on which specific leadership roles the Bible does NOT grant to females. I'll assume you speak of other types of leadership granted to either male or female by God.

You have two distinct issues: how to deal with her as a fellow member of the local church, and how to deal with her personally as your mother-in-law.

First of all, you ask how to "smooth things over." You don't. You meet them head-on with honesty, directness, love, mercy and compassion. But you don't "smooth things over."

As a Pastor, your husband's duty is to Shepherd the church, not allow his mother to run roughshod over the congregation causing division and turmoil because of her favored status, OR because of a lack of courage to confront her like any divisive, troublemaking busybody Believer should be confronted.

On a personal level, you and your husband have a FIRST duty to your own children and family. Where your mother-in-law is intruding and violating that God-ordained duty, you simply have to confront her, lay down the boundaries and expectations, and not worry about her response.

That doesn't mean you aren't compassionate, patient and loving. You are. But mercy is not weakness or cowardice. Compassion is not avoiding the "tough" situations in life.

My advice in summary:

If your church is not Biblically structured with a plurality of Shepherds (Elders), your husband should change that immediately.

The leadership of the church, your husband included, must confront and deal with your mother-in-law as a Believer who is being divisive, making trouble, being critical and engaged in "busybodyness." Her relationship as "mother-in-law" is irrelevant to her being disciplined as a member of the flock.

You and your husband, with regards to your personal and family life, have to be clear to her about what you will and will not allow related to her interaction with your family and kids. You must set boundaries that, if not met, must result in some degree of

withdrawal from the relationship with her. Your marriage is first, your kids are second. Extended family must respect this.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Relationships – Hurtful Family Members

How do I deal with a hurtful sister? She never passes up an opportunity to cut me down in front of others. Last week, she introduced me to her friend and said I was "the evil one." She said it was a joke. What advice would you give me?

Whenever I face this type of situation I am reminded of the story of David and Shimei.

Shimei was hurling insults at David, kicking dirt and spitting, calling David names. Now usually behaving like this towards the King would result in instant punishment, probably death. And in our way of thinking, it would be the proper response.

2 Samuel 16:9 - Then Abishai the son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Please, let me go over and take off his head!" (NKJV)

Chop his head off! That was the natural response. That's the way we feel about people who treat us the way this hurtful sister is treating you. The feeling is natural, and even somewhat justified. There is nothing

"wrong" with you because this behavior hurts you. Of course it does.

As Christians however, we learn to look past our hurt and try to see God's hand. David, a "man after God's own heart," discerned that God had sent Shimei. David said:

2 Samuel 16:10 - "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse, because the Lord has said to him, 'Curse David.' Who then shall say, 'Why have you done so?' " (NKJV)

In other words, David put the matter in God's hands. If the Lord sends us an adversary, then He has done so for a reason. The mature Christian seeks out the reason, and embraces it.

Why? Because the spiritual truth is that when we reach a place of total submission to God, and total focus on glorifying Him, then we will not be offended at all for our own sake.

We may never reach that point in this life, but we need to be constantly progressing towards it and accepting the opportunities (blessings) that God sends along to help us get there!

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Religion – Plymouth Brethren

Who are the Plymouth Brethren?

The Plymouth brethren were aptly named after the town of Plymouth. Christians had gathered there in the 1800s.

John Nelson Darby from Ireland was an early noted leader serving the American brethren for over 50 years.

He translated the entire Bible into English, French and German and the New Testament into Italian. He is the author of the Darby Bible.

The brethren believe that the holy Bible is inspired by God and is the sole authority for their faith and doctrines. The brethren believe in a pre-tribulation rapture and millennial kingdom.

Based on Matthew 18:20 they believe it is essential to gather in God's name and not in the name of a leader or denomination. At times this was held to at such an extreme that it caused division and error.

There are two main divisions of the Plymouth brethren, the "exclusive" and the "open" - the difference of which involves how they govern either locally or as a group of assemblies.

A search on the Internet will yield you plenty of background and information about the Plymouth brethren.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Religion – Just Be Sincere, Right?

Does it really matter WHAT religion you are? Or is it more important to just love and know God?

No, it doesn't matter what religion you are. The truth is, you shouldn't be a "religion." Religions are man-originated systems of belief that teach us how to either 1) earn salvation by

our own effort or 2) teach us that WE ARE GOD.

ALL "RELIGIONS" OF THIS WORLD TEACH ONE OR BOTH OF THOSE CONCEPTS IF YOU LOOK DEEPLY ENOUGH (even atheism makes us our own god).

This stands in stark opposition to TRUE Christianity which is not a religion but a relationship. In Christianity, salvation is a free gift of God (Eph 2:8). God did it. In "religion," man does it. That's the key:

Religion: man does it.

True Christianity: God does it.

In true Christianity, man's relationship with His Creator has been cut off because of man's sinful nature which began when Adam and Eve disobeyed God (thus elevating themselves above God, i.e. pride). In "religion," people basically think they are "good" and just need to add a few things to earn their way into "salvation"...however they may view "salvation."

In Christianity, NO ONE IS GOOD (the human heart is in fact, evil), and therefore the only way to restore your relationship with God is to do it His way, because we can never earn it by being "good." (1John 1:10; Ps 53:3; Jer 17:9)

"Hey, wait a minute," you are thinking, "I'm offended by that. I'm a good person. I'm not evil and wicked." Really?

Have you ever told a lie, been deceitful or knowingly exaggerated? YOU ARE A LIAR

Have you have said "G*d d**n", "j*s*s chr**t!" or "oh my g*d" in a less than reverent and respectful manner? YOU ARE A BLASPHEMER

Ever lusted after someone? Even once, even for one second? YOU ARE AN ADULTERER

Ever stolen? Ever wasted time on the job? Ever underreported taxes? YOU ARE A THIEF

Ever wanted what someone else has? Ever been jealous of someone else's recognition? YOU ARE COVETOUS

Ever had anything in your life be more important than God even for a second? YOU ARE AN IDOLATOR.

Still think you are "good," you lying-thieving-blasphemous-lustful-idolater?

If you answered NO to any of those questions above, you are simply deceived or being dishonest. We are all guilty of all these things at some point in our lives. It only takes once. How many times do you have to lie to be a liar? Once. How many times does it take saying "oh my god" to be a blasphemer? Once. So don't play games with yourself about the STATE OF WICKEDNESS AND EVIL in humans INCLUDING YOU. YOU and I are liars, adulterers, thieves, blasphemers, idolaters, etc. if we honestly ask ourselves those questions above.

No "religion" can do anything about our sinfulness except deceive us into missing the Truth. Only Christianity offers a solution, an answer, a rescue. Religion says, "Be good, earn your salvation, appease the gods, make up for your sins." Huh? The only thing the

efforts of sinful humans can produce is more sin, be they wrapped in "good works" or not.

How much work does that take anyway? How many years of perfection makes up for a year of sinfulness? If only one lie puts you right back at being a liar, how can we possibly hope to be good enough to earn salvation? If only one lust, one instance where God is not the most important thing in my life instantly makes me an adulterer and an idolater again, then what hope do I have of ever being "good enough" or "earning salvation?" The answer? We DO NOT have any hope.

Christianity is Unique Among "Religions"

That's why Christianity stands alone in the world against "religion." Christianity (God) says, "You have no hope to be 'good enough' so I planned a way for you." That way is simply this: "I'll send my only Son to earth who will live a truly perfect, sinless human life. Then He will willingly accept the punishment for YOUR WICKEDNESS. If you believe this (faith), turn from your wickedness (repentance), proclaim that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (confession) and then do all that I command you (obedient response), I (God) will accept Jesus' punishment on your behalf, see you as 'sinless' and you can have eternal life with Me because of Him."

That's not "religion." That's reality... the reality of our situation and the reality of our eternal predicament. It has nothing to do with religion. It is a choice, a relationship, an acceptance of God's terms.

Religion is about man's effort. Christianity is about man's relationship with God (or lack of it).

Religions teach incompatible and opposite views of salvation, eternity and man's origin... then present impossible, futile or absurd solutions and ideas about it.

Christianity teaches who created us, what happened to separate us from the Creator, and how to remove that separation so that we may return to our Creator for all eternity.

Religion is confusing. Christianity is crystal clear and simple.

Religion is EVER-CHANGING with each new generation recycling old ideas and making up new ones. Christianity is absolute and unchanging making it reliable and trustworthy, beyond the whims of man, opinion or majority vote.

Skip religion. Embrace a relationship with your Creator. Only Christianity gives the truth about how to do that.

~~~~~

## Responsibility – Overcoming Past Sin

**I agreed with my girlfriend, to whom I'm now engaged, to get an abortion in last March. I knew this was wrong from the start. I can't change it now. I have given this to God but it's hard for her some days. What do I say or do to continue the healing process? I am now serving on the worship team**

**and as youth minister. She doesn't want me to tell the Pastor or I would have a long time ago. Where do I go now?**

Wow, this is not going to be a pleasant answer, and I'm not sure how I can sugarcoat it and do it justice.

First let me list everything, in my opinion, that is currently **WRONG** with this situation and needs to be addressed immediately. Remember, you're asking my advice, and that's all it is - my advice.

Unless I'm missing something, it would seem engagement at this point, having not dealt with the past, is fraught with dangers.

If you haven't dealt with the abortion, have you dealt with the fornication, either then or now?

When a baby has been conceived in sin, and then murdered, how can you expect to have ANY good days, much less a few hard ones? (until it is all truly dealt with before God)

With this secret and **RECENT** past, why are you in ministry?

Are you currently fornicating?

Do you think your shepherds and church leaders have any right to know of a recent history of fornication and abortion?

Is your concern healing or hiding?  
How about your fiancée?

In my opinion, based on the limited knowledge I have from your question, I would offer this advice, in love, with compassion, but not sugar-coating:

Tell your Pastor and church shepherds/Elders and immediately begin a process of disclosing the sin and arranging accountability for your relationship and life.

Send your engagement; once you have both dealt with the past, the sin and the spiritual flaws that led to this point, only then will you be even remotely at a point to consider engagement.

You both need to expose and deal with the character flaws and sin that led to the fornication in the first place, especially if it is still occurring (and saying, "Well, we've already had sex, so what's the difference?" just exposes even more character issues that need to be addressed).

You need to expose and deal with the spiritual deficit that led to your mutual agreement to murder an unborn child.

You need to immediately step away from public ministry as you have very troubling and considerable spiritual issues you need to deal with first before taking on the responsibility of leading, teaching and being an example to others.

The "healing process" is, generally speaking, a fancy term today for saying, "How do I make myself feel better?" That's the wrong approach. Healing will come with disclosure, repentance and authentic contrition. Healing will come when you do the right thing. Healing will come when you fully face the spiritual deficits that have brought you to this point.

However, neither of you, this side of Heaven, will fully "heal" (i.e. feel better, not be bothered by, not have to

think about, not remember, etc.) after something like this. There are some things in life, so serious, so tragic and so life changing, that they become a part of our life forever. You have experienced some of those things.

You don't need to pray and wish for "easy days" or to get over it, but rather pray that this event will drive you to the foot of the cross where forgiveness, mercy and grace can be found. God will bring "easy days" in His timing.

Will God forgive you? Yes. Has He? If you've asked in faith as a true Believer, yes. However, there are a LOT of red flags and warning signals blaring when you mention that she wants to keep it secret and a few weeks after the event you are leading in ministry. BIG ALARMS GOING OFF....

There is life in Christ after the very worst sin, no doubt. That is our only true hope to survive this sin-cursed life.

It is my emphatic advice that you BOTH do this immediately:

Seek help from your spiritual leadership;

Fully disclose everything that has happened;

Ask each other for forgiveness; ask God for forgiveness; ask any of your Brethren who you confess this to for forgiveness (because your actions have shamed our mutual faith);

Ask your spiritual leaders for accountability and spiritual evaluation of your life ;

Postpone or end your engagement for a considerable period of time and devote yourself to spiritual growth and maturing;

**IMMEDIATELY** stop all sexual physical contact if it is occurring;

Immediately disclose all of this to the leadership who is shepherding your church so that they may make an informed decision about your ministry involvement.

Tough words, I know, but written in love and concern for your ETERNAL and LONG TERM welfare. Not easy, not fun right now... but the right thing to do to get your life on track for the long haul.

Here are verses of comfort and promise to help you through this tough time:

Lamentations 3:22-24 - Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him!" (NKJV)

2 Corinthians 1:3 - Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, (NKJV)

Numbers 14:18 - 'The Lord is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation.' (NKJV)

1 John 2:1-2 - My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an

Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. (NKJV)

1 John 1:9 - If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (NKJV)

Romans 15:5 - Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, (NKJV)

Leviticus 5:5 - And it shall be, when he is guilty in any of these matters, that he shall confess that he has sinned in that thing; (NKJV)

Hosea 5:15 - I will return again to My place Till they acknowledge their offense. Then they will seek My face; In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me. (NKJV)

Proverbs 28:13 - He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy. (NKJV)

Psalms 32:5 - I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," And You forgave the iniquity of my sin. (NKJV)

~~~~~

Restitution — Does The Bible Require It?

As a Christian, is restitution necessary? Does the Bible require it?

Restitution is paying back something that was stolen, usually with a "penalty amount" as well.

It would be easy to answer this question by stating that the Old Testament commanded it (Exo 22:1; Lev 24:21; Lev 6:4), but the New Testament does not.

However, we have Zacchaeus in Luke 19 telling Jesus he would repay four times anything he had stolen. Jesus' response was not, "No, don't do that. Forgiveness is enough." The Lord responded that salvation had come to Zacchaeus' house that day because of his desire to believe and obey God in all things.

As Christians, we have a higher standard in that we are not only concerned with following commandments, but we are also concerned with our attitudes. For example, Jesus said that adultery was not just the physical act as practiced under the Law, but for Christians it was also the purity of the heart. Lust is tantamount to adultery. We have a higher standard.

Given that, it's not a question of, "Are we commanded to make restitution?" It is a matter of the heart that wants to make all things right when we have "stolen" from others and do so in such a way as to honor God.

In that respect, YES, we are required to make restitution. How much? I think that is a matter of conscience and seeking Godly counsel. We should make restitution in all ways too, not just monetary. We need to make restitution if we've damaged reputations, hurt relationships, stolen time and emotions.... If we have

"stolen" from someone, money or otherwise, we should be willing and ready to make restitution.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Revelations – Who Are The 144,000?

Who are the 144,000? What part do they play in the future?

You will find many opinions, but here is the answer I most agree with...

The 144,000 are an "army" or organized force of saved Jews that will preach and spread the Gospel during the Tribulation period of Revelation. They will be the first of the new nation of Israel which will be the witness to the world that the original nation of Israel was supposed to be.

Revelation 14:1-5 - Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God

and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God. (NKJV)

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Roles – Women In Ministry

I am a woman whose soul "sings" when I hear/read the truth taught - I am passionate about it. However, I believe it is not Biblical for me to take any pastoral/elder roles. My situation is this: My husband and I lead a Bible study group of couples and some single women in our home - as a ministry of our church. But I am the main "teacher" of our group. And I feel torn about that. The men in our group are not teachers, and some are not leaders at all. Sometimes I just "take the bull by the horns" and teach. Other times I step back and ask one of the men to do a series (but then I often regret it, because there is no obvious gift of teaching among any of them at this point). The other (less obvious) issue in this, is that I sometimes sense that my husband feels demeaned because I take that role (which also bothers me a great deal). Can a woman teach a man? If I should not, please tell me how to resolve this situation that feels so impossible to me.

There are two very distinct ways this question could be interpreted. I took it one way, but one of my readers, "Bill,"

pointed out another valid interpretation. With his permission, I'm putting his response after mine.

We have no way of knowing the original motivation and heart of the reader who asked the question. She'll have to decide that for herself. The point of including both responses here is to TEACH the whole audience so that they may apply the wisdom in the appropriate situation in the future.

Brent's original answer:

I'm glad that you have a sensitive heart towards this issue.

Many today think this is an old fashioned topic that is SILLY. We have become so "feminized" in both society AND the church that to even consider that there MIGHT be an issue with a female teacher is snickered at.

You are correct that it is not Biblically permitted for you to take the role of Elder/Shepherd/Pastor in the assembly (all the same thing Scripturally). That is a role of spiritual leadership that God has given to men.

In the setting of a Bible study, or at home, or in some group of Christians gathered to talk about God and study the Bible, it is an issue of having a humble, servant heart. Submission applies only to your marriage relationship, not to other men. So that could be an issue to consider when you say your husband feels "demeaned."

However, I would ask your husband to contemplate "why?" If God has gifted you as a teacher but not him, what is there to feel belittled about? If he COULD be a teacher but neglects it, then he SHOULD feel uncomfortable

because you having to step up to teach exposes that neglect.

In a group of Christians meeting for fellowship and study, the gifts of God will rise up... teachers will teach, encouragers will encourage, givers will give, empathizers will empathize, prayers will pray.

If all present are humbly serving, showing deference to one another, and seeking to edify, this is not an issue of "usurping authority," not being submissive or self-aggrandizement.

If you are not "bullying" your way into teaching, but rather are simply the naturally gifted teacher who is humbly using your gift, ready to defer to others, not thinking too highly of yourself, and your motivation is only to glorify God through teaching... then you do WELL to exercise your gift.

I am FULLY committed to God's roles for male/female and the role of submission in marriage... but we have wrongly dragged those ideas over into situations that have produced false guilt and legalism in settings where it simply does not apply.

I lead and teach groups all the time where women interject comment and opinion which is every bit as much "teaching" as what I am saying. It is a respectful, humble, patient, loving interaction of Christians expressing what God has taught them. Some are more gifted and dedicated in this area, BUT they also have a higher responsibility to not "lord it" over others, not forcefully dominate, and not think too highly of their own thoughts and ideas.

Can a woman teach a man????? Ask my wife. There's not a day that goes by that she hasn't taught me something. In classes or groups I lead, there is NEVER a time that a female doesn't contribute solid teaching.

Now I know this question primarily rises about women preaching or teaching at "church," but that is not the setting here, so I'm not going to go through that issue in detail. You are asking about being the "teacher" in a Bible study group that has men.

As for being the primary teacher/leader, again, in your situation where you describe a true absence of another teacher, YOU can teach without elevating yourself; submission is only an issue related to your marriage; and "leadership" positions are an issue in the Believers Assembly, not a Bible study.

Bill's response to my answer and his take on the question:

Brent,

OK, you don't really deal with the subject of a woman teaching. This woman has stated her opinion about teaching. What she said between the lines is, "Nobody can teach like I can." She isn't satisfied with what anybody else does. She also said it was a Bible Study of her and her husband. She said that he feels "demeaned" and she feels "bothered" by that.[TIP]AR]

This woman is guilty of what is said in Timothy. 1 Tim 2:12 - But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.

Here Paul is instructing Timothy and

it is not in the same context as I Cor. 14 of the church. This is a life teaching.

You patted her on the back and let her go so she could continue in her own path. No one will grow in that Bible Study. Eventually it will fall apart or she will create her private following. Do we have another Kathryn Kulhman on our hands? I doubt it. What we do have is someone who feels spiritually superior to all the others and this will destroy any good that could come out of it.

I have no idea who she is, but she has no incentive to change. She isn't growing anybody, because she is making them dependent on her. While she should be encouraging her husband to do more, she continues to undermine him. True, this is reading between the lines, but I'm convinced your reply simply feeds her ego.

Bill

~~~~~

## Salvation – Is Repentance A Requirement?

**Do you have to repent to be saved, or simply believe in Christ? Are you familiar with the "Lordship controversy?" My Pastor says that repentance does not play a part in Salvation. He says that people who believe that repentance is part of salvation are being "legalistic." What are your thoughts? HELP- I don't know what to believe!**

I've never met two people who explain or define the issues of salvation, repentance, and belief in the exact same way. The issues, concepts and Scriptures are many and deep. Personal experience skews our perceptions and interpretations. In that light, I offer NO definitive answers or opinions; only my own personal thoughts on the issues and an honest summary of my own belief.

On the one hand, we have the "Lordship" folks who say that repentance is "necessary" for salvation (in the sense that repentance is always present in genuine belief) and for that they are labeled "works-oriented" or "legalistic." At the other end of the spectrum we have the "simply believe" people who get labeled "easy believers" and "Gospel light." In the middle we have those who believe that repentance and obedience (and sometimes Baptism) are a part of salvation but salvation can be lost or given up via willful sin.

The primary concern of the "Lordship" crowd is that Christianity is full of people who profess Christ but do not "take up their cross" (Matt 10.38). They talk the talk, but don't walk the walk. They claim Christ but don't serve Him. They claim holiness but live like the world. They claim heaven but do not serve Heaven's King. They have a "form" of the Gospel, but deny its power to change lives (2Tim 3.5).

Those are legitimate arguments. The Bible clearly warns of being lukewarm (Rev 3.16), false Christians (Matt 13) and those who claim the Lord, but are unknown by Him (Luke 13.27).

John MacArthur, the most well-known proponent of the Lordship issue, does NOT teach that repentance saves. He teaches that repentance will always be present in true salvation. In light of the Gospel, what is there to argue about that point?

The argument of the "belief only" crowd is that adding anything to salvation other than belief in Jesus is making salvation something that is "earned" by some effort. This argument is made about the Lordship arguments, and it is levied at those who say that baptism is essential to salvation.

The "you can lose your salvation" Christians think that "eternal security" Christians believe you can "accept Christ" and then live however you want.

The biggest problem with all of that is that every side paints the very worst picture of the other sides in order to prove their own point.

The Lordship folks do not believe that repentance saves and that you earn your salvation by being repentant and obedient.

The "simply believe" group does not believe that you just "accept Christ" in any old casual meaningless way, go out and live however you want, and don't worry, you'll end up in heaven.

The "you can lose your salvation" Christians don't believe that a person loses their salvation and is on their way to hell each and every time they commit a sin; they believe that willful, long-term, unrepentant sin will cost you salvation.

At this point, I'm not arguing for or against any of these positions but want to simply point out how we distort and exaggerate each other's beliefs in order to prop up our own.

In the same way that John MacArthur does not teach that repentance actually saves, most who preach the essential nature of baptism don't preach that "baptism saves." They believe that obedience to the command of Baptism must, and will always, be present in any true salvation; and in that sense, Baptism is essential.

I contend that in the same way the Lordship argument states that repentance and obedience will always be present in true salvation - you could argue the same thing about Baptism. Baptism is clearly commanded, it is an act of obedience demonstrating our repentance... and yet my Lordship friends would recoil at the idea that Baptism is "essential" in the same manner they would readily defend that repentance and obedience is.

Again, it's not that repentance, obedience or Baptism actually SAVES, but that they are all present in true salvation; therefore, they are in a sense part of salvation, or essential to salvation.

There are solid arguments for all sides, and the fact is God did NOT make these issues BLACK AND WHITE, PLAIN AND SIMPLE OR CRYSTAL CLEAR. If He did, good and honest men wouldn't still be debating them. I would venture to say that there are many, many of you reading this who are just like me: if God would have said "A-B-C; 1-2-3; X-Y-Z" - we

would accept it without question or hesitation. But He didn't choose to give it to us like baby food. It's grown up food that has to be cooked, prepared, chewed, tasted, swallowed and digested.

So why don't we all be a little less quick to dismiss honest, sincere and God-fearing people as false teachers and heretics and seek the truth in love, praying that God will give us wisdom as we ask for it? There are enough REAL heretics and false teachers for us to deal with without bickering with each other. It is said that Christians are the only humans that still eat their own. How sadly true.

-----

Our arguments and attempt to systematize God complicates the simple.

Does the Bible say believe? Then believe. Does it say confess? Then confess. Does it say to repent and obey? Then do it. Does it command us to be baptized, assemble and give? Do it.

Just do what God says to do. That is the beautiful simplicity of the Gospel. Tell others about sin, hell and Jesus. Give them God's Word and tell them to learn it and obey it.

The Gospel is infinitely deep in its application and meaning but extraordinarily simply in its requirements. The controversies in fundamental churches today (Lordship salvation, baptism, Calvinism), in my opinion, distort the simplicity of the Gospel with regards to repentance, baptism and free will (among other things).

The simple message of the Gospel is to believe that your sins have condemned you, and Jesus Christ, the Son of God is the only answer.

A TRUE belief of that, not just an intellectual acknowledgement, will OF COURSE be accompanied by contrition (sorrow for your sin), a desire to turn from evil (repentance) and a willful decision to be obedient to your Savior and Master (baptism, good works, Communion, the assembling of the Saints, giving, etc.). Conversion without a changed life was an utterly foreign concept to Jesus, the early church and the Biblical authors.

The overall message of Scripture in its totality CLEARLY does not leave the impression that any person who simply has mental acknowledgment of Christ being a real person is automatically saved. It didn't save the demons or Judas or the other thief. Everyone agrees we are to believe something MORE than the basic fact that Jesus existed.

So what are we "believing"? What constitutes a belief that results in salvation? That Jesus was the Son of God? That He was raised from the dead? That He was eternal? Virgin born? Creator? Master? Lord? Prince? Conqueror?

What do you pick and choose? The Bible talks about all these things. We seem to believe we are FORCED to declare what EXACTLY, to the letter, constitutes a saving experience... so what exactly are we to believe about Christ? Can you believe He was raised from the dead, but not believe He was God? My point is, when you insist on quantifying and systematizing salvation, you might be biting off more

than God ever required for you to chew.

It is very dangerous and causes MUCH division to pull one verse (or a few) from the Bible and declare it to be the totality of salvation concerns. You must take the OVERALL message of the Scripture, taking into account the reasons, symbolism, purpose and results of God's entire plan for man, His entire history with humankind; the past, present and future of His dealing with us. We cannot lay our heads on our pet verses, consider them alone without the rest of the Bible, and then declare our doctrines based on our predetermined opinions.

You don't think that can happen?  
Consider these common arguments:

Acts 2:38 - this verse proves that repentance and baptism save you.

Roman 10:9 - this verse proves that confession and belief save you.

Romans 10:10 - this verse proves that confession alone saves you.

1 Thess 4:14 - this verse proves that you only have to believe that Jesus died and rose in order to be saved.

Eph 2:8-9 - this verse proves that only faith is required for salvation

2 Cor 7:10 - this verse proves that only Godly sorrow and repentance is necessary to be saved

Acts 3:19 - it is plain from this verse that repentance is what saves you

1Pet 3:21 - this verse proves beyond doubt that Baptism is what saves you

See what I mean? I can "prove" whatever I want about salvation by

plucking a verse(s) from the rest of the Bible and declaring, "SEE THERE! That verse plainly says what I am saying."

When properly considering doctrine, you **MUST** consider the entire Bible and not only the actual text but also themes, examples, symbolism, overarching concepts....

Now you may think that I am contradicting myself about making the simple Gospel more complex, but I'm not. The **MORE** you consider the entire Bible with all of its parts and threads and subjects and concepts, the **MORE** the beautiful, simple, saving, Gospel of Christ comes into crystal clear focus.

Men, in their sincere attempts to systematize, categorize and standardize God's Word tend to **ELEVATE THEIR CONCLUSIONS** to be equal with plain Scripture.

It has come to where we **MUST** decide if we are Calvinists or Arminians; if the point of salvation is at the moment of baptism or the moment of belief; if it is possible to lose your salvation or if you are once saved always saved; if Jesus must be Lord or if you simply have to believe in Him.

We get so caught up in choosing sides and developing systematic theologies that we blur, distort and confuse the simple Gospel message....

I'm a sinner bound for hell. Jesus Christ the Son of God died to save me. I must trust in Christ, place my faith in God, turn from my sins and obey God with all my heart. That is the simple fact of what God commands of me if I am to receive eternal life on HIS **TERMS**. I don't know exactly when

my spirit was regenerated, when I was sealed with the Holy Spirit, when I was adopted into God's family, when I my sins were imputed to Jesus and His righteousness was credited to me. I don't know when all of that supernatural miracle occurred. I just did what God said to do, and placed my faith and trust in Him to keep His word.

What does God very plainly tell me to do? Believe in Jesus. Confess Him. Repent. Be baptized. Live a holy life. Serve Him. Love Him. Obey Him.

So that's what I will do. And salvation will be mine.

That **IS** the message of salvation. Throw out all the theological debate, systematic arguments, logic of men and denominational squabbles and you are left with that simple message.

Doctrine **IS** important. Theology is important. True theology illuminates and enhances the simple Gospel rather than causing contention, division and argument.

It **SCARES** me to think it might come true, but what the Church needs is a good healthy dose of persecution to burn away all the nonsense and bickering and reduce Christianity back to its basics:

Those who take up their crosses and follow Christ; and those who choose not to.

Well, that's more than plenty to have every side mad at me. I can hear the "unsubscribe page" just clicking away.

My opinion in summary: Salvation is the result of genuine faith and belief; genuine faith and belief are always

accompanied by repentance and obedience; repentance involves turning from sin and making Jesus Lord over all in your life; obedience involves the commandment of Baptism as well as holy living, giving, assembly, etc.

Belief and repentance are like two sides of coin. One isn't complete without the other. You can't remove one without destroying the other. It's hard to see both together because they are fused together in the middle. You can only see from a human perspective the "heads" or "tails" side... no both at the same time.

Belief and repentance are like two oars on a boat. If you remove one, you only row in circles. They balance each other out.

True belief is the "saving element," if we must be forced to identify one. But true belief cannot exist without repentance any more than a coin can have one side.

In the sense that you will force me to say that "always accompanied" (as in "true belief is always accompanied by repentance") is tantamount to saying "essential," then I plead guilty. For everyone else who understands my point, accept my conviction that genuine faith and belief alone are what saves a person - but belief and faith in Christ cannot be genuine or result in salvation if devoid of repentance and obedience.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Salvation — Can You Appear To Be Saved But Really You Aren't?

**Can someone that who has made an apparent "acceptance" of Christ and been baptized still NOT have the Holy Spirit living in them?**

Yes, of course. Someone can "appear" to follow Christ, even in baptism, and still NOT have the Holy Spirit (which means their salvation was not genuine).

All genuine occurrences of salvation result in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit into the Believer. But there will be "false" converts who make every appearance of being Christian but are not.

The Bible is very clear on this matter, especially in the parable of the "wheat and tares."

Matthew 13:24-30 - Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?' But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together

until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn." " (NKJV)

To understand this parable, you need to understand what a tare is. A tare is a weed that looks exactly like a wheat plant in its early stages of growth, and only becomes recognizable as a "weed" when it ripened.

The tare would be intermingled with real wheat and rob the wheat of nutrients and water. By the time the tare became discernible from real wheat, it was too late. To try and uproot the tare would uproot the wheat as well. The only choice was to let the tare grow with the wheat, and then separate them at the time of harvest.

There will always be those who "appear" to be Christians who are not:

Matthew 7:21 - "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven." (NKJV)

Jesus goes on to explain the parable (Matt 7:36-43) and tells us the God will separate the wheat and tares at the "end of the age." The wheat receives eternal life, and the tares are cast in the "furnace of fire."

Can a person be baptized and not indwelt with the Holy Spirit. Of course. There is no magic in being immersed under water. The Holy Spirit is neither obligated nor forced to indwell a person simply because a physical act has occurred.

As well, there is no doubt a person can "accept" Christ in some sort of external action and still not be truly saved. It will happen more often in an environment where the Gospel is presented as a "Jesus will improve your life" sales pitch rather than a "Jesus will save you from the coming judgment" reality check.

So to answer your question, YES, a person can APPEAR to be a Christian by "accepting Christ" and being baptized and NOT be indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, a person who has GENUINELY turned to Christ in repentant, obedient belief is of course filled, sealed and guaranteed salvation through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit:

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 - Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. (NKJV)

~~~~~

Salvation — If God Has Forgiven Everyone . . .

If God has forgiven 'everyone,' does that not mean that everyone should be going to heaven? If they are no longer debtors, then on what basis are they being punished? Did Christ pay for the sins of many in vain?

God hasn't forgiven everyone. The premise of your question is wrong.

If God could just forgive everyone, then Christ would have never needed to die. But God can't forgive arbitrarily; He is the Perfect Judge and sin must pay its price - death.

Christ died for all, and His shed blood is sufficient to save all. But all people were not automatically saved just because Jesus died. Jesus made salvation possible for all those who turn to Him in belief, repentance and obedience (because true belief will naturally be followed by repentance and obedience).

The idea that all are saved, rather than those who have turned to God on HIS TERMS, is called "universalism."

On what basis is a person condemned or punished? On the basis that all have sinned (Rom 3:23). People die and go to hell because they have violated God's holiness by breaking His Law.

A person can go to Heaven because they realize their lost and hopeless dilemma and turn in repentant, obedient response to God in the way that God has determined results in salvation.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Salvation – Can I Be Sure?

How can I be sure, beyond even a shadow of doubt, that I am saved and going to heaven?

As I answer this question, I want everyone to remember that I am not answering HOW to be saved, but how to have assurance that you are saved. I'm going to assume that a salvation

"experience" has occurred and that faith, repentance and obedience to God's Word have been exercised.

With that assumption, how can you know if you are genuinely saved? CAN you know for sure? The Apostle John says YES!

1 John 5:13 - These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

Hmmm, not very many ways to misinterpret that. So yes, we can know. But how?

1 John 2:3 - Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.

1 John 2:5 - But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.

1 John 3:2 - Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

1 John 3:14 - We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.

1 John 3:19 - And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.

1 John 3:24 - Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He

abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

1 John 4:2 - By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God,

1 John 4:6 - We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

1 John 4:7 - Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

1 John 4:13 - By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

1 John 5:2 - By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.

1 John 5:19 - We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.

1 John 5:20 - And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

That certainly does not cover all the applicable Bible verses about being sure of your salvation, but I can assure you of one thing.... if you work through this list, evaluating your walk with God, praying for wisdom and studying God's Word - you will be well on your way to the assurance you long for!

Hint: these verses pertain to obedience and relationships. The

Christian life is manifested primarily in these two characteristics.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Salvation — Is Fornication A Ticket To Hell?

By participating in sex outside the marriage, are you writing your ticket to hell? From what I have comprehended from reading the Bible, I would think that God makes it perfectly clear that is totally out of his will and is not the way to heaven. Is that correct?

Your question is actually two questions that need to be answered separately.

The first answer concerns the phrase "ticket to hell." First of all there is no ticket to hell in a sense. Every human has sinned and is on their way to hell (Romans 3:23). The only ticket, if you want to phrase it that way, is for a person to continue in sin and reject Jesus Christ.

If the person you are speaking of does not turn in faith and repentance and obey the commands of Jesus Christ, then that is their "ticket to hell."

I know that wasn't the exact focus of your question, but I felt it necessary to clarify that for other readers. Now on to the particulars of your question...

First of all, what does the Bible say about fornication (sex before marriage) and adultery (sex outside of marriage)?

Mark 7:21-23 - For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man. (NKJV)

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 - Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. (NKJV)

1 Corinthians - 6:18-20 Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. (NKJV)

Galatians 5:19-21 - Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice

such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (NKJV)

Ephesians 5:5 - For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. (NKJV)

So as you can see, the Bible leaves no room for wiggle on God's opinion of sexual immorality. That leaves us with two considerations for the person who is engaging in "sex outside the marriage" as you put it:

First of all, is the person genuinely saved? If yes, God will not allow them to continue this shameful behavior much in the same way that any good parent would not allow their children to continue in grossly inappropriate behavior. So no, this particular sin is not a "ticket to hell" because it was a sin that was forgiven once and for all at the moment of salvation. But it will not be a sin that is overlooked in uncorrected by the heavenly Father who never fails to chastise and discipline one of his wayward children.

Revelation 3:19 - As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. (NKJV)

Hebrews 12:5-6 - And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives." (NKJV)

If the person you speak of is not saved, then the adultery in question is yet another part of the sin that has

already condemned this person to hell.

As Christians, we certainly can have a good idea if someone is genuinely saved or not by the fruits that they bear (James 5: 1-5), but in the end only the Lord God of heaven knows for sure those who are saved and those who are not.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Salvation – What Is Grace?

What is salvation? What is grace?

That's a WHOLE LOT of question in six words!!

These questions of course have been answered countless times by Bible teachers whose shoes I'm not worthy to dust off. Honestly, when I receive questions like this, people often just want to hear my "version" so they can see if I believe what they believe.

These are foundational Christian issues that can be done justice in one little answer from me.

So rather than try to give some doctrinal statement, let me use this opportunity to give you a list of foundational definitions every Christian should know, but few do.

Why should you know them? Well, why does a network engineer know computing terms? Why does a mechanic know automotive terms? Why does a CEO know business terms?

If the working professionals of the world knew as little about their

profession as most Christians do about their faith, they would be shown the door before the five o'clock whistle. Yes, I know, that's being judgmental...

So, if you are uneducated about the foundations of Christian doctrine, here's a very basic list of terms to get you pointed in the right direction:

- Repentance—turning from sin (Matt. 9:13; Acts 17:30; 26:20)
- Faith—turning to the Savior (Acts 20:21; Eph. 2:8-9; Heb. 11:6)
- Substitution—Christ dying on the cross in our stead (1 Pet. 3:18 ; John 10:11)
- Reconciliation—bringing together through a third party two opposing parties (2 Cor. 5:18-20)
- Propitiation - Christ satisfying the holiness of God on the cross (Rom. 3:25 ; Eph. 2:13 ; Col. 1:20; 1 John 2:2; 4:10)
- Remission—putting away or carrying away our sins—also synonymous with forgiveness (Lev. 16:21-22; Heb. 9:26 ; 13:12 – 13; Rom. 3:25 ; Eph. 4:32; Col. 2:13)
- Regeneration—receiving a new nature through the second birth (John 1:12-13; 3:3; 1 John 5:1)
- Redemption—obtaining something by paying a ransom price (Luke 1:68; Gal. 3:13; Heb. 9:12)
- Imputation—God adding the righteousness of Christ to the believing sinner (Isa. 53:5, 11; Rom. 4:3-8; Phil. 3:7-8)
- Adoption—wherein the believing sinner enjoys all the privileges and responsibilities of adult sonhood (Gal. 4:4-5; Rom. 8:15 –23; Eph. 1:5)

- Supplication (prayer)—communicating with God (Luke 18:13 ; Acts 2:21 ; Rom. 10:13 ; Jude 20)
- Justification—God declaring a repentant sinner righteous (Rom. 5:1; 8:33)
- Sanctification—God setting us apart for growth and service (John 17:17 ; Eph. 5:26 ; 1 Thess. 4:3–4; 5:23)
- Glorification—the ultimate, eternal, and absolute physical, mental, and spiritual perfection of all believers (Rom. 8:18 , 23, 30; 5:2; 1 Cor. 15:43 ; Col. 3:4; 1 Pet. 5:1)
- Election—being chosen by God (Eph. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 2:9)
- Foreknowledge—that attribute of God which allows Him to know all thing in advance; a natural result of His omniscience and omnipresence (Acts 15:18 ; Rom. 8:29 ; 1 Pet. 1:2)
- Predestination—God's eternal plan whereby all those who respond to God on God's terms are conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29 –30; Eph. 1:9–12)

HEY! What about the questions?
Okay, here's the laser quick version:

What is salvation? It is being rescued from the just condemnation of eternal death that all people deserve because all people have violated God's holy standard.

What is grace? It's God giving you what you don't deserve.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Salvation — “Jesus Loves You” Or “You’re Going To Hell!”?

A Christian friend of mine once told me that we, as Christians, should NOT go around telling everyone "Jesus loves you" in our evangelism because then they will think "If God loves me so much, how (or why) would He send me to Hell?" Then they won't come to faith in Christ, because they think they don't need to be saved from anything. How would you respond to this?

I think that's an extreme rebound response to the social Gospel we have today.

We need to present the message, in full, in balance, exactly as Scripture presents it, without compromise, spin, marketing, watering down or salesmanship.

God created man (Gen 1).

Adam sinned and sin entered God's creation (Rom 5:12).

All men are sinful as a result (Rom 3:23). Sin is any act, thought, motive or choice that is not perfectly Godly.

We can know what sin is because God's Word, Law, Commandments, Statutes and Principles tell us what is holy (Psalm 19).

We can know what is sinful, because the Holy Spirit of God convicts all men of sin (John 16:8).

There are none righteous, none worthy of salvation by their own merit (Rom 3:10).

The just penalty for sin is eternal death (Rom 6:23), which God warned us about before we sinned (Gen 3:3).

God knew that He alone could pay the penalty for us (Acts 4:12) and His only Son was punished in our place (John 3:16).

God's perfect justice has been satisfied through the innocent, voluntary, substitutionary death of His own perfect Son (John 19:30).

With our penalty paid by Jesus Christ, God now offers the free gift of pardon, salvation and eternal life (Rev 22:17).

But the gift is offered on His terms: we must repent of our sin, and turn in obedient faith to God, trusting and believing in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Matt 3:2; Luke 13:3; Acts 3:19; Acts 2:38; John 20:31; Acts 16:31; Rom 1:16; Eph 1:13; 1John 3:24; just a small sample of relevant verses).

Anyone who accepts God's offer of salvation on His terms will spend eternity with God in Heaven (John 3:16; 1Tim 6:12; Rom 6:22; Gal 6:8).

Anyone who rejects God's offer of salvation on His terms will spend an eternity in hell (2Thess 1:8-9; Matt 25:46).

That's the simplicity of the Gospel message in balance, with no compromise.

This is the Gospel as it is manifested on the human level, so please, no lectures about Calvinism, no lectures about eternal security, no lectures

about Baptism (notice the words "obedient faith") and no lectures about Lordship salvation. I will leave it to others to continue all the debate, controversy and rhetoric concerning each particular doctrinal emphasis.

My only intent here is to demonstrate that we are to NEVER try to "spin," modify or "package" the Gospel simply because the world, or the Church, has gone off on some tangent or had an extreme reaction to some portion of the Gospel.

Man, in his attempt to improve on God's presentation, frequently gets lopsided on one point or another. Some emphasize Baptism to the detriment of the role of belief; some emphasize love to detriment of God's fearful wrath and hell; some emphasize "Jesus will improve your life" to the detriment of "you're on your way to hell;" some emphasize God's providence and sovereignty to the detriment of man's participation.

The simplicity of the Gospel is beautiful. We're all separated from God by our sin. Jesus paid our penalty for us. Cry out to God to be rescued from your helpless and lost state, accept the free gift of salvation His terms - and God will save you - because Jesus died for you.

~~~~~

## Salvation — Can A Practicing Roman Catholic Be A Biblically Saved Christian?

**Can a believing/practicing Roman Catholic person be, at the same time, a Saved Christian? Are there any beliefs that a Roman Catholic would have that would, by definition, prevent that person from being considered a Saved Christian. In other words can there be such a thing as a truly saved Roman Catholic? Thanks for any insight that you may have, Joseph Lentine**

Let me allow you to compare some Catholic doctrine to actual Scripture and you draw your own conclusions. Of course, you would have to believe that the Bible is the final and absolute authority in order to draw a "Scriptural" conclusion.

If you (or anyone) don't believe the Bible to be the infallible Word of God, then "truth" is up for grabs. If the Bible is not the absolute truth, what is? The Catholic Church? The Book of Mormon? The Koran? All of the above?

There either has to be ONE source of absolute truth, or NONE. Truth by default is exclusive. There is one truth. All other is false by default.

The Holy Bible is easily proven to be that ONE source of absolute truth through its miraculous and supernatural properties: 40 authors over 1500 years from all walks of life and yet it is perfectly in harmony and error free; it is scientifically, historically and archeologically accurate; it contains hundreds of prophetic predictions that were all fulfilled to the LAST detail; it has

solely changed entire nations and millions of lives for the good.

Name another book or group that comes close. So given that little lesson in Biblical authenticity, compare what the Bible has to say vs. what the Catholic Church says, and come to your own conclusions.

**How is a person saved?**

**Bible:** John 3.16 (and many, many others) - Repent of and confess your sins and believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; He died for your sins and that Jesus is the only way to be saved.

**Catholic Church:** believing, being baptized, being a loyal member of the Church, loving God, loving his neighbor, keeping the Ten Commandments, receiving the sacraments, especially Holy Communion, praying, doing good works, dying in a state of grace (what about believing in Jesus? It is missing in most "salvation" explanations from Catholicism)

**Was the sacrifice and death of Jesus sufficient to wash away all your sins?**

**Bible:** Yes, Mark 10:45; 1 Peter 2:24

**Catholic Church:** No. In addition you need the Mass, prayers for the dead, intercession from Mary, the Rosary, Purgatory, penance, and indulgences just to name a few things that "complete" the atoning death of Christ.

How much of this other stuff do you need? Hard to tell.

**Do you have a second chance to get to Heaven after you die?**

**Bible:** No. Heb 9.27

**Catholic Church:** Yes, after you spend some time in Purgatory and your family prays and pays for your sins. How much? No way of telling. How long? No way of telling.

If you're lucky enough to die wearing a Scapular, you get to go straight to heaven, not because of Jesus, but because you were wearing a Scapular.

In other words, the Bible teaches Christ alone saves. The Catholic Church teaches you EARN your way to heaven through various means, which denies the sufficient work of Christ's death.

**Can you find Biblical support for the Catholic practices of:**

- The Mass
- The role of Mary
- Tradition over Scripture
- Veneration (worship) of images
- The Sacraments
- Purgatory
- Transubstantiation (the communion turning to the actual flesh and blood of Christ)

All of which the Catholic Church teaches saying that the Catholic Church has "final authority," even over the Scriptures.

Doctrines of men; or the Word of God; which will you put your trust in?

Can a currently practicing Catholic be truly saved? What is your conclusion?

Can a PRACTICING Catholic who refuses to leave the Catholic Church even after knowing the truth be truly saved? What is your conclusion?

Can a truly saved person continue to worship and be part of the Catholic Church? What is your conclusion?

I look forward to hearing your conclusions.

Here are some good lessons to look over in your search for the truth:

[http://new.discoverthebook.org/mesage\\_detail.asp?fileid=305](http://new.discoverthebook.org/mesage_detail.asp?fileid=305)

<http://www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/MARYCULT.HTM>

<http://www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/ECTDOC.HTM%20>

~~~~~

Salvation – How Young Is Too Young?

If you were leading a small child to the Lord (4-6 years old), what would you say? How much does the child need to understand at this age?

I'm not sure I would be "leading them to the Lord" in the sense it is commonly used today.

I would be leading them TOWARDS THE LORD and, appropriate to their age, incrementally increase their understanding of sin and salvation until such time God convicts them and they repent with their own understanding and personal conviction of sin.

Teaching your children is an ongoing process regardless of age, and we

teach them as much as they are capable of grasping at whatever age, stretching them a bit each time to challenge them.

While I do not think there is anything wrong with "leading a small child to the Lord" (especially if they have an obvious understanding of the Gospel and WHY they need it), I think parents should be very cautious about thinking a conversion at 3 or 4 years old is necessarily a genuine conversion and "it's a done deal."

The authenticity of any conversion will be evident by a changed life and spiritual fruit over time. The tests and evidences of genuine salvation are not age specific. So you might want to check out my study on that and then apply it to your children, regardless of age.

<http://www.seriousfaith.com/dvo/devotionseriesdetail.asp?seriesid=56>

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Salvation – Unbiblical Traditions

I know someone I think is saved, but don't know if they have ever made a public profession of faith. Is praying the sinner's prayer with another person without "walking the aisle" enough of a public profession of faith?

Questions like this betray how far we have strayed from simple Scripture, and allowed religious tradition and practice to become equal to the Bible.

We don't do it on purpose, we just do it, it's our fallen nature. Then if someone questions it, they look like a fringe nut.

First, the so-called "sinner's prayer" is not in the Bible. Not even the practice of it is in the Scriptures. This is an evangelistic method and a tradition that has evolved over time as we tried to figure out ways to package the Gospel and close the deal.

I'm not saying it's WRONG... I'm just saying it's not Biblically prescribed, so we might want to reconsider making it some sort of cornerstone of witnessing and salvation.

The same goes for "walking the aisle" or "going forward" or "answering the altar call." These are religious traditions that have no bearing on whether or not a person is truly saved.

As for the issue of public confession, there we do have Scripture to consider:

Romans 10:9-10 - that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. (NKJV)

1 John 4:2-3 - By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. (NKJV)

A person who has never professed, or refuses to profess Christ publicly, has considerable cause to wonder if salvation has ever occurred. The Bible does not give us some formula, ritual or event where/how this should occur. Salvation should result in the continual confession of Christ publicly as Savior and Lord as we tell others the Good News.

It is a very profitable and eye-opening effort to study each instance of conversion in the New Testament. You'll see a total lack of formula, ritual and religious tradition. You'll see a very interesting variety of how salvation occurs (the course of events), and how the convert responds to salvation.

It is very different from our ritualistic traditions, habits, formulas and patterns we see practiced throughout Christianity today. It comes as quite a shock to find out there are not specifically "five steps" or "a plan of salvation" or "the sinner's prayer" or a religious ceremony in the Bible. I know, I'm a heretic.

Of course there is only one Way, one Person, one Name by which one can be saved, but you'll find it refreshing that the actual salvation experience was quite varied in the Bible. (If the only thing you are thinking right now is "baptism" or "Trinity" or "in who's name," then you're totally missing the point.)

FOLLOW UP AFTER POSTING THIS QUESTION:

I'm getting some comments like, "Then God doesn't tell us how to be saved?" or "God gives us a clear pattern but your saying people can

just be saved any old way they can find their own way?"

You know sometimes when we read a difficult Bible verse, we think, "I'm not sure I get it, but I know what it DOES NOT mean based on everything else the Bible says." Well based on everything I've written over the years, of course I'm not saying God just threw us out here to find our own way into salvation or that salvation is any way we please.

To the contrary, WE don't find our way to God at all in reality. God draws US to Him (John 6:44, and NO I'm not teaching Calvinism, that's plain and simple Bible), which the Bible is clear about. HE GUIDES US into salvation, of which there is only ONE way.

But He does not guide everyone through a neat little path of a 5 step evangelization program, or a Billy Graham revival, or the "invitation" after a sermon. The situations, paths and circumstances God draws people through into salvation are endlessly varied.

The destination is always the same: salvation through Jesus Christ on God's terms... but it's not always, and I would say more and more rarely, accomplished through some pre-packaged religious evangelization program, church tradition, sinners prayer, walking the aisle or whatever. The point of my answer is this: the salvation experience in the Bible is about people, in the situation Jesus finds them in, addressing whatever is keeping them from surrendering to Him. At a well, in the temple, in a tree, on the road... all convicted by different questions, approaches and needs.

We tend to think salvation is primarily presented with the "invitation" after a sermon or by getting someone to say "yes" after sharing with them a "Sales Presentation Gospel."

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Salvation – Can You Lose Your Salvation?

Can a born again believer lose his/her salvation? Why or Why not?

I'm not going to give the usual answers because this question has been debated, debated and debated some more. Nothing I can add will be definitive, so I will just give some things to think about that address the fact that there are VERY hard verses in the Bible that have to be explained no matter which side you fall on.

If eternal salvation can be lost, was it eternal? If you lose "salvation," could it really be said that was truly salvation? After all, it didn't result in being saved.

If you can lose your salvation, then how is it regained? If you can lose it, why doesn't the Bible address the idea of getting "RE-saved?" How many times can you be saved and resaved?

What if you happened to die between the time you lost your salvation and the time you get it back? What if that is only a short time? Are you out of luck?

If the Holy Spirit seals you and gives you a "guarantee" of salvation (2Cor

1:22), does He "unseal" you and take back His guarantee when you lose your salvation?

What exactly constitutes "losing salvation?" How many sins? How often? Which ones?

If you are saved "not of yourselves" (Eph 2:8-9), how can you get "unsaved of yourself?"

If Christ paid for your sins (redeemed you; literally bought you), then does Christ give back the payment when you lose your salvation?

If God promises to sustain us and complete His work in us (II Timothy 1:12; I Corinthians 1:8; Philippians 1:6), does He change His mind when you lose your salvation?

Now, lest one side get too smug....

Why all the lists in Scripture about sinful behavior that won't be admitted in heaven? (1 Cor 6:8-11; Gal 5:19-21)

If salvation cannot be lost then why does the Bible say that if we continue to sin there is no sacrifice for sin (Heb 9:26)?

Why does the Scripture warn us about "falling" if we can't? (2Pet 1.10)

Don't be so sure you have all the answers to these very tough issues. If it was that easy, we wouldn't be having this debate.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Salvation – Are We Supposed To Know For Sure?

Are we supposed to know if we are going to heaven or hell? Some people say they know where they are going, but if you live the best way you know how you may not make it to heaven... true or not?

The Apostle John sure believed we could "know":

1 John 2:3 - Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.

1 John 2:5 - But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.

1 John 3:14 - We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.

1 John 3:19 - And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.

1 John 3:24 - Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

1 John 4:13 - By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

1 John 5:13 - These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

1 John 5:19 - We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.

Yes, we can know. The Bible plainly states that it alone reveals the way of salvation (Acts 16:30; Acts 4:12; 1Thes 5:9), so just in the same way you would know that you are a soldier if you join the Army; or you are an American if you are a citizen; or that you belong to a certain family if you were born or adopted into it... in the same way, you can know if you are a child of God or not, bound for heaven.

However, "living the best way you know how" has NOTHING to do with getting to heaven or being saved:

Romans 11:6 - And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work. (NKJV)

Ephesians 2:8-9 - For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (NKJV)

2 Timothy 1:9 - who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began. (NKJV)

Titus 3:5 - not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. (NKJV)

BEFORE salvation, "living the best way you know how" may result in making you a socially decent person, but it cannot save you from the just condemnation you deserve before a Holy God. If you've ever told even one lie, you're a liar; if you've ever lusted

even one time, you're an adulterer; if you ever had one lazy minute at work, or not reported one dollar of income, or taken a paper clip that didn't belong to you, you're a thief; if you've ever hated anyone for even one second, you're a murderer; if you've ever longed for someone else's job, spouse or income, you're a coveter.

And if you've broken all those Laws, then you've broken all the Laws about loving God too, by dishonoring Him through disobedience and sin.

So you see, you can't be "good" enough to be saved. Only the shed blood of Jesus Christ who died on the cross to pay the penalty that YOU owe God can be good enough to save you.

YES - you can know. NO - your "goodness" cannot save you. If you have committed ONE sin (which we all have, Rom 3:23), your "goodness" is insufficient to pay the penalty you owe God for your sin.

You can only know you are saved if you know the only thing that can save you. And the only thing sufficient to save a person... is another person; and that person is Jesus Christ the Son of God who took your place and paid your penalty.

Believe that, O Sinner, and respond in faith and obedience to Him, and you will be saved. Start by reading the Gospel of John and the Book of Acts in the Bible, and God will reveal to you all you need in order to be saved.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Salvation — Will A Person Who Has Never Heard About Jesus Go To Hell?

This is something I have always struggled with - if someone has lived their entire lives without hearing about Christianity (say in a tribe in Africa, or raised in a segregated religious community), will they be punished for dying a non-Christian? My Pastor says yes.

Your Pastor proclaims to know things he can't possibly know. As humans we can only be categorical and dogmatic about the TRUTH we can know. So we know categorically, and can state definitely, that if someone hears the Gospel and rejects it, they are lost. If someone follows a religion whereby they try to earn their way into heaven, they are lost. If someone lives their entire life ignoring the divine law written on their heart and rejecting the Creator that creation clearly illuminates, then they are lost.

"But the Bible says there is no other name under heaven by which a man is saved - Jesus Christ. There you have it... plain and simple. If a person does not believe in and obediently respond to Jesus Christ, they will go to hell. Many sincere Christians and Pastors will say, "How much plainer can it get?" .

Acts 4:12 - Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (NKJV)

It cannot get ANY plainer for those who have heard exactly that. Once you have been exposed to that Truth, you are responsible for it. But what about the Old Testament believers? They never heard of Jesus. Abraham was saved by faith. Job was saved by faith. Noah was saved by Faith. Enoch was saved by faith. Faith in God, faith in God's plan that was fulfilled in Jesus... so they were saved by the name of Jesus too.

But that was BEFORE Christ, right? Yes, so for those who NEVER have the opportunity to hear the Gospel, is it still possible they are capable of the same faith? Did God remove the ability to have genuine faith after the Cross except when the Gospel is present? I'm not trying to create new doctrine here, I'm just saying that we should not make the Bible say something it does not say. It does not say, "There is no other name under heaven by which you must be saved and that includes people who never even had the chance to hear EXCEPT if they lived AND DIED before Jesus rose from the dead..." The Bible doesn't say that. For anyone who reads or hears "no other name under heaven..." BAM!!! They are now responsible for that Truth, period. No exception. Reject it, go to hell. Ignore it, go to hell. Try to get to heaven by any other effort, go to hell.

All through the Bible we find both example and principle that God holds us responsible for the Truth as it has been revealed to us. Before Jesus, that Truth came from the divine law written on every heart, expressed in the written Law (if you were Jewish or exposed to Judaism) and revealed in nature (creation declares a Creator). All of that led to faith, faith in God,

faith in God's plan of salvation via Jesus, alas... saved by Jesus name.

"No, no, no Brent... you're tap dancing around plain Scripture, using your own wisdom and ignoring clearly what the Bible says. The people before Jesus were saved differently, by faith, looking towards Jesus. Once Jesus came, then it was only by physical hearing and responding to the Gospel message of Christ." Really? Does the Bible draw that distinction: PHYSICALLY hearing the Gospel and responding? It's not possible to have the same faith as Abraham if you never physically hear the Gospel? Does the Bible declare that?

What about the deaf, blind and dumb? The mentally disabled? Babies? If your Pastor can declare "hell" for native in the deep dark jungle who never heard, then he should be brave enough to spread the condemnation equitably.

What about the people who lived during Jesus day? And especially those who died not long after His resurrection? The Gospel took DECADES and DECADES to spread even through that larger region. So some person in Asia, living by faith like Abraham, was automatically condemned to hell because he was unfortunate enough to live after Jesus ascended but before the Gospel message came his way? Wow... what a bummer. But wait... if a person who genuinely could have never had the chance to hear of Christ during that time (because it had not come to his area yet) COULD be saved by faith, like Abraham, by what Biblical precedent do we dogmatically claim that cannot be possible today?

The Gospel had not spread all over within decades, did they get a break? Two thousand years later it still hasn't reached everyone... any grace for them? If the person in Asia could be saved by faith 50 years after Christ, can the native in the jungles of a Pacific island two thousand years later be saved by the same faith that saved Abraham? No? By what Biblical grounds can you say "no?"

Again, I'm not trying to make up loopholes to the Gospel. Anyone who reads my writing knows that I categorically teach ONE WAY to be saved. What I don't do, and this is my point here, is make the Bible say what it doesn't say. If you hear about the Gospel, you are responsible to it. If you never hear it, and never had a chance to hear it, but like Abraham, Enoch or perhaps the guy in Asia in 50 A.D. live by FAITH and respond to the divine law written on your heart and worship the Creator that creation declares MUST exist, then is it really the place of Brent Riggs or some Pastor to say, "Nope, go to hell buddy. You didn't hear about Christ." I think we try to step in to God's place and declare what is neither our business or within our ability when we make such claims.

What IS our business and within our ability is to say: I will teach no other way to salvation than Jesus Christ. I will believe in no other way to salvation. I will say that anyone who has heard the Gospel now can only be saved by obediently responding to the Gospel. And I will say that anyone who never has the chance to hear the Gospel AND does not live by faith worshipping the Creator cannot be saved either. Otherwise, for those folks who never have a chance to hear

the Gospel but live by faith, that is in God's hands and God's business. It doesn't change or affect my responsibility as a Christian.

I'll get roundly criticized and called a heretic for this one, so let me finish by reemphasizing one last time: I'm not trying to create a doctrine here. Far from it. What I'm trying to point out is the danger of making categorical statements like this Pastor, going BEYOND what Scripture says, injecting our own conclusions where the Bible is silent, and avoiding some obvious questions at the same time.

As a closing note, my personal belief is that God is quite capable of getting the Gospel to anyone, anywhere, anytime on this entire earth... so I don't sit around worrying about this question unless it is to try and answer it for others like today.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Salvation — If God Is Good, Why Does He Send People To Hell?

Why would God send ANYONE to hell? He is the Good Shepherd. He has unimaginable love for EVERYONE, especially those who are lost. Doesn't it hurt Him? Does He send anyone who is truly sorry for their sins, even after they died? I know you really can't answer these questions in full knowledge, but I'd like your take anyhow.

Why would God send anyone to hell? First of all, God doesn't send people to hell; people choose hell. They choose hell by rejecting the free gift of eternal life on God's terms. For those who want eternal life on their own terms, rejecting their Creator, they choose hell willingly. God, like any Just Judge, is simply pronouncing the sentence.

For those who have a hard time grasping the concept of a "loving God" enacting punishment and eternal condemnation, see if you can understand it from human terms:

A man breaks into the home of your children then rapes and kills your granddaughter. He flees the scene, jumps into his car and takes off speeding through town. Despite clear warnings of a school zone, he barrels through a crosswalk of children at 60 miles an hour. The cops finally catch up to him and coincidentally the first policeman on the scene is your son. The man pulls out a gun and shoots your police officer son dead. He is finally subdued and brought into custody by other officers.

When the man is brought into court and tried, with all the testimony and evidence being irrefutable and overwhelming as to his guilt, the judge gets up and sentences him, "I know that you are a bad person and you are guilty of all these bad things. But the fact is, I'm a loving guy. I love my children and I tried to love everyone. I don't wish anyone would ever suffer or have to be punished. So because I'm such a loving guy, I'm going to let you off the hook."

Is that justice? Is that love? Of course not. We understand from a human perspective that true love and true

justice would enact the deserved and expected punishment for the crimes. How hard is it to understand that God, being perfect love and perfect justice, would enact perfect love and perfect justice and condemn those who have willingly chose that condemnation by rejecting God's free gift of eternal life and choosing instead their own life of sin and wickedness?

We are all sinners and have "broken the law." (Ever lied? Liar. Ever said God's name flippantly? Blasphemer. Ever put something before God in your life? Idolater. Ever lusted? Adulterer. Ever stolen or been lazy on the job? Thief.) We all await the same just punishment, but God has LOVINGLY offered a "rescue" from it NOW. Reject that rescue, and you justly will be sent to your eternal doom.

In our analogy, you might say, "Couldn't the judge just forgive him?" Yes he could, no analogy is perfect but would arbitrary forgiveness be fair? Would arbitrary forgiveness honor the sacrifice of those who keep the law or the victim's family? God has opened the door NOW for anyone who wants forgiveness for his sins. That door is open, the gift of eternal life is free, but it must be accepted on God's terms and not man's. And that is the problem. Because of pride, man does not want forgiveness on God's terms even though God is the creator and is a just and loving judge of man. God would be violating His own perfection if He arbitrarily "forgave" someone who dies in their unforgiven sin. It would make God a liar, insult Jesus' sacrifice and send a message of unfairness to all those who were saved. Of course, God cannot do that. So He righteously and lovingly

sentences each person according to His unbreakable Word.

You are correct in saying that God has unimaginable love for everyone. He demonstrated that by sending his one and only Son to be punished on our behalf. Jesus became a man and lived the perfect sinless life and deserved no punishment, thus making him the only human qualified to be punished on our behalf. God's unimaginable love was fulfilled in Jesus and is available to all. So those who reject the unimaginable love NOW fully deserve the unimaginable eternal condemnation in the FUTURE. God would be less than loving and less than just if He were to simply act arbitrarily.

Many people are "sorry" for their sins. Being sorry is not the same as responding to the Gospel on God's terms. Responding to the Gospel requires repentance, submission, obedience and turning away from human pride. That is a whole lot more than simply being sorry. Being sorry now, or being inevitably sorry when you finally face God on Judgment Day, is not "God's terms" for eternal life.

As for second chances, and those religions that put forward a second chance doctrine such as Purgatory, the Bible simply does not teach that. You will find NO reference or principle supporting the idea of purgatory in Scripture. You will find no indication of second chances after death.

Our chance is NOW, and God makes that chance available to all. To give people a second chance after death would denigrate Jesus' death on the cross and cause the Bible to be inaccurate in many ways as it clearly

describes the finality of the Judgment. If the Bible cannot be trusted about Heaven, Hell and Judgment, then it really can't be trusted at all.

Better to put your faith in God's Word than hope that some man-made idea about second chances pans out in the end.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Salvation Of Babies

A brother in church asked me about the age of accountability for children. He heard that any child, no matter what age, if not saved, will not be permitted to go to heaven. I pointed him to 2 Sam 12:23 where David said he would go to his dead baby son. Can you help me find more Scriptures on this issue?

The "age of accountability" is not Scriptural. It is a concept created by men because of questions such as, "Will babies go to heaven?"

It comes from man's need to answer questions that God doesn't give us a specific answer to. The "age of accountability" is an attempt to explain the "innocence" of children or babies and give some sort of idea of WHEN someone is "old enough" to respond to the Gospel.

We get ourselves in trouble trying to create answers to questions that God does not answer for us.

There is no "age of accountability" in the Bible, not even an indirect

reference to it. All persons are born with the sin nature (Jer 17:9; Rom 8:7; Gen 6:5). It is not imparted at the "first committed sin" as this man-made doctrine assumes.

The need to have this idea of "age of accountability" is because it is unthinkable to us that babies are born with sin, and because we know that sinners are condemned to eternal hell unless cleansed by the blood of Christ. The idea of matter-of-factly stating "all babies that die go to hell" is simply unacceptable to us.

And it should be. We are created in the image of God (Gen 1:26), and the idea that babies who die (still born, aborted, infant death, etc.) will go straight to hell is repugnant to us. I believe this repugnance stems from the fact that we are created in God's image.

God is good. God is love. God is merciful, patient and above all JUST. It is NOT in keeping with His character that millions of babies will spend an eternity in hell because they died before ever being able to hear or understand the Gospel.

Now, the FACT is, this question about "where babies go when they die" is simply not answered in Scripture, much the same as the FACT that an "age of accountability" is NOT a Scriptural doctrine.

God has not specifically answered the question about a dead baby's eternal destination. Scriptures like 2Sam 12:23 do give us "hints" about the matter. David speaking about his dead baby said:

"But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I

shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

We can also make some fairly substantial arguments based on the revealed CHARACTER OF GOD that babies who die will go to heaven and be covered by God's mercy.

In the end we have to draw our conclusions from Scripture and accept that this question is not answered. The Biblical conclusions are:

The "age of accountability" is not Scriptural and attempts to answer what God has not

The Bible does not specifically state the eternal destiny of a baby or young child who dies

The Bible does "hint" that they go to heaven

What we know about God's character seems to support that they go to heaven

Being created in God's image, we are rightfully repulsed at the idea of millions of babies condemned to eternal hell, and this innate "knowledge" supports the idea that they go to heaven.

~~~~~

## Sanctification – Does My Life Testify To My Salvation?

**I grew up a Nazarene; at 18 wandered until 39 then came to a Bible believing church and asked for forgiveness. I was once a heavy drinker and a bad father. That all**

**stopped. Over the past 8 years I have been active in many ministries and have helped others. But never once have I heard God speak to me. The only thing I feel is in my gut and can only describe as "the little angel on one and the little devil on another shoulder" guiding me. What am I missing? I pray many times a day and read scripture nearly every day. I do not want to go backwards to before. How can I really, really feel a complete connection? Am I one of the few who is not destined to be with the Lord and just kidding myself?**

You have several mini-questions, so let's answer them starting with the easiest.

First, there will not be a "few" who are not destined to be with the Lord. There will be many. There will be many times more lost than saved evidently:

Matthew 7:13-14 - "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." (NKJV)

Next, is it possible to "kid" yourself about being saved? In a sense, apparently YES:

Matthew 7:21-23 - "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many

will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' (NKJV)

Obviously, at least part of those saying "Lord, Lord... look at everything I've done for You" are "kidding" themselves about being truly saved.

So your concern is valid. We should evaluate, examine and seriously ask ourselves about the authenticity of our salvation which I believe is the essence of "working out our salvation in fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12; which does NOT mean we work to earn our salvation, but that we diligently examine ourselves to make sure our walk is worthy of our claim of salvation).

How can you objectively evaluate your salvation? 1st John is a good place to start:

1 John 5:13 - These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

You can know you are saved... (assuming you have responded in faith and obedience to the Gospel of Jesus Christ; verses from 1st John):

if you keep God's commandments (2:3)

if you keep His Word (2:5)

if you practice righteousness (2:29)

if you love your fellow Christians  
(3:14)

if you lay down your life for your  
Brethren (3:16)

if you confess that Jesus Christ is God  
(4:2)

if you love others with God's love  
(4:12)

That is not an exhaustive list, but it's a good place to start. And remember, doing these things does NOT earn you salvation, it authenticates that your salvation is genuine.

What about the "little angel and devil" on your shoulder? For the Christian, that might be a way (not a good way!) to describe the tension that occurs between your flesh (wanting to sin) and the Holy Spirit who now indwells you (wanting to sanctify you). This tension exists in various degrees in all Christians and will continue until the sinful flesh is gone. Listen to what Paul says about this:

1 Timothy 1:15 - This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. (NKJV)

Romans 7:17-20 - But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. (NKJV)

Now, that is not to imply that we take a casual attitude toward sin and think, "Well, I'm just human, sinning is just part of life..." NO! NO! NO! Yes, we will struggle with sin, but that is NOT an excuse! We must hate sin in every form, and our life should be characterized by an increasingly consistent holiness.

So stop thinking of the battle as "little angels" on your shoulder and recognize that there is a spiritual war going on between your old sinful Self, and the Holy Spirit who is seeking to conform you more and more to Christ (Eph 6:12).

Your final, and probably most important, question was "How can you feel completely connect to God?" The good news is, that answer is simple. The bad news is, that answer is hard. It requires focus, discipline and faith. Okay, here it comes.....

Pray. Spend time with God. You can't know someone or connect with someone you don't spend time with.

Read. Read God's Word. In it you will find all you need to be fulfilled in your Christian life (2Tim 3:16-17; 2Pet 1:3).

Obey. Obedience is the glue that brings it all together. Obedience authenticates, validates and demonstrates our salvation. Read 1st John and note all the calls to obedience and the resulting benefits.

No doubt we could add a hundred other things to this list, but they will all neatly fit into these three categories. There is no magic pill or plan. Much to the dismay of our

"Madison Avenue" mentality, there are no "seven spiritual secrets" or "ten power verses" or "10 keys for Christian success."

Those are merely spiritual fast-food products. The only real "secret" is the daily consumption of God's Word, daily communication with God through prayer, and daily communion with God by spending time alone hearing His "voice."

And that, my friend, is no secret. It's just hard work.

~~~~~

Satan — Can God Save Satan?

If God forgives everyone and provides everyone a chance for Heaven, would God permit Satan into Heaven if Satan confessed all his sins and repented?

No. You are confusing human kind with angels. Jesus didn't die to redeem fallen angels, but fallen man. The angels who rebelled, including Satan, will face their punishment with no escape.

As well, Satan already believes in Jesus, all the demons do. They have seen Jesus since the moment of their creation. They believe and tremble (James 2:19). Repentance and confession is irrelevant for them because they cannot be born again.

It is not our repentance and confession that makes us acceptable to God, but it is the resulting regenerated heart and recreated

sinless spirit in us that allows us to be reconciled to God.

Satan and the demons are not recipients or candidates for the new birth.

Matt. 8:29; 25:41; Luke 8:28; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6; Rev. 12:7-9

~~~~~

## Satan — Can He Read Our Minds?

**I have heard a lot of people talk about journaling, and often write down what is on my mind, my prayer requests etc. But, doesn't this give Satan ammunition to come against us? If he knows our struggle isn't this like giving the enemy your secret battle plan? I would be very interested to know your thoughts on this.**

Well, it's an interesting question I've not ever thought about.

Satan is not God. He is not omniscient. He cannot read your mind in the sense that he (or any demon) can literally know your thoughts like God can. However, he can "read us" very well, probably better than any human, even our close friends or spouse.

Let me say here, that when I say "Satan" I really mean any fallen angel. Satan himself is not omnipresent and is probably busy somewhere else, but it is true that other demons do indeed fight against us but cannot truly read our minds.

So would writing down your inner most thoughts and struggles give demons ammunition to work with? Umm..... ummm.... maybe.

However, I would think that the fallen angels who are constantly stalking us probably already know all our weaknesses, struggles and temptations anyway because we can hardly keep from exposing them, especially in private. Very few temptations stay bottled in the mind and never make it to our lips, choices or attitudes.

But I suppose it would be possible to reveal something in a journal that a demon otherwise didn't know and could use against us. I don't see any reason to think that is not possible.

I think if a journal is used to be self-obsessed or to wallow in the past, it could be especially juicy for demonic use. That's why I encourage people if they use a journal to use it for writing down God's Word, prayers, answered prayers, praises, etc.

There is no Biblical imperative to journal, so whether it is profitable or not is strictly an individual conviction.

Again, I don't think anything we would journal would be truly secret in our mind anyway because whatever is in our hearts comes out in prayer, actions, struggles, etc. There is no way to "hide" things from Satan, and I don't think it's much of an issue anyway simply because the Bible doesn't address anything close to "keep it in your mind quietly so Satan doesn't find out."

Good rule of thumb: if the Bible doesn't reveal something as an important consideration, then it's not.

The Bible doesn't say anything about being careful not to reveal something to Satan he could use against us, so I would not consider this much to be concerned about.

As a Christian, hidden in Christ, sealed by the Holy Spirit and cared for by God Himself, I'm all the more unconcerned about Satan "knowing something" I wrote down.

~~~~~

Satan – Can We “Bind” Him?

One of your answers is critical of the idea of "binding Satan" but it wasn't the actual topic of that question. Can you explain your answer in more detail?

Dear readers:

I have received so many critical responses and questions about my answer concerning "binding Satan," I felt it necessary to follow up. The original answer can be found here: http://www.seriousfaith.com/question_detail.asp?questionid=807

I realize that sometimes people use the phrase to generically mean "God, protect us from the evil spiritual forces" - which I don't propose is wrong in essence, but still kind of "sloppy" Biblically. However, there is a large segment of Christianity who do not use this phrase in a generic sense but literally believe in the idea of "binding Satan."

Satan is not omnipresent or omniscient... most likely, very few of us will ever be directly oppressed by

Satan himself because he has bigger fish to fry. So even for those who specifically believe in this idea, what they really mean is "bind demonic forces."

So even if we could specifically "bind" Satan himself, it still leaves legions of his demon followers to oppress us or attack us or frustrate our efforts for God. Do we bind all the demons? If we can bind Satan with a word, why not bind all the less powerful demons as well? And if it is really doing something, why aren't we methodically scheduling Christians every minute of every day to bind Satan? Why let him loose for even one second?

If we can "bind Satan," then why doesn't the Bible indicate how long a "binding lasts"? Where is the idea of binding over and over again? That is what must happen because obviously one "binding" isn't keeping Satan bound for very long. How long is he bound? Bound from what? How does he get loose? Why would God give us such a "power" that evidently is not very effective because despite the fact that millions of Christians a day, a minute, all over the world "bind Satan"... he and his demons are still wreaking havoc on the world.

A lot of Christians use the phrase when what they really mean is "God, please protect us from demonic attempts to keep us from doing Your will," which of course is perfectly acceptable... why don't we just pray that?

I received the following verses over and over and over yesterday from those who disagree with me and support this idea of "binding Satan."

Unfortunately, all the verses are taken grossly out of context, which is a common mistake when addressing one of these questionable Christian practices.

Revelation 12:11 - And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. (NKJV)

This verse is specifically speaking of future events concerning those who endure during the Tribulation. However, even if it is WAS directed to us, it simply says nothing about "binding Satan." It says that Christians overcame the persecution of the devil by the blood of the Lamb. To use this to support "binding Satan" is very plainly adding meaning to the verse that does not exist.

James 4:7 - Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. (NKJV)

A verse definitely directly applicable to us. So what does it say? Bind Satan? No. It says "resist him" which means to oppose, stand against or set yourself against him. "Devil" here is a reference to all things evil, all things of Satan, all the demons who serve him, not just Satan proper. James is in the midst of instructions on how to live a holy life and quite naturally and appropriately says, "Stand against everything evil, whether demons or sin or Satan himself and God will cause the devil to flee."

The verse says, "resist" and the devil will what? Flee. Nothing about "binding" anyone or anything.

1 Peter 5:8-9 - Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. (NKJV)

Again, resist the devil and all that he represents. Nothing about "binding." Do not read into Bible verses meanings that simply aren't there.

Matthew 18:18 - "Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. (NKJV)

Satan is not the context of this verse unless you REALLY stretch "whatever" to specifically support this idea of "binding Satan." The context of this verse is PLAIN: it is speaking of Church discipline and how to deal with a Brother who is in obvious sin. The verse is saying in essence, "Follow my commands about how to discipline a sinning Christian, and whatever decision or action you take on earth, will be honored in heaven."

Matthew 16:19 - And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. (NKJV)

In context, this verse is specifically and plainly speaking of the establishment of the Church on earth spoken directly to Peter and the disciples. In response to this I hear:

"But aren't we Christians too? Wasn't Jesus speaking to us too?" No. He was

speaking to Peter and the original disciples about the Church that was yet to be established on earth. The church is established today. We have the full revelation of God's Word. It is a common error of Bible interpretation to take Scripture and act as if WE are the original audience. We aren't. When God spoke to the Jews, He was speaking to the Jews. When Jesus spoke to the disciples, He was speaking to the disciples. When Paul wrote to the early Church, he was writing to a specific people who lived in a specific time, in a specific place.

PROPER BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION IS THE PROCESS OF FINDING OUT THE EXACT TRUE ORIGINAL MEANING OF THE ORIGINAL SPEAKER TO THE ORIGINAL HEARER IN THE ORIGINAL CONTEXT - AND ONLY THEN MAKING APPLICATION TO US TODAY.

"But isn't God the same yesterday, today and tomorrow?" Yes. But understand the implications of trying to apply that logic. Do you follow every command, every law, every regulation that God has ever put forth because "God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow?" No. (Read Leviticus just in case you're unclear on this point.) So you cannot apply this logic selectively to certain things you WANT follow. Just because God gave the keys of the kingdom to Peter and the disciples and proclaimed on them the power to "bind and loose" doesn't NECESSARILY extend to ALL CHRISTIANS based on the notion of "God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow." You cannot use this logic to haphazardly claim random verses as applicable. There must be clear

Biblical reason to say, "This applies to us today."

"Isn't God still establishing His church?" No. The Church is established. The Word of God is complete. Yes, we are striving to spread the Gospel and bring people into the Kingdom... but the Kingdom is established on earth exactly as Jesus directed the original disciples. The mission and purpose of the original Apostles (and their accompanying supernatural powers) has been complete for a couple of thousand years. We now have OUR mission and purpose, and that is to spread the Gospel and do God's Will.

I received responses from readers directing me to "read Ken Hagin" or "read Benny Hinn" or "read Ken Copeland"... with all due respect to both those who suggested this reading, and those men themselves.... I don't need to read MEN when I have GOD's Word sitting right in front of me. All of these men are from the same vein of Christianity and frequently parrot the teachings of each other. So it's not as if each of them are Bible teachers who came to their conclusions independent of each other.

Not that it matters. Even if they did, the conclusion is simply wrong and just because a handful of men come to the same conclusion does not mean that we are to accept it without question. The verses used to support this notion of "binding Satan" are either simply missing from Scripture or are samples of gross proof texting.

In the sense that sincere Christians use the phrase "bind Satan" to mean "Lord, protect us from demonic

influence and activity" or "Lord, please frustrate Satan's attempts to spread his lies and evil in this world" - then I most certainly accept that and bathe it in Christian liberty and grace, taking the sentiment for what it is.

But in the direct sense of the common practice and teaching that Christians can literally "bind Satan" or demons, I must stand on God's Word with conviction and honestly proclaim it to be wholly unBiblical - both from the aspect of proper Bible interpretation and from common sense given the fact that after millions of "bindings," Satan and his demons are still running free.

Yes, we should invoke "Jesus' Name" to protect us from Satan, asking God to thwart demonic activity and influence. We should pray that God will protect us from Satan and keep his army from hindering our work for the Lord. We should set ourselves against evil and resist it with all our might AND GOD will cause the demons to flee.

It is GOD who controls Satan, not some notion of us "binding" him with our words or commands. In closing, the Bible is clear about when and how Satan WILL be bound:

Revelation 20:1-3 - Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while. (NKJV)

Revelation 20:7-10 - Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. (NKJV)

~~~~~

## Satan — Can Demons Know Our Thoughts?

### Can Satan and the demons read our mind?

No, I don't think they can but I don't think they need to be able to.

What is in a person's mind and heart comes out of their mouth and is demonstrated by their lifestyle and choices. It would not be difficult for a human to be able to discern the type and general topics of thoughts of another person if they were to spend any length of time observing them live.

Matthew 15:18 - But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. (NKJV)

Whatever is inside of our mind or heart will eventually be manifested externally and the dark forces of Satan will be there observing in order to accuse us before God and throw it back in our face.

Revelation 12:10 - Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. (NKJV)

Now back to Satan and the demons... they are finite creatures. Yes they are powerful, even "fantastic" compared to humans, but they are still created just like us.

Satan is NOT God's opposite. He was a "super angel" - probably the greatest being God ever created. Rather than being satisfied with that, Lucifer ascended to heaven with the intent of raising himself to God's level (Isa 14:3), a decision which caused him, and a third of the angels who followed him, to suffer the greatest fall from grace in the history of the universe (Eze 28:17).

Neither Satan, nor the demons, can see into the heart and mind, nor are they omniscient, omnipresent or omnipowerful. They are powerful, they are super intelligent, they are cunning and master manipulators. But they are finite, and they have limits.

Don't worry about the demons reading your mind; worry about them using your sinful words and choices to manipulate you and put distance between you and God (with regards to intimate fellowship).

## Science – Does It Have Priority When It Disproves The Bible?

### **What about when Science disproves the Bible, or when scientific evidence forces us to reinterpret Scripture?**

It depends on your foundational worldview. If you believe the Bible to be the inerrant Word of the Creator of the Universe, then any "enlightenment" (science or otherwise) that is plainly contrary to the Bible must be assumed to be a mistake or a misperception that will eventually be proven as such, given enough time and evidence.

If you believe that the Bible is subject to "objective science" (which science very frequently is not objective), then what else is the Bible subordinate to? Philosophy? Opinion? Majority rule?

The Bible is either absolutely true, or not. It claims such perfection. Therefore a scientist either has to filter "discoveries" through the Bible (where applicable) or deny the Bible - but there is no option to re-interpret the Bible based on the latest science. Science has changed dramatically, frequently and consistently with time often revising or retracting "truths" which were at one time "proof" the Bible is wrong. The Bible does not change and stands firm against all skeptics for hundreds of years.

There does not exist, despite rabid efforts, ANY scientific evidence that disproves the Bible.

Now, where the Bible is silent on scientific matters, then liberty is granted in differing views. Where it is not silent, any discovery by man that is contrary must by default be incorrect no matter how sincere the discovery is.

The Bible has recorded for hundreds of years things that science has only recently discovered (water cycle, the earth is round, it hangs in space, rivers in the oceans, mountains in the ocean, the unknown nuclear force that holds together atoms, to name a few). Science has never disproven authoritatively and concretely any scientific subject that Scripture touches.

Again, many times the Bible has been announced by "science" to be inaccurate, but eventually new discoveries have proven that the Bible was correct all along.

Science that stays within the realm of true science (repeatability, observability, demonstrability) is good science. Science that does not have pre-bias or agenda against possibility of the supernatural, is good science. Science that elaborates, illuminates and enhances what the Bible declares to be true is good science.

Science that "proves" the Bible wrong, or forces you to "reinterpret" the plain statements of the Bible, will eventually be proven wrong. That is a fact. And in fact, it has already happened numerous times.

The choice is simple. When a man declares a "discovery" that contradicts plain Scripture, we are left with a decision of who to trust - the scientist or the Bible.

I will stake my eternity on the incredibly consistent, indisputably authenticated, and clearly supernaturally-inspired Word of God.

I will not stake my eternity on flawed men with religious prejudices whose "scientific proof" today has a very real and statistical chance of changing tomorrow.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Scriptural Terms — "Anointed"

**Someone started up a conversation with me about church music and worship time. He began using the term "anointed." He also referred to me as "anointed" because I was singing in church. What does that mean exactly, and is it Scriptural?**

The term "Anointed" has come into wide use, first from the "word faith" and "charismatic" groups, then into the more fundamental and mainstream churches (which is a common pattern).

In Scripture, "anointed" (when talking about a person) was used to denote someone specifically chosen by God and clearly identified for a specific purpose, such as King David or King Saul or the Aaronic Priests.

That is why the Bible says, "Touch not the Lord's anointed" (1Sam 26:9; 1Chron 16:22). To rebel against, harm or malign these specifically chosen-by-God-leaders was to go directly against God Himself.

Sadly, that Scripture has been jerked brutally (and self-servingly) from context and brandished at anyone who would dare question the "self-anointed" Christian personalities today or point out unScriptural teaching/revelation/word-of-knowledge/prophesy and all sorts of silliness we see rampant in the "church" today. It has been heard countless times from well-known TV and large-church personalities who have been rebuked for flagrant false teaching. Of course, the smaller local church leaders of the same persuasion then wield the same defense on any individual under their authority who would dare question their authority, decision or teaching.

This is comically strange in light of the Apostle Paul's commendation of the Bereans whom he praised for searching God's Word and proving all things, carefully determining if every word he taught them was true according to Scripture (Acts 17:11). A true Bible teacher welcomes scrutiny and evaluation of his teaching. Many popular Christian personalities today want no such accountability.

"Touch not the Lord's anointed" in the Bible came with real consequences when someone rebelled against God's chosen. It is directly applicable to the Priests, Kings and Prophets of Israel. It has been HIJACKED by parts of modern Christianity as a way to avoid accountability.

The principle of not rebelling against God's appointed authority is of course applicable in principle today. Those appointed authorities however, are subservient first to the accuracy and support of Scripture in their leadership, teachings and decision. They are NOT above rebuke, correction and confrontation if they are not in line with Scripture.

That describes one very wrong use of the idea of "anointing" that goes on today. With respect to the conversation you describe, the word "anointing" today has also become synonymous with "calling" or "gifted by God." It is not entirely inaccurate in concept but an unwise use of the word (in my opinion) because 1) Scripture doesn't use it in that manner, and 2) given the problem described above, it gives the "anointed" person the idea in many cases that they are above questioning, rebuke or counsel because THEY are "anointed."

In the long run, it's always best to stick with the Scriptural use of terms despite how "social Christianity" or church fads bring on new meaning. "Anointed" in the sense of "chosen" was used in the Old Testament concerning a chosen Priest, King or Prophet (i.e., Lev 8:12; Num 3:3; 1Sam 15:17) and the anointing of oil for healing or dedication (i.e., Lev 8:10; Num 7:88). In the New Testament it is used generically to speak of all Christians (i.e., 1Cor 1:21), healing (i.e., Mark 6:13) and about Jesus (i.e., Acts 4:27; Acts 10:38 ).

It is not found in the Bible in the sense that it is commonly and frequently used today, meaning that every person who is a gifted singer in church, or a teacher in Sunday school

has been chosen as God's "anointed" specifically. If that were the case, logically and realistically, where does it stop? The logical conclusion is that every talent, ability and desire becomes "anointed." Those all can definitely be "consecrated" (dedicated to God) but not "anointed" in the accurate Biblical sense where God specifically chooses an individual and identifies them clearly to the large group such as "This is your new King" or "This is the next High Priest."

Maybe, very loosely, the term works generically; but again, in my opinion it's better to use terms specifically the way the Bible does to avoid confusion and misuse.

In your example, it would be more accurate Biblically to say that God has "gifted" you to sing, and in the sense that you have followed His leading to do so, you have been "called" to sing.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Second Coming – Predictions By Christians

**Hi Brent, I just heard comments about Jesus returning by 2012. The bible does not state this. What are your comments?**

Remember 1988? Large segments of Christianity were duped with a book full of numbers, explanations and "proof" that Jesus would return in 1988. That was an "evangelical" false prophecy which doesn't even take into account all the quasi-cult false

prophecies of the 2nd Coming that have come and gone.

The world has always been full of these predictions, and there is only ONE response you should have: IGNORE THEM.

God has told us all He wants us to know, and all we need to know:

Mt 24:36 - "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. (NKJV)

Mt 24:44 - Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. (NKJV)

There are many more verses of course that speak on this topic, but these are the only ones you need for this particular questions.

Now, many "prophets" get around the childlike simplicity of these verses by claiming, "It says we don't know the DAY and HOUR... but we can pick the week, month or year." Puuuhhhh-leeeeze...

That is simply ignoring the obvious meaning. We don't know when Jesus will return, period. Even Jesus doesn't know (an irreconcilable truth we must accept the same way we accept other irreconcilable truths such as the virgin birth or Jesus was 100% man and 100% God). Only God the Father knows when Jesus is going to return.

Now, we CAN KNOW when the time is nearing. Jesus plainly tells us that in the same way we can see flowers blooming and know that spring IS NEAR, we can see signs that tell us the return of Christ is getting closer. See Matt 24:3-51 below.

Fellow Believers, IGNORE these predictions unless you want to be disappointed or feel silly. You should be looking for Jesus' return every minute of every day... not in some predicted year which goes against clear Scripture that says Jesus could return ANY SECOND, BE WATCHING.

Warn your family, friends, church and other Believers to ignore this sensational, distracting and unBiblical nonsense. We tend to forget that EVERY generation gets a bag of these predictions. They were false then, they will be false now.

That doesn't means Jesus could NOT come in 2012, of course He could. But if He does, this latest prediction will have been just a lucky guess, and the "predictor" will have to do some answering to Jesus. There is no "2nd Coming Prediction Lottery" where the lucky guesser gets a special place in heaven.

-----

Mt 24:3-51 - Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. "Then they will deliver you up to

tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

"Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand), "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened. "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. See, I have told you beforehand.

"Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; or 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For wherever the

carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together. "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would

have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (NKJV)

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Security — Will You Go To Hell If You Sin And Don't Realize It?

**If a person has received Christ as their personal savior and is now saved, can they lose their salvation if they sin? In other words will they go to hell if they slip and say a curse word, or lie or gossip?**

This question is indicative of a couple misunderstandings, and addresses one of the most contentious disagreements that Christians have had since the New Testament was written.

So let's take a look at each part of the question.

"If a person has received Christ as their personal savior and is now saved..."

The phrase "receive Christ as personal Savior" is not found in Scripture. While that doesn't necessarily make it wrong, it should cause us to evaluate such a widespread use of it. Jesus and Paul gave us clear examples of presenting the Law of God to convict of sin, and then presenting the Savior as the solution to sin problem.

There is no doubt that often we can persuade a person to "accept Christ as their personal Savior" without that person understanding what true Christianity is. Too often it follows a presentation of "Jesus will improve your life" rather than presentation of God's holy law which convicts that sinner and reveals the true need for a Savior.

"Can they lose their salvation if they sin?"

This is not a question that can be answered in this setting. It has been argued with convincing points from both sides for hundreds of years. There are difficult Bible verses to deal with no matter which position you take and to present either conviction as simple, "black and white," or "how could you believe otherwise?" is to ignore many Bible verses that are difficult and deep.

For example, the Bible declares eternal security by declaring us sealed and guaranteed by no less than the Holy Spirit Himself (Eph 1.13-14); but then warns us some who were "once

enlightened" can "fall away" (Heb 6.4-5).

Each side will have their arguments to explain these verses as if the explanation is simple and easy. But my point remains... we too often take a hard core position on something Biblical without acknowledging that the Bible may not be as "black and white" as we finite human beings want to pretend it is.

Is that a wishy-washy position on my part? No way. It's being realistic about Scripture. We are all too quick to declare we know GOD'S OPINION on something when in reality is OUR CONCLUSION. They are NOT the same thing.

When it comes to this issue about eternal security ("can you lose your salvation?"), the Bible is clear on the one hand that a true Christian can be secure about their final destination and the faithfulness of God's promises... while on the other the Bible repeatedly warns about being on guard, being alert and constantly evaluating the genuineness of our salvation.

Let's just take the Bible for what IT actually says, instead being dogmatic (and excluding others) about what we CONCLUDE that it says.

"In other words, will they go to hell if they slip and say a curse word, or lie or gossip?"

First of all, people don't "slip," Whatever is in their heart, comes out of their mouth (Matt 15:18). But the question remains... will a person "lose their salvation" for one curse word or lie? No matter which side of the "eternal security" argument you fall

on, the clear answer to this question is "no."

When a true Christian commits a sin, they are blessed with grace and the ability to ask forgiveness and receive cleansing (1John 1:9).

There is no such idea in Scripture, in any way, that a person loses their salvation with every committed sin, and somehow gets "re-saved" over and over again with each prayer of repentance. It simply is not in Scripture, nor is it in keeping with the overall picture and purpose of Christ's atoning death on the cross.

Remember, we are not talking about the unrepentant person who continues in unconfessed sin day after day (which goes back to the much harder question of "once saved, always saved"). The question was "will they go to hell" if a person "slips" and "lies, curses or gossips" (implying a one-time or occasional sin)? The answer must be a resounding "no" if the person is truly saved.

Every authentic Christian will struggle with sin at times in his life. To deny it is to lie, and the truth is not in you (1John 1:8). However, every authentic Christian life should be identified by a consistently decreasing level of sin and a consistently increasing level of holiness. The mature Christian should struggle with sin as AN EXCEPTION, not as a daily rule.

No, a true Christian will not "go to hell" for a committed sin; but neither will God allow one of His children (a true Christian) to go unchastened and undisciplined if they do not adequately and consistently deal with



their sin by repenting and asking for forgiveness.

~~~~~

Self – Is God Against Anything That Focuses On “Me” Instead Of “Him”?

Is God against birthdays because it causes us to focus on SELF?

NO, God is not against birthdays generally speaking.

Of course, God is against anything that becomes more important to us than He is, but we'll assume for the sake of this question, we're just talking about a run-of-the-mill attitude towards a birthday celebration.

If He was against a birthday party because they "focus on self," God would have to be against eating, shaving, dressing, any relaxation or fun, any enjoyment that was not ministry, buying anything for yourself that was not necessity, etc.

Of course God is against SELFISHNESS and a CONTINUAL FOCUS on “self” (i.e. self-esteem, self-love, self-worship, self-centeredness, self-obsession, etc.). He is against a self-seeking heart, a self-centered heart, and a person who has placed the focus on himself as a rule. But God is not against the blessings or needs that are exercised or enjoyed in the course of a selfless (heart attitude), God-fearing, servant-minded life.

It is the focus of our heart that God sees and judges. What we do on the outside is just an outflowing of what is on the inside. I can enjoy a birthday party, some fun, or buy myself something without being “self-centered” or “self-focused.” I can rejoice over some blessing that benefits me alone without feeling like I've taken my eyes and heart off God and onto myself.

Of course, we always need to be ON GUARD to make sure our heart hasn't shifted its gaze from God to “me,” but this is not the same as saying that every event or enjoyment I have personally is rooted in selfishness.

Here are a few verses to consider about real “self”-ishness:

Philippians 2:21 - For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. (NKJV)

2 Corinthians 5:15 - and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. (NKJV)

Isaiah 56:11 - Yes, they are greedy dogs Which never have enough. And they are shepherds Who cannot understand; They all look to their own way, Every one for his own gain, From his own territory. (NKJV)

Philippians 2:4 - Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. (NKJV)

2 Timothy 3:1-5 - But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves... ..having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! (NKJV)

Self Esteem – Scriptures About It

I am new to preparing devotionals and sermonettes. I wanted to know if you could give me some verses that have to do with self-worth and how to value oneself?

I'm not sure about "preparing devotionals and sermonettes." I don't practice or promote techniques or systematized ways to prepare teaching (not saying it's wrong; I just don't do it myself), and I'm not sure I even know what a "sermonette" is.

Regardless, you ask me about verses about "self-worth" and how to "value one's self," In today's world that would mean a bunch of psychobabble drivel about self-esteem, learning to love yourself, focusing on your self-worth, learning to forgive your "self" and elevating "self" by means of positive reinforcement and promotional self-talk.

Self, self, self, self, self....

Big problem... it's worldly humanist HORSE PATOOKEY that is not only detrimental to ALL people (saved or not) but also devastating to Christian doctrine, practice and life. It is completely and 100% OPPOSITE of Bible truth and wholly incompatible with Christianity in every sense.

Our "self-worth" and "value" as Christians come from outside of our "self," and we are only to boast in our value in the sense of how God sees us

because Jesus died on our behalf. We are "valued" as heirs and adopted children of God DESPITE of our "self" (Romans 8).

Below are some verses about what the Bible says about our "self." The modern Church would do well to DUMP the humanist blabber that has invaded our teaching, and go back to what the Bible says about our true SELF. The truth about our SELF causes us to be "poor in spirit" (Matt 5) and sends us running to God instead of sitting around talking about "esteem and worth."

A proper understanding of our nature from the Bible is the only way to genuinely understand Scriptural "worth" and "esteem" correctly. At that point, we realize that "worth" and "esteem" are totally outside and apart from our SELF and we glory that our worth is what GOD THINKS OF HIS CHILDREN, rather than what we think of ourselves. The Puritans most certainly had the correct idea when it came to the matter of how to view ourselves.

Consider any "worth" we have in and of ourselves in light of these verses:

(Jeremiah 17:9) - "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? (NKJV)

(Romans 3:10) - As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; (NKJV)

(Isaiah 64:5-6) - You meet him who rejoices and does righteousness, Who remembers You in Your ways. You are indeed angry, for we have sinned— In these ways we continue; And we need to be saved. But we are all like an

unclean thing, And all our
righteousnesses are like filthy rags;
We all fade as a leaf, And our
iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us
away. (NKJV)

(1 John 1:8) - If we say that we have
no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the
truth is not in us. (NKJV)

(Genesis 6:5-6) - Then the Lord saw
that the wickedness of man was great
in the earth, and that every intent of
the thoughts of his heart was only evil
continually. And the Lord was sorry
that He had made man on the earth,
and He was grieved in His heart.
(NKJV)

(Psalm 14:2-3) - The Lord looks down
from heaven upon the children of
men, To see if there are any who
understand, who seek God. They have
all turned aside, They have together
become corrupt; There is none who
does good, No, not one. (NKJV)

(Matthew 15:19) - For out of the heart
proceed evil thoughts, murders,
adulteries, fornications, thefts, false
witness, blasphemies. (NKJV)

(Romans 5:12) - Therefore, just as
through one man sin entered the
world, and death through sin, and
thus death spread to all men, because
all sinned— (NKJV)

(Galatians 5:16-21) - I say then: Walk
in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill
the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts
against the Spirit, and the Spirit
against the flesh; and these are
contrary to one another, so that you
do not do the things that you wish. But
if you are led by the Spirit, you are not
under the law. Now the works of the
flesh are evident, which are: adultery,
fornication, uncleanness, lewdness,

idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions,
jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish
ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy,
murders, drunkenness, revelries, and
the like; of which I tell you
beforehand, just as I also told you in
time past, that those who practice
such things will not inherit the
kingdom of God. (NKJV)

(Matthew 5:3-5) - “Blessed are the
poor in spirit, For theirs is the
kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those
who mourn, For they shall be
comforted. Blessed are the meek, For
they shall inherit the earth. (NKJV)

(Proverbs 16:19) - Better to be of a
humble spirit with the lowly, Than to
divide the spoil with the proud.
(NKJV)

(Isaiah 66:2) - For all those things My
hand has made, And all those things
exist,” Says the Lord. “But on this one
will I look: On him who is poor and of
a contrite spirit, And who trembles at
My word. (NKJV)

(Romans 12:3) - For I say, through the
grace given to me, to everyone who is
among you, not to think of himself
more highly than he ought to think,
but to think soberly, as God has dealt
to each one a measure of faith. (NKJV)

We do not have innate and self-
possessed-or-originated “worth” or
“esteem” in relation to the commonly
accepted versions of it today. Our
worth comes from our relationship
with God, our position in Christ and
the value that God places ON us (and
assigned to us via Christ) as His
children.

This is an important distinction because humanism (the basis of modern psychology and counseling) teaches that man is INNATELY GOOD, and the Bible declares man innately sinful and wicked. These two philosophies are diametrically opposed and cannot BOTH be true.

Pick one.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Sin – Are We Really Evil And Deceitful? Or Good?

I have read several Christian authors lately that say that a believer does not have a "heart that is deceitful above all things" (Jeremiah) but that God has given us a new heart (replaced the heart of stone for a heart of flesh) so that it is not wicked but good. Are they right?

Yes, and no.

Man is born with a sinful heart. It is the result of sin entering God's perfect creation through Adam (Rom 5:12). Yes, you were born a sinner, but before you get mad at Adam or think God is not fair because YOU weren't the one who sinned, consider this....

Adam was a perfect man, in a perfect situation, in perfect fellowship with God; and he still sinned. Do you REALLY think you would have done better?

Jeremiah 17:9 - "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?" (NKJV)

People have a hard time with the idea of being born a sinner. Many believe that we are born "innocent" and only become sinners the first time we willfully sin. Logical, but not Biblical. The Bible leaves no doubt as to our inherited nature:

Psalm 51:5 - "...in sin my mother conceived me."

Ephesians 2:3 - "...by nature children (objects) of wrath"

Romans 1:26-28 - Our intellect and emotions are slaves to sin.

Romans 7:20 - Our will is set against God and enslaved to sin.

So the heart of man is sinful and deceitful above all things. When we speak of the "heart," it generally includes: 1) our thoughts and attitudes (the mind) and 2) our eternal spirit.

When the miracle of supernatural regeneration occurs (Titus 3:5) our "heart" (our eternal spirit) is literally born again, renewed, to eternal life (in contrast to our first birth that was to eternal condemnation due to the inherited sin nature).

The other part of our "heart" - our mind (thoughts, will, actions, attitudes, motives, etc.) - is still at war with our sinful flesh. That war will continue in varying degrees with each Believer until the day we die, or Jesus returns.

So in a very real sense, yes, we have a new heart as Christians, and our

"heart" is no longer "desperately wicked." We have the ability now, by the Holy Spirit, to be truly good and righteous in God's eyes.

But also in a very real sense, we still have a "desperately wicked" heart of flesh that struggles with wanting to sin. The old nature in our sin-cursed body dies hard, and will not give up easily. The flesh is not redeemed or born again (it will be someday, though!)... and wants to rebel from God. This difference is, after salvation the Christian CAN defeat the flesh over time, whereas before salvation he could NOT; no chance, not happening.

New heart; old flesh.... until we meet Jesus face to face. Then we'll have a new heart and new "flesh" (an eternal, physical, incorruptible glorified new body).

Finally, this "new" slide towards denying "sinful man" is not NEW. Satan's been pulling that one out in different colors and flavors since the Garden. If a man never knows he is "sick with sin," then he will never have a real need of the Great Sin Physician. It's not enough to simply believe in the Physician (even demons believe), you have to confess your sickness (sin) and turn the Healer for rescue.

Don't be caught up in this "just love" watered-down nonsense. We should speak about sin as often, as frankly and as honestly as the Bible does... no more, no less. We are to be doctrinally sound AND intensely compassionate.

God doesn't need our help re-inventing a more palatable Gospel that will "be more popular and won't

offend." Again, we should talk about WHATEVER subject, the way the Bible does. God knows what He's doing, believe it or not.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Sin – What Was The Sin Of Adam And Eve?

What exactly was the sin Adam and Eve committed?

If you were to ask most people, you would hear, "They ate the apple God told them they couldn't have." This is about as silly as the pictures of Noah's toy "boat" with little cute animals hanging out the windows.

First, the basic sins were disobedience (doing something God said not to do); rebellion (going against God); idolatry (they place their own choice higher than God's command); and finally, the cornerstone of ALL sin: pride.

Pride can be summed up as "I am equal to God." It was the original sin that got Satan booted from heaven:

Isaiah 14:14 - I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High. (NKJV)

Luke 10:18 - And He said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." (NKJV)

Every time we choose our own way in contradiction to God's, we are in essence saying, "I am equal to God."

Interestingly, gentlemen, Paul points out something we should take note of:

1 Timothy 2:14 - And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. (NKJV)

Eve was tricked. She still had a choice when it came down to the act of disobedience. She knew it was wrong. But Satan crafted his argument in such a way as to confuse and deceive her.

No such luck for Adam. He just flat out jumped in with both feet and thumbed his nose at God.

In plain English, Adam and Eve sinned by saying, "We're going to do what we want, what we think is best, what we think is desirable; God is trying to keep us from being like Him, and we CAN be like Him."

This is the foundation of all false religion: "MAN IS GOD, CAN BECOME GOD OR IS LIKE GOD." Only Christianity stands alone denying this premise. All other religions ultimately teach this, because all other religions teaching you can earn, secure or somehow manage your own salvation.

If you can save yourself, then you are God.

~~~~~

## Sin – How Could Satan Sin If He Was Perfect And Lived With God?

**How could Satan sin? There is no sin in heaven, right? But, after he did sin, why did God allow him to live and create all the pain and**

**suffering that he does? Does that mean that Adam and Eve didn't commit the first sin? Wasn't Satan the one who committed the first sin?**

First of all, since the Bible does not specifically give direct, black-and-white answers to this, we tread carefully to ponder the answers. Let me walk through your questions, one by one:

Yes, Satan was an angel. He was the head angel, a super-arch angel, the greatest of all God's creation (Ezekiel 28). He was the perfection of wisdom and beauty and lived directly in God's presence as His anointed cherub.

Satan (Lucifer) became prideful because of the gifts he was given by God (sound familiar?), and Satan made the decision (another argument against those who teach man has no free will; but that's another question for another day) that he would ascend to God's throne. In other words, Satan enthroned himself and removed God (something we all do each and every time we sin, even if momentarily).

Pride is the essence of sin: MY way, MY feelings, MY recognition, MY desire, ME, ME, ME.

"Sin" is not a "thing" unlike goodness or light, which originates in God. Sin is the absence, to any degree of perfect holiness, just as darkness in varying degrees is the absence of light.

Unless God were to create Angels and Men as mere robots (thus removing any chance of authentic relationship which God as a Personal Being desires), sin is always a POTENTIAL.

God didn't create sin, though He well knew exactly when/where/how it would occur. God did not sovereignly ordain sin, nor has sin ever deterred God from His plan for one micro-second.

It's all about relationship. In order for God to have the relationships with His creatures that He designed them for, sin was a potential, and an inevitability. God knew that. God had a plan for it. We are in the middle of that plan.

So Satan took God's blessings and became prideful about them. He tried to take God's throne and was tossed out of heaven. We don't know if this was the FIRST sin, the Bible doesn't say. Eternity PAST is a pretty long time, so who knows.

Why didn't God annihilate Satan, knowing what Satan would do? We can only surmise that God, in His infinite perfect wisdom, allowed Satan to live because it ultimately is part of God's plan, even if we don't understand or think we can see a BETTER way.

I have become quite comfortable myself with the realization that IF GOD CHOSE TO DO SOMETHING, THEN IT WAS THE PERFECT WAY TO DO IT, EVEN IF I DON'T UNDERSTAND IT. This applies to EVERYTHING, including our own personal lives. We may not grasp it, understand it or even agree with it (from our own limited ability), but we do not have to be anxious about it, or genuinely believe something got "messed up" in God's plan. It didn't. So I can rest in the security of God's perfection.

That's not a cop out. It's an understanding and acceptance of God's supremacy and power.

So, God let Satan live knowing what Satan would do to mankind and His only Son. Satan then deceived Eve, and Adam simply chose to sin.

Did Adam commit the first sin then? He committed the first human sin. So the Bible, of course, is accurate on that. We don't know who created the FIRST sin of all eternity, we are not told. We can't assume it was Satan, because eternity PAST is simply beyond our comprehension. We can barely comprehend our lifetimes, and for most, we can't even fathom 6000 years of human existence, much less the infinite past of God.

One other point... you stated, "The heavenly beings are with God and are without sin." Correct. Sin cannot exist in God's presence. There is no indication in Scripture that Angels have a sin nature such as what man has inherited through Adam. It seems they are created truly sinless but Satan and one third of the angels rebelled against God.

This once again is a clear indicator that Angels DO have free will choice to love and serve God. Unfortunately for them, there is no provision to restore them to God after they have sinned. Eventually Satan and his angelic rebellion will be destroyed. Perhaps being in heaven, directly in God's tangible presence, leaves them beyond excuse and disqualified for redemption of any type... but that is speculating into God's business.

Remember, "sin" is not a virus or physical element. It is any decision,

behavior, attitude or motivation that is short of perfect holiness... in other words, it is anything that is not perfectly GODLY.

"Sin" is possible because God created Angels and men for RELATIONSHIP with Him. Relationship cannot occur IF IT IS FORCED OR AUTOMATED. It must be CHOSEN, or it is not real. The choice also leaves the potential for the WRONG CHOICE... hence, "sin."

So Satan sinned and was cast from heaven. Adam and Eve were deceived by Satan and sinned, and the entire human race inherits that sin nature. Satan will be destroyed. Humans who accept forgiveness on God's terms will be restored to perfect fellowship with God for all eternity.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Sin – Does Accidental Sin Mean I'm Really Not Saved?

**I am trying not to drink alcohol because I believe that it keeps me from being closer to the Lord and being obedient to Him also. If I slip up, does that mean that I am not a Christian and that I am going to go to hell forever? I want to be closer to the Lord but I still find myself wanting to take a drink once in a while. I know that the Lord does not want Christians to drink, so does the Lord forgive when I slip up? I want to please the Lord and follow Him so I can have a deeper relationship with Him and live a happier life? What is your advice?**

I seem to be on record pace for answering controversial questions this week, so why stop now?

You ask many questions within your question, and while at first glance the answers may appear to be simple, they are not all as black-and-white as they may appear. That's not because I'm wishy-washy or have a liberal view of Scripture; but rather it is because I want to be dogmatic where the Bible is dogmatic, be black-and-white where the Bible is black-and-white, and not overstate, over emphasize or exaggerate Scripture to fit my personal opinions.

So let me break down your question into a series of mini-answers, giving you, to the best of my ability, what the Scripture says about each and where appropriate offering an opinion from my experience.

Question/comment: I am trying not to drink alcohol because I believe that it keeps me from being closer to the Lord.

Before we get to the question of whether the Lord commands us not to drink, you should know by your own statement that it is wrong for you to drink because your conscience tells you that it keeps you from being close to the Lord. It does not matter whether it's drinking or recreation or spending money, if your Spirit-led conscience tells you that a certain activity is wrong because it keeps you from being all that the Lord would have you to be or keeps you from being as close to the Lord as you could be, then that activity is wrong for you, period.



1 Corinthians 10:27-33 - If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake. But if anyone says to you, "This was offered to idols," do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake; for "the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness."

"Conscience," I say, not your own, but that of the other. For why is my liberty judged by another man's conscience? But if I partake with thanks, why am I evil spoken of for the food over which I give thanks? Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved. (NKJV)

Question/comment: If I slip up, does that mean that I am not a Christian and that I am going to go to hell forever?

Regardless of one's opinion about the issue of "eternal security," few would argue that the Bible teaches a Christian is doomed to hell forever for committing one sin. This is of course not true. As Christians, because Christ died on the cross to pay for our sins, we can confess our sins and God is faithful and just to forgive them. So the answer is No, if you "slip up" one time, it does not mean that you are automatically going to hell forever.

1 John 1:9 - If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (NKJV)

However, as Christians we should constantly evaluate the authenticity of our salvation, which is evidenced by our obedience. "Slipping up" is just another way of saying disobedience, which is sin. We should constantly evaluate the sin in our life and make sure that we are doing everything that God through the Holy Spirit can empower us to do to rid our lives of sin. When sin does occur we must immediately repent of it, ask God's forgiveness and diligently seek to never allow it to happen again.

Question/comment: I want to be closer to the Lord but I still find myself wanting to take a drink once in a while.

This is to be expected. Even the Apostle Paul himself struggled with his flesh wanting to do the things that he should not do. This is not an excuse for allowing ourselves to do it, nor does it keep us from being closer to the Lord. To the contrary, the great temptations that we have should drive us into the arms of the Lord for protection and comfort.

Romans 7:15-20 - For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. (NKJV)

Question/comment: I know that the Lord does not want Christians to drink, so does the Lord forgive when I slip up?

Here is where I have to correct a misconception that will get me a lot of e-mail. We cannot make a blanket statement and say, "The Lord does not want Christians to drink." We can have that opinion. We can have that personal conviction. We can teach that it is better not to drink for many reasons. We can teach that we believe that God is more glorified by total abstinence from alcohol. But we cannot dogmatically say, "The Lord does not want Christians to drink," because the plain fact is the Bible does not say that.

The Bible says that Christians should not get drunk and should not drink if it causes a weaker brother to stumble (Rom 14:21; Eph 5:18). It is a sin to get drunk. But there is no Biblical command for all Christians declaring that a Christian should never take a drink and it is a sin to do so. If the Bible does not declare that plainly, then we cannot declare it plainly. We can certainly decide to have this conviction for ourselves and for our families; and we can also decide that we want to teach it as the principal or standard that we have chosen to adhere to. But again, we cannot declare God to be definitive about any matter or subject that He Himself has not been definitive about.

From what you have told me, the Lord does not want YOU to drink at all; so you should not drink at all. You do not have to worry about "slipping up" if you do not put yourself in a place where there is alcohol in a glass or bottle near your hand that can be put

to your mouth. The only way that you can "slip up" would be if you stumbled and fell and your face accidentally landed in a puddle of alcohol which inadvertently had splashed up into your mouth. Otherwise, there is no slip up, there is only personal choice.

Question/comment: I want to please the Lord and follow Him so I can have a deeper relationship with Him and live a happier life? What is your advice?

Read the Bible every day

Pray every day

Set aside time to think about and meditate about God every day

Never violate your conscience which is directed by the Holy Spirit

When you make a decision ask the question, "What decision can I make that will most glorify God?"

That is my advice on how to have a deeper relationship with God and a happy life.

~~~~~

Sin – Struggling With The Same Sin Over And Over

If a Christian is under bondage of a particular sin, does that mean all his prayers will go unanswered? Sometimes one struggles with a particular sin and sins impulsively and compulsively. I am now free but I would like to know if my acts of service and charity during the

period I was under bondage were a waste.

First, a Christian is not "under bondage to sin." Salvation looses us from the slave chains of sin (Rom 6:6). Christians still struggle with sin because they have not appropriated in full every power and blessing that God provides in our salvation... we choose our sin because it still feels good to our flesh.

Do some of our prayers go answered because of sin? I believe that answer is an obvious yes, though I also believe that God is always just one true prayer of repentance away before the prayer line is open again. Some reasons why prayers can go unheard:

- Sin must be confessed (2Chron 6:26; Psa 66:18; James 5:1; Prov 1:28)
- Unforgiveness must not be present (Mark 11:25)
- We must be asking for the right reasons (1John 5:13-15; James 4:3)
- We have to have faith in Christ (John 15:7)
- We ask in Jesus name for His glory (John 14:14)
- We have to be obedient (1John 3:2)
- We must ask God in belief (Mark 11:24)
- You must be treating your spouse in a Godly manner (1Pet 3:7)

Unheard prayers become heard by God when we pray on God's terms, faith being first and foremost.

Are acts of charity and service a "waste" if they are done during times of struggle with sin? Hardly.

They still benefit the recipients; God is still glorified through the benevolence and Christ is glorified no matter what our own personal motives or state of fellowship (i.e., Phil 1:15-18).

Jesus understands our every weakness and temptation (Heb 4:15), and the Lord is merciful, patient and forgiving. No service done for Him is a "waste" even when done by imperfect saints struggling with sin.

It is not the struggle with sin that will negate good works. It is doing them for personal gain, pride or self-promotion that turns gold into burned up stubble (1 Cor 3:12).

Let me remind you that as a Christian, you are not in bondage or slavery to your sin. You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. God gives you all you need to live a holy life. You can have victory over sin by the power of the Holy Spirit, prayer, fasting, discipline, knowing the Word and worship. But that's a whole other question.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Sin – Persistent Sin That Won't Go Away

What if a person has given their life to Christ and there is still persistent sin in the same areas of their life no matter what they do or try to do?

First, only God can say who is truly saved; we can only make flawed observations... so here goes!

I would say a person who sins persistently and frequently "no matter what they try to do" is either not truly saved or does not understand what he now possesses through his salvation.

As for the former, I would encourage this person to truly examine the genuineness of their salvation. It is beyond the scope of this answer to deal with all the variables, so my counsel would be for them to seek out a mature, disciplined Christian and ask them for help. Ask for guidance through the process of what salvation is, how a person is saved and how can you know "for sure" you are saved.

Let's assume the person is truly saved. We know there IS such a thing as a "weak" Brother or Sister in Christ (Rom 14:1-2); so it could be that this person is weak. It may be as well that this person has never been taught about the power of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and so they continue to "fight" in the flesh, which always ends in failure.

What are some of the benefits and power that Christians possess as a result of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit?

Holy Spirit intercedes for us, praying perfectly for our needs - Romans 8:26

Holy Spirit is our Helper; we don't have to depend on our own fleshly power - John 15:26

Holy Spirit gives us peace and joy in this life - Romans 14:17

Holy Spirit comforts us - Acts 9:31

Holy Spirit teaches us truth - John 14:17

Let me close with a verse that should encourage any struggling Christian:

Romans 15:13 - Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (NKJV)

We have HOPE by the POWER of the Holy Spirit. If a struggling Christian just keeps "trying to do better," they will never grow spiritually or progressively sanctify their life.

It is only when we rely on, turn to, and depend on the Holy Spirit to guide us, teach us, comfort us, help us and EMPOWER us that will we have any degree of victory over sin.

Perhaps this struggling Christian has simply never been taught this.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Sin – What Is The Sin That “Leads To Death”?

Please explain 1John 5:16-17. What is a "sin that leads to death?" I thought all sin led to death. Can you explain?

All sin does lead to death. That's clear from Genesis through Revelation. So what is this passage talking about? What is a sin that "does not lead to death?" Let's take a look....

To start, you need to back up a couple of verses. In verses 14-15, we find

John telling us about the certainty of answered prayer IF we ask according to His will. We know His will by learning it from the Bible and being led by the Holy Spirit. We are told in no uncertain terms that IF we pray according to God's will, then He WILL hear us and WILL grant us what we ask.

We know that this is not a blanket "purchase order" for Christians, because we all know from reality that God does not give us everything we pray for... in fact, most Christians would argue God RARELY gives us what we ask for (which should be a clear indication of some needed introspection).

What could be the obvious reason for not getting what we ask for from God? Answer: we aren't praying according to His will. For some reason, we either don't know it, have it wrong, or don't understand it, but one thing is certain - it isn't God's will, or He would give it. That is a clear promise.

Given that background, we move to verses 16-17:

1 John 5:16-17 - If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death. (NKJV)

Remember, you can't jerk verses off the page and treat them as "stand alone" (known as "proof texting"). You have to take them in context.

In context, we move from hearing about the certainty of answered

prayer - conditional on asking according to God's will - to a specific example of praying according to God's will - in this case concerning "a sin leading to death" - and NOT getting your request. That leads us to need to find out "WHY?"

It concerns one specific type of prayer request relating to prayer for someone who has committed "a sin leading to death."

What kind of sin is that? We aren't specifically told, but the context and the way it is written make it apparent the passage is talking literally about a sin that will lead to physical death in this life. Sometimes we "spiritualize" Scripture and miss the plain meaning. We think of "leading to death" more of a symbolic way of saying "a sin that keeps you from being saved." In this verse and context, the more obvious interpretation is that physical death is the meaning.

It is not referring to one specific sin or a certain list of sins but rather the types of premeditated, willful, unconfessed sin that causes God to finally decide to take that person's life. It is a sin that finally reaches the end of God's tolerance for reasons known only to God. There are some verses that touch on this:

1 Corinthians 5:4-5 (the sin of sexual immorality in the church) - In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. (NKJV)

1 Corinthians 11:30 (irreverence concerning the Lord's Supper) - For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. (NKJV)

Acts 5:5 (lying to God) - Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. (NKJV)

Verses 16 & 17 seem to be saying - keeping verses 14-15 in mind - that "God will give you whatever you ask according to His will but not if you are praying for a sinner whom God has already determined will lose his life because of some sin that has been committed."

In this case, the intercessory prayer - which is promised to be granted in verses 14-15 - will not be answered... and God is telling us why it won't be answered so that His promise is not untruthful in verses 14-15. Once God has decided that physical death is inevitable, for reasons only He knows, then prayer on that person's behalf is no longer effective.

John shows the obvious by contrasting the opposites: there IS a sin leading to death, and there IS NOT a sin leading to death. Since we know all sin leads to spiritual death, and can only be atoned for by the blood of Christ, it becomes obvious that physical death is the meaning in these verses.

We are also indirectly comforted knowing that not all sin (and obviously not most) leads to God's decision to take away someone's life. God is patient and merciful. It seems obvious that you really have to push God to get Him to decide that your physical life has been forfeited.

However, we should not ignore or neglect the opposite truth: sometimes a person can sin in such a way that God may choose to end their physical life because of it. Very sobering.

This appears to be true for Christians as well as the unsaved. In 1 Corinthians, Paul is addressing a worldly, struggling church, but still addresses them as true Christians. In 1Cor 11:30 he points out that some of them had died because of taking the Lord's supper in an "unworthy manner."

Can we categorically say that they must not have been truly saved? That would be pretty presumptuous - just as presumptuous as assuming the warning and consequences in those verses don't apply to us today. Something to think about next time you partake of Communion.

In summary, this verse is stating that God will not grant a prayer request when it concerns someone whom God has already judged worthy of physical death because of a particular sin - but this does not invalidate God's promise to grant us our requests when they are made "according to His will."

As a secondary lesson, use this lesson as a demonstration of how to interpret the Bible IN CONTEXT. Far too often, Christians attempt to USE and INTERPRET verses as if those verses existed in a vacuum all by themselves. It is the sole reason we have so much confusion and error in Christianity.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Sin — Confronting Sin In Other Christians

As Christians, are we supposed to confront sin in other Christians? Does the Bible tell us how and when to do this?

This is always a tough question because it cultivates such intense emotions in people ranging from calls of "judgmentalism" to fueling the fire of legalism and opening a wide door for busybodies.

Often, human wisdom or pragmatism is applied, and the rule of measurement becomes "Does it work?" In this case it might go something like this, "Confronting doesn't work because it drives people away; love works instead because it makes people feel comfortable and want your help." Sound good? Of course, but is "sounding good" a rule of standard for Biblical doctrine?

Some couch this in the statement, "Am I my brother's keeper?" In other words, is it any of my business what my brothers and sisters do? Some say yes, some say no, some say "depends."

There are two parts to the issue. First, do you confront? Yes or no? Second, if yes, how? I think the Bible is clear about the first question:

Sin that is ignored will corrupt the whole body - 1 Corinthians 5:6-7 - Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened.

For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. (NKJV)

Sinning brothers are to be disciplined - Matthew 18:15-17 - "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. (NKJV)

Sinning Elders are to be rebuked - 1 Timothy 5:20 - Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear. (NKJV)

Idol talkers and deceivers are to be rebuked - Titus 1:13 - This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, (NKJV)

Sexual immorality IN PARTICULAR is to be confronted, exposed, judged and dealt with - 1 Corinthians 5:5 - deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. (NKJV)

Turning a sinner from sin is commended - James 5:20 - let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins. (NKJV)

The unruly are to be confronted - 1 Thessalonians 5:13-14 - and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves. Now we exhort you,

brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. (NKJV)

Those caught in sin are dealt with (not ignored) in gentleness - Galatians 6:1 - Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. (NKJV)

Divisive Christians are to be warned, then rejected - Titus 3:10 - Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, (NKJV)

These are clear examples and instructions about confronting sin in others. Like most verses, they have specific application in context to certain situations and at certain times. It would be easy to say none of those SPECIFICALLY say I should confront my Christian brother at work about public sin in his life. However, this ignores a clear theme and continuous thread of principle that is demonstrated in the verses:

- 1Cor. 5 - Confront sin, don't ignore it.
- Math 18 - Confront sin, don't ignore it.
- 1Tim. 5 - Confront sin, don't ignore it.
- Titus 1 - Confront sin, don't ignore it..
- 1 Cor 5 - Confront sin, don't ignore it.
- James 5 - Confront sin, don't ignore it..
- 1 Thes. 5 - Confront sin, don't ignore it..
- Gal 6 - Confront sin, don't ignore it.
- Titus 3 - Confront sin, don't ignore it.

It would be impossible to list every situation and every variable in order to specifically tell you when and who to confront. The Bible never attempts to address every situation when it comes to teaching us how to behave as Christians. The Bible gives us instruction, shows us examples, reinforces the principles, then expects us to ask God for wisdom on how to apply it to everyday life.

If we ARE to confront sin, then when and how? That's easy, and the answer is the same: when love is the motive and the method.

Confronting should be done in love and because of love.

Confronting sin is always wrong when done for a personal agenda. It is always wrong when done for retaliation or self-righteousness. It is always wrong when done in pride or selfish motives. Look at the verses again, and you'll see the correct motive either plainly or more subtle, but it's there and it's never about the "confronter." It's always about restoring the sinner to God:

- 1 Corinthians 5:6-7 - The purity of the body is the motive
- Matthew 18:15-17 - In later verses you find that restoring the sinner to the Body is the motive
- 1 Timothy 5:20 - The proper fear of God is the motive
- Titus 1:13 - The growth of faith is the motive
- 1 Corinthians 5:5 - Salvation of the sinner is the motive
- James 5:20 - Turning the sinner from error is the motive

- 1 Thessalonians 5:13-14 - Maintaining unity and peace is the motive
- Titus 3:10 - Unity and truth are the motive

Finally, we have the method, gentleness and love:

Galatians 6:1 - Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. (NKJV)

We are to restore in gentleness, which of course is founded in love. If your motive for considering a confrontation of a brother or sister about sin is based on anything but SELFLESS motives that bring glory to God - think again. If your method is anything but gentle and loving, don't bother.

We don't confront sin to make ourselves feel important or better than someone else. We don't confront sin in order to make a point or get back at someone. We don't confront sin for the sake of embarrassing or humiliating someone. We don't confront sin with a "holy police" mentality, the enforcer of sanctification.

We confront sin for the reasons God tells us to in verses like those above with the goal of restoring the sinner to fellowship with God always in truth, always in patience, always in mercy and always in love.

1 Corinthians 16:14 - Let all that you do be done with love. (NKJV)

~~~~~

## Sin – Can You Be A Christian Lesbian?

**Can there be such a thing as a "Christian Lesbian" - one who loves God, and worships God, one that says that God has accepted her life choice, and she can't help who she loves in the flesh?**

Can there be such a thing as "Christian lesbian?"

In one sense, "yes" just as there are lazy Christians, gossipy Christians, gluttonous Christians, immoral Christians etc.

The Apostle Paul addressed the Corinthians as fellow believers even though some of them were entangled in some gross immorality and division.

So there can be a "Christian lesbian" just as much as there can be a "Christian [fill in the sin you struggle with]." But hold on...

Can there be a "Christian lesbian" whose "life choices" are accepted by God? Absolutely not! "Life choices" are politically correct code words for the willful choice to SIN. It is the logical end result of saying that we are "born" genetically disposed to a certain behavior, thus not responsible for it, or even worse, that it can NOT be wrong (since we are born that way).

God does not accept lesbianism any more than He accepts pedophilia, lying, gossiping or bad attitudes. You cannot be a "Christian lesbian" in the

sense of "Oh well, that's just who I am, God understands..."

To say someone "can't help" who they are "in the flesh" denies the power of the Holy Spirit and God to provide an escape for all temptation (1Cor 10:13), to transform a Believer into the image of Christ (Rom 12:2), and ignores the Christian's duty to deny the flesh and repent (turn away) of sin (Gal 5:19; 1John 2:16).

These kinds of statements ("can't help it") are the end result of decades of weak Bible teaching, humanist self-worshipping ideas creeping into the Church, and a powerless Christian leadership who is increasing shackled (willingly and forcefully) when it comes to the truth.

No, God will not accept your lesbian life, clearly condemned in Scripture as sin (Rom. 1:24, 26, 27; 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:9, 10), any more than He would accept someone saying they can't help being a liar, a child molester or a thief.

Confess your sin, repent... go, and sin no more. (John 8:11)

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Sin — Where Did It Come From?

**Where does sin come from? How did Satan know to commit sin, if it had not already existed?**

First of all, sin is not a "thing" in the sense that Satan or Man saw it one day and chose to "commit it."

Sin is the violation of what God says is "right." God declares truths; God decides absolute right and wrong; God is good; anything that is not what God is (or demonstrates in His character) is bad, or evil.

Evil doesn't exist until God's law or goodness is violated - on purpose. "Sin" came into existence the moment a created being purposely CHOSE to do something they knew the CREATOR would not want them to do.

This poses a problem for those who declare that man has no FREE WILL, because God has sovereignly declared all that is and will be. This makes God the cause of sin rather than man or Satan. If Satan cannot CHOOSE to go against God, then it is not truly sin.

If man has no free will, then man could not choose to disobey God. That means God "ordained" sin to be committed, along with all the destruction, death and eternal condemnation that followed. This is in direct contradiction to the known characteristics of God.

Satan was the first to sin because he is the one who tempted Eve to disobey God. He is the "father of lies" and "deceives the whole world" (Revelation 12:9; John 8:44). It seems fairly certain that Satan did not sin until after the earth was created because God declared ALL creation to be good:

Genesis 2:3-4 - Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made. This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day

that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, (NKJV)

A person cannot truly love someone if they do not have the genuine free choice to do so. Conversely, a person cannot truly sin if they do not have the free will to choose THEIR way, instead of God's way.

It goes against all human experience, logic and understanding to believe that a person can love or sin if they cannot genuinely choose to do so.

Sin IS the choice to do something other than what God would have done. To say otherwise is to make God the cause and author of sin which of course is impossible.

There is no way around the issue. Sin is the willful choice of the "created" to violate the will of the "Creator." If the "created" is forced to sin, then it is unjust to hold them guilty of it. We are created in God's image and we innately understand that it is unjust to hold someone guilty for sin unless they willfully chose to sin. If we inherently understand justice, how much more does God understand it?

Sin exists because God gave us the CHOICE to love and obey, or rebel and sin. Real choice is the only genuine way to have a REAL relationship. That is why God created man with the ability to CHOOSE to obey, to CHOOSE to love.

Now having said that, the Bible clearly teaches man is dead in their sin (Col 2:13), that salvation is a gift of God (Rom 6:23), that grace and belief are granted from God (Phil 1:29), that man can in no way earn or do anything to merit salvation, and that the entire process of salvation starts

with God, and ends with God (John 6:44).

I'll leave it to those who want to CHOOSE (pun intended!) to be a Calvinist, or choose to be an Arminian, to reconcile these IRRECONCILABLE concepts... I'll just accept the plain facts as the Bible presents them:

Sin is anything that violates God's wishes.

Man can choose to obey or disobey.

God is responsible for salvation.

To summarize, sin came into existence the moment a created being violated the will of the Creator. It was not a "thing" that was created, it was a consequence of a choice.

~~~~~

Sin – Are Children And Babies Sinful?

From a compilation of questions: Since man is sinful from birth, what happens to children who die before they understand salvation? Should we practice infant baptism? Are you saying that children are "sinful" even before they reach the age of accountability?

Let's answer the easy parts first.

Infant baptism - there is no Scriptural support or example of infant baptism. The physical act of immersing someone in water does not somehow impart salvation to a person unbeknownst to them

(sacramentalism) - true baptism that is a part of the Christian experience is the act of a repentant believer in Christ responding in obedience to God's command to be baptized.

The act of baptizing an infant would be at best a dedication of some sort for the parents to raise the child in a Christian household. But there is absolutely NO Scriptural support that this somehow results in salvation for the child or makes them part of the Kingdom of God.

Along those lines, let us be clear about another common "Christian" concept that has no Biblical basis and that is the "age of accountability." This idea is not found in Scripture. It is a conclusion that has been drawn by man because of the repugnant idea that babies and very young children who die might go to hell if we declare all persons to be sinful from birth.

Before we discuss what happens to babies when they die, I wish to ask the reader to put away a "human tradition" simply because it fits the way we WANT to believe. THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS THE "AGE OF ACCOUNTABILITY." It doesn't exist in Scripture. It is only a conclusion, an idea, an opinion, a doctrine concocted by well-meaning men who found that calling children "sinful" was not acceptable to their theology.

Now to the main question: What then happens to infants, young children or the mentally retarded when they die?

To start, you have to honestly come to grips with the primary issue: are all persons "sinful" from conception - that is, are we born "sinners" in God's

eyes? The inspired Word of God is clear:

Psalms 51:5 - Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me. (NKJV)

Ephesians 2:3 - among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. (NKJV)

Romans 3:10 - As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; (NKJV; "None" - not there are "no adults, or no people who have reached the 'age of accountability' who are righteous")

Romans 5:12 - Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned— (NKJV; "all have sinned" - there is no exclusion of some persons who are declared innocent)

It is no secret to any parent that children "naturally" know how to sin - selfishness, lying, stealing, rebellion. We don't have to teach them that, nor do they somehow learn it all "the first time they sin." Children are born with the innate nature of sin and begin to willfully sin WITHOUT anyone teaching them how or what sin is.

So the idea that children only become sinners, or sinful, after committing the "first sin" is not only absent from Scripture, it does not even fit the common human experience that every parent knows: children start sinning without ever being taught how.

Why? Because they are born infected with the curse of the sin nature, inherited from Adam, the first perfect

human who brought sin into the world.

This has nothing to do with Calvinism or the doctrine of "original sin." It has to do with the plain facts: God created man (Adam) in a perfect situation, in perfect communion with God, with absolutely no reason to go against God - and he chose to sin anyway. Every single one of us would have failed and done the same.

By Adam's sin, the NATURE OF SIN infected the human race. The curse came upon all mankind and through reproduction each person is born into and a part of that curse and infection.

IT IS NOT AN AFFRONT TO GOD - AS SOME CLAIM ABOUT THE "REPUGNANT IDEA THAT MAN IS BORN SINFUL" - IT IS THE NATURAL CONSEQUENCE OF THE HUMAN RACE THAT CHOSE TO DISOBEY GOD.

God created the human race perfect, and the human race, through Adam, chose to stain God's creation. This is EXACTLY what God is correcting via the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

So, does that mean that a baby or mentally handicapped person goes to hell when they die?

The most direct answer is: THE BIBLE DOES NOT TELL US.

What then? Is there no answer? There can be no dogmatic answer that we bind on people and declare as Church Doctrine because the fact remains, no matter our personal opinion - that the Bible simply does not answer this question. God chose, for His reasons, not to reveal this to us.

We are left then to draw our conclusions based on what we know about God, and what our Holy Spirit led conscience determines. However, we CANNOT make our conclusions and conscience binding on others, and state, "Here is what the Bible teaches about this..." because the Bible does not teach us about it. I want to make that clear before giving you my personal opinion.

My personal opinion on the question about babies who die or mentally retarded persons who die is three-fold:

Only God knows for sure, and I can rest in the fact that it is not up to me.

Whatever God decides is the most loving, just, perfect decision that can be made because God is perfect.

Based on what I know about God's character, my opinion is that infants, very young "innocent" children and mentally handicapped persons will be the recipient of God's mercy and love and will be in heaven for eternity.

This is in keeping with the known attributes of God and the witness of the human conscience in this matter (because it is indeed repugnant to believe that an infant is doomed to hell; we are created in God's image, and as such we have a sense of what is just and merciful). God is love; God is merciful; God is perfect; God wishes for all to be saved, but on His terms.

So my personal opinion, very strongly, is that infants and mentally incapable persons who die, will be in heaven, the benefactors of God's incredible love, compassion and understanding.

King David, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, seems to allude to this when he speaks of being reunited with his son:

2 Samuel 12:23 - But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." (NKJV)

It is my firmly held opinion that those we consider "innocent" (infants, very young children, mentally retarded) are indeed born with the sin nature, inherited from Adam, but in keeping with the attributes of God will be received into God's presence via mercy, grace and compassion.

~~~~~

## Sin – Is Plastic Surgery Wrong?

**I was wondering if you could explain why cosmetic plastic surgery is wrong. I know that Leviticus talks about not cutting into our bodies and numerous places talk about the fact that our bodies are God's temple; we don't own them. So why would we have the right to deface them and destroy God's natural design. I am trying desperately to stop some family members from having cosmetic surgery, but I need so help.**

This is one of those questions I really want to answer, and yet everything in me is screaming "NO, don't do it!"

No matter how I answer this, I'm going to get hammered. I've never been smart enough to let that stop me in the past, so why start now....

First, who says that ALL cosmetic surgery is wrong? We must be very careful about pronouncing anything as ALWAYS sinful unless God does so. For example, many Christians will dogmatically state that ALL drinking of alcohol is sin, when in fact God declares that DRUNKENNESS is the aspect of alcohol consumption that is ALWAYS sinful. Consuming alcohol was a matter-of-fact in the Bible and when God wanted it prohibited, He clearly did so (i.e., Rom 14:21; Eph 5:18; 1Tim 3:8; Titus 2:3). Whether it's SMART to drink, or whether we SHOULD drink, is a whole other topic... but you can't call it "always wrong."

We have no verse in Scripture that plainly states, "All cosmetic surgery is wrong," or any verse that even clearly implies it - especially if you are looking in the New Covenant which applies to Christians today.

In the absence of verses stating something as "wrong" or "always wrong," you have to then move to finding PRINCIPLES that apply to the issue.

Are there any Biblical principles that would make cosmetic surgery wrong for a burn victim or someone who has a deformity? Are there any Biblical principles that would make cosmetic surgery wrong for a woman who has lost a breast to cancer? What about for a boy with a cleft lip? Or someone who has lost an eye?

See what I mean? As Christians, we are all too quick sometimes to pull the

"sin gun" out and start blasting away... and typically it will be about issues we have never had to deal with. It's funny and perplexing actually - Christians are quick to call some things sin which God has not, while ignoring other things that are CLEARLY sinful. Something to ponder...

Then we move to other gray areas.... What about the person who has the big bump on their nose and has a fairly minor surgery to remove it? Can it be said that this is "always wrong?" Without clear Biblical support, I would say this is an issue between that individual and God. If God, through the Holy Spirit, is telling this person, "No, don't do it," then they should not. If that person is a true Christian and has no conscientious problem with having the procedure done, I think it is very presumptuous for another Christian to cry "sin!" with no Biblical support.

Now, let's get a little more gray.... What about the adult female who is unusually small around her chest and considers a modest augmentation for the sole purpose of wanting to feel and look feminine? I'm not talking about the woman who does it because they want to increase their sexual allurements around men. I'm talking about the woman who does it just to reach a point of "normal" and feel more feminine in the very modest manner.

Is that wrong? Can we dogmatically declare that as wrong? There are many Christians who would quickly declare that all breast augmentation is wrong... but can you really do that and stand on God's Word?

"Live with what God gave ya." - "If God would have wanted you to have them, you would of been born with 'em!" Well, aren't we all just hypocrites? Using this argument, one could argue that ANYTHING done to improve appearance is wrong including getting your nails done, or using makeup, or removing body hair, or working out to build muscle, or changing your hair color, or.....

Wearing an artificial limb; getting a glass eye; getting varicose veins removed; or how about tanning?

It's not so simple, is it? We have a list of "approved" cosmetic improvements that don't bother us but are quick to condemn someone who ventures over to the "unapproved" list.

Of course, there is cosmetic surgery that is definitely wrong such as those who do it purely for sexual reasons - to increase the amount of male sexual allurements through showing off the body (even males are doing that now!). But if you are talking about a woman doing it for private reasons (maybe for her husband's interests) and modesty/privacy is being maintained... how can we definitively state that it is "always" wrong?

Now I know that my answer is going to get me some significant grief, lose me a few readers, and get me cast as worldly, wishy-washy and liberal.... but I maintain that our liberty in Christ is governed by God's Word and our conscience. And short of having clear Scripture that calls something "always sinful," we must allow each person to walk through their Christian life being led by the Holy Spirit through a sensitive conscience.

What are some principles that **WOULD** make cosmetic surgery clearly wrong? I think cosmetic surgery would be wrong if:

It is done merely to increase sexual attraction

It is done purely because of personal vanity

It is done in violation of your Godly conscience

If it becomes stumbling block to a weaker Christian

If it violates any clear principle of Scripture

Otherwise, I think we need to be careful about declaring something "always wrong" that God has not declared "always wrong."

Let the hammering begin....

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## **Sin — If There Is No Sin In Heaven, Where Did It Come From?**

**If there is no sin in Heaven, how did Satan sin against God?**

Depends on who you ask....

A Christian of the Calvinist persuasion would say that like all things, Satan's sin was foreordained by God and part of God's plan. While God did not "cause" Satan to sin, all things fall under God's sovereignty and omnipotence, and nothing happens

except what God has ordained to occur. Nothing can happen the God hasn't predestined and sovereignly orchestrated... but it's not God's fault Satan sinned.

A non-Calvinist would probably answer that very simply, angels were created with free will. Satan used his freewill and chose prideful rebellion. This theory assumes that God's created beings (angel and humans) have free will and choice.

What do we know that is plainly from Scripture regardless of whether it fits into our chosen systematic theology?

Satan was the first sinner on record - 1 John 3:8

Satan did something to get him the boot from heaven - Revelation 12:7

Jesus saw Satan fall - Luke 10:17-24

Satan said, "In his own heart," which seems to clearly imply free will choice; a strange choice of words by God if He really meant to say, "I predestined Satan."

Isaiah 14:13-15 - For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.' Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, To the lowest depths of the Pit. (NKJV)

This passage could easily be talking about the King of Babylon instead of Satan. Historically the context fits, but the lofty language of verse 13 has led many theologians to believe this is speaking of Satan.



Apparently Satan fell sometime after Eden was created but before Adam and Eve sinned - Ezekiel 28:11-19.

It's hard to be dogmatic about why, when and where Satan fell, but it is plain that he did something to rebel against God and many of the other angels joined him.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Sin – What Is “Living In Sin”?

**What does the Bible say about "living in sin" I would like to point out specific passages and let the Bible speak for itself rather than it appearing that I am the one judging the sin.**

Before I give you a list of verses, remember that there is a big difference between judging sinful behavior (comparing the behavior against God's Word) and judging the state of a person's heart. The only way we can avoid sin, or disciple others, is to "judge" what is sinful and forsake it. But we aren't called to look into a person's heart and judge motives or intent. Only God is capable of that.

Here is a very helpful list from Torrey on the topic of sin. I hope you will find it as enlightening as I have:

- Sin
- 1. Is the transgression of the law. 1Jo 3:4.
- 2. Is of the devil. 1Jo 3:8; Joh 8:44.
- 3. All unrighteousness is. 1Jo 5:17.

- 4. Omission of what we know to be good is. Jas 4:17.
- 5. Whatever is not of faith is. Ro 14:23.
- 6. The thought of foolishness is. Pr 24:9.
- 7. All the imaginations of the unrenewed heart are. Ge 6:5; 8:21.
- 8. Described as
  - a. Coming from the heart. Mt 15:19.
  - b. The fruit of lust. Jas 1:15.
  - c. The sting of death. 1Co 15:56.
  - d. Rebellion against God. De 9:7; Jos 1:18.
  - e. Works of darkness. Eph 5:11.
  - f. Dead works. Heb 6:1; 9:14.
  - g. The abominable thing that God hates. Pr 15:9; Jer 44:4,11.
  - h. Reproaching the Lord. Nu 15:30; Ps 74:18.
  - i. Defiling. Pr 30:12; Isa 59:3.
  - j. Deceitful. Heb 3:13.
  - k. Disgraceful. Pr 14:34.
  - l. Often very great. Ex 32:20; 1Sa 2:17.
  - m. Often mighty. Am 5:12.
  - n. Often manifold. Am 5:12.
  - o. Often presumptuous. Ps 19:13.
  - p. Sometimes open and manifest. 1Ti 5:24.
  - q. Sometimes secret. Ps 90:8; 1Ti 5:24.
  - r. Besetting. Heb 12:1.
  - s. Like scarlet and crimson. Isa 1:18.
  - t. Reaching to heaven. Re 18:5.
- 9. Entered into the world by Adam. Ge 3:6,7; Ro 5:12.
- 10. All men are conceived and born in. Ge 5:3; Job 15:14; 25:4; Ps 51:5.
- 11. All men are shaped in. Ps 51:5.
- 12. Scripture concludes all under. Ga 3:22.

- 13. No man is without. 1Ki 8:46; Ec 7:20.
- 14. Christ alone was without. 2Co 5:21; Heb 4:15; 7:26; 1Jo 3:5.
- 15. God
  - a. Abominates. De 25:16; Pr 6:16-19.
  - b. Marks. Job 10:14.
  - c. Remembers. Re 18:5.
  - d. Is provoked to jealousy by. 1Ki 14:22.
  - e. Is provoked to anger by. 1Ki 16:2.
  - f. Alone can forgive. Ex 34:7; Da 9:9; Mic 7:18; Mr 2:7.
  - g. Recompenses. Jer 16:18; Re 18:6.
  - h. Punishes. Isa 13:11; Am 3:2.
- 16. The Law
  - a. Is transgressed by every. Jas 2:10,11; 1Jo 3:4.
  - b. Gives knowledge of. Ro 3:20; 7:7.
  - c. Shows exceeding sinfulness of. Ro 7:13.
  - d. Made to restrain. 1Ti 1:9,10.
  - e. By its strictness stirs up. Ro 7:5,8,11.
  - f. Is the strength of. 1Co 15:56.
  - g. Curses those guilty of. Ga 3:10.
- 17. No man can cleanse himself from. Job 9:30,31; Pr 20:9; Jer 2:22.
- 18. No man can atone for. Mic 6:7.
- 19. God has opened a fountain for. Zec 13:1.
- 20. Christ was manifested to take away. Joh 1:29; 1Jo 3:5.
- 21. Christ's blood redeems from. Eph 1:7.
- 22. Christ's blood cleanses from. 1Jo 1:7.
- 23. Saints
  - a. Made free from. Ro 6:18.
  - b. Dead to. Ro 6:2,11; 1Pe 2:24.
  - c. Profess to have ceased from. 1Pe 4:1.
  - d. Cannot live in. 1Jo 3:9; 5:18.
  - e. Resolve against. Job 34:32.
  - f. Ashamed of having committed. Ro 6:21.
  - g. Abhor themselves on account of. Job 42:6; Eze 20:43.
  - h. Have yet the remains of, in them. Ro 7:17,23; Ga 5:17.
- 24. The fear of God restrains. Ex 20:20; Ps 4:4; Pr 16:6.
- 25. The word of God keeps from. Ps 17:4; 119:11.
- 26. The Holy Spirit convinces of. Joh 16:8,9.
- 27. If we say that we have no, we make God a liar. 1Jo 1:10.
- 28. Confusion of face belongs to those guilty of. Da 9:7,8.
- 29. Should be
  - a. Confessed. Job 33:27; Pr 28:13.
  - b. Mourned over. Ps 38:18; Jer 3:21.
  - c. Hated. Ps 97:10; Pr 8:13; Am 5:15.
  - d. Abhorred. Ro 12:9.
  - e. Put away. Job 11:14.
  - f. Departed from. Ps 34:14; 2Ti 2:19.
  - g. Avoided even in appearance. 1Th 5:22.
  - h. Guarded against. Ps 4:4; 39:1.
  - i. Striven against. Heb 12:4.
  - j. Mortified. Ro 8:13; Col 3:5.
  - k. Wholly destroyed. Ro 6:6.
- 30. Specially strive against besetting. Heb 12:1.
- 31. Aggravated by neglecting advantages. Lu 12:47; Joh 15:22.
- 32. Guilt of concerning. Job 31:33; Pr 28:13.
- 33. We should pray to God
  - a. To search for, in our hearts. Ps 139:23,24.
  - B. To make us know our. Job 13:23.

- c. To forgive our. Ex 34:9; Lu 11:4.
- d. To keep us from. Ps 19:13.
- e. To deliver us from. Mt 6:13.
- f. To cleanse us from. Ps 51:2.
- 34. Prayer hindered by. Ps 66:18; Isa 59:2.
- 35. Blessings withheld on account of. Jer 5:25.
- 36. The wicked
  - a. Servants to. Joh 8:34; Ro 6:16.
  - b. Dead in. Eph 2:1.
  - c. Guilty of, in everything they do. Pr 21:4; Eze 21:24.
  - d. Plead necessity for. 1Sa 13:11,12.
  - e. Excuse. Ge 3:12,13; 1Sa 15:13-15.
  - f. Encourage themselves in. Ps 64:5.
  - g. Defy God in committing. Isa 5:18,19.
  - h. Boast of. Isa 3:9.
  - i. Make a mock at. Pr 14:9.
  - j. Expect impunity in. Ps 10:11; 50:21; 94:7.
  - k. Cannot cease from. 2Pe 2:14.
  - l. Heap up. Ps 78:17; Isa 30:1.
  - m. Encouraged in, by prosperity. Job 21:7-15; Pr 10:16.
  - n. Led by despair to continue in. Jer 2:25; 18:12.
  - o. Try to conceal, from God. Ge 3:8,10; Job 31:33.
  - p. Throw the blame of, on God. Ge 3:12; Jer 7:10.
  - q. Throw the blame of, on others. Ge 3:12,13; Ex 32:22-24.
  - r. Tempt others to. Ge 3:6; 1Ki 16:2; 21:25; Pr 1:10-14.
  - s. Delight in those who commit. Ps 10:3; Ho 7:3; Ro 1:32.
  - t. Shall bear the shame of. Eze 16:52.
- 37. Shall find out the wicked. Nu 32:23.

- 38. Ministers should warn the wicked to forsake. Eze 33:9; Da 4:27.
- 39. Leads to
  - a. Shame. Ro 6:21.
  - b. Disquiet. Ps 38:3.
  - c. Disease. Job 20:11.
- 40. The ground was cursed on account of. Ge 3:17,18.
- 41. Toil and sorrow originated in. Ge 3:16,17,19; Job 14:1.
- 42. Excludes from heaven. 1Co 6:9,10; Ga 5:19-21; Eph 5:5; Re 21:27.
- 43. When finished brings forth death. Jas 1:15.
- 44. Death, the wages of. Ro 6:23.
- 45. Death, the punishment of. Ge 2:17; Eze 18:4.

Torrey, R. (1995, c1897). The new topical text book: A scriptural text book for the use of ministers, teachers, and all Christian workers. Oak Harbor, WA Logos research Systems, Inc.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Sin – How Can We Go To God In Pray When We Are Sinful?

**Eph 2:18 - For through him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. As Christians we have access to the Father. Sin cannot be in God's presence. We still sin after we become Christians. So do we not get to enter God's presence until we get rid of all our sin? We'll never be sin free in this life? How**

## can we go in God's presence with sin?

You are correct on several issues but missing one part that will answer your question.

Yes, as Christians, we now have access to the direct presence of God as Eph 2:18 states. Yes, as Christians we still sin. And yes, sin cannot be in God's presence.

So how can we be in God's presence and still be sinners?

A simplistic answer might be that each and every time we go before God, we ask for forgiveness for all our sins and being "sin free" can enter His presence. But that not only ignores the fact that we can sin at any moment, even while praying.... it ignores a much deeper truth about sin and salvation.

First, one might consider that Ephesians 2:18 is speaking about the fact that all of our sins are already forgiven as Christians from an eternal standpoint, so even though we have sin temporally (in the flesh), we can still go in God's presence because our sin is forgiven eternally speaking. That angle, however, tries to separate the spirit and flesh, as if they exist unaffected by the other (dualism). But that still isn't reaching down to the deeper foundational truth (not to mention dualism is unBiblical).

What is the foundation truth that answers this question? It's called "imputation." What is that? You may be familiar with AMPutation... cutting something off. IMPutation is putting something on, or attaching something that was not previously there.

James 2:23 (NKJV) - And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted [imputed] to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God.

As a Christian, at the moment of regeneration (Titus 3:5), the human spirit is miraculously made new ("born again"). Your sin was imputed to Christ on the cross, and His righteousness is imputed to you at the moment of salvation.

At that point, as Christians, when you are in God's presence, from a JUDICIAL standpoint, God doesn't see your sin, He sees Christ's righteousness. However, we still live in our sin-cursed body which continues to struggle with sin until it is finally replaced with a new, eternal body.

The sin of the flesh must be confessed and forsaken. We confess our sins to God and ask His forgiveness, so of course, in a sense, our sin is actually present when we first go into His presence to confess. It's not present from a judgment standpoint, however, because God sees Christ's righteousness at the spiritual level.

Summary: While a Christian still sins, he must go into God's presence to ask for the forgiveness of those sins. So the sin in our flesh cannot be the subject of Eph 2:18. It is the unforgiven sin of the unsaved that is in question, by implication, in Eph 2:18, and that is what keeps someone from having access to the Father.

Once our sins are forgiven, our spirits regenerated, and Christ's righteousness imputed to us, God only sees the perfection of His Son when

He looks at us. Therefore, we have access to him.

~~~~~

Sin Nature – How Am I God's Child If I Am Full Of Sin?

Proverbs 16:5 - Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord; Though they join forces, none will go unpunished. (NKJV) I am not sure I understand... does this mean proud as in "earthly proud?" I know I am proud to be God's child but I don't think that's what that means... can you clear that up?

The idea of the word "proud" in this verse is "high" or "haughty" or "lofty." It is the idea of lifting or elevating your heart (mind, will, desires) above God.

Being "proud to be God's child" obviously isn't the same thing. The object of pride (you or God) determines what you have "elevated" in your life. To be "proud" of God is to elevate him. To be proud of what He has done in your life, is to elevate Him.

The scary thing is that being "proud in heart" is not just strutting around proclaiming your own greatness. Being proud in heart encompasses EVERYTHING we do that does not put God first.

The unsaved person lives in this condition perpetually.

The saved person struggles with denying SELF, who wants its way all the time. Paul sums it up nicely:

Romans 7:18-20 - For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. (NKJV)

All Christians struggle with pride (elevating yourself above God by doing what YOU want instead of what God would have you to do). But Christians have the Holy Spirit to guide them and empower them to overcome the desire towards pride.

As we grow spiritually, our pride should diminish and our humility increase.

~~~~~

## Sin Nature – Is A Person "Born Gay"?

**Can a person be born gay? If yes, how can being gay be wrong?**

Can you be "born gay?" The answer: it doesn't matter.

This is a straw man argument that implies that if you are born a certain way, then it is normal and cannot be wrong.

First, the "normal" thing. Sadly, babies are born deformed, retarded and stillborn all the time. Does this make those things "normal?" Of course not

because we have a physical standard of what a "normal healthy" human baby is, and being born with your legs missing or severe retardation is not normal. It doesn't make them any less human or valuable much to the dismay of our baby-killing factories. However, it is not normal.

So being "born gay" does not NECESSARILY make it "normal." We have to measure it against an authentic and authoritative standard.

Does being "born gay" make being homosexual right? No more than being born selfish makes selfishness right. And any parent who has raised a child knows they are "born selfish"... it is a natural and inevitable character trait. It doesn't have to be taught, modeled or demonstrated. Why?

Because, as the Bible clearly says, all humans are born inheriting a nature of sinfulness. This is undeniably manifested and proven by human behavior. Children are not TAUGHT to hit, bite, whine, fuss, bicker, lie and disobey. They instinctively do this because of their sinful predisposition.

1 Timothy 1:10 - for fornicators, for homosexuals, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, (NKJV)

The Bible lists homosexuality as sinful. This is abundantly clear to all except those who simply do NOT want to believe it and will twist, distort, explain away and "psychobabble" God's Word into whatever interpretation suits their agenda. That the Bible condemns homosexuality as a manifestation of our sinful nature is just as plain as it's condemnation of

lying, stealing, gossiping, gluttony, adultery, etc.

Can a person be "born gay?" Yes. No. It doesn't matter. For whatever reason it is manifested, practiced or indulged in, the Bible says it is a sin.

It doesn't matter how we are born - perfect, innocent, sinful, selfish, homosexual, sexual deviant, angelic.... it doesn't matter what you believe about the nature of humans at birth.

What matters are our choices of action and behavior throughout our life. When we do something that God has declared to be sinful, we have sinned and are in need of God's forgiveness or face His judgment.

It doesn't matter if there is a "gay gene" or an "adultery gene" or "alcoholism gene." It doesn't matter if you have "felt gay" since you were a child. It doesn't matter if you have lusted since childhood. It doesn't matter if you are "born with a temper" or "born lazy."

Every single sin that is listed in the Bible is a result of the sinful nature that mankind currently has. All men, every person is predisposed to sinfulness. We are all born with some tendency towards some kind of sin.

Romans 1:27 - Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. (NKJV)

Simply declaring, "I was born this way, therefore I cannot help it, therefore it cannot be wrong, therefore a loving God cannot

condemn it," makes NO SENSE when it comes to rape, stealing, murder, adultery, pedophilia or any other of a number of ways people "compelled" to behave because they feel the "urge" to.

You might say, "Well that's pretty extreme comparing gays to murderers." Okay. Let's say homosexuality is one of the "lesser" sins like lying, cheating, gossip or unkindness. What difference does it make? None! Sin is sin. One sin makes you a sinner. Sin is anything that God says is a sin, and He plainly says homosexuality is a sin. So it doesn't matter if we dress it up and say it's not as bad as some other sin.

We know that being "born a killer" is wrong even though people claim it. We know it's wrong no matter what people claim but ignore this same principle when it comes to homosexuality. Sorry, doesn't work that way. If it works for homosexuality ("I was born this way therefore it must be okay"), then you can't argue with the person who claims they were born to steal, born to drink, born to murder or born to abuse children.

Can a person be born gay? Doesn't matter. Everything that God declares is wrong, is wrong. And He doesn't exactly sugarcoat it, or hint about what He says is sinful.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 - Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards,

nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. (NKJV)

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Skepticism – Is The Bible Full Of Errors?

**People make fun of me for my faith and ask me how I can believe in an old, outdated book that is full of errors and lacks credibility. How do I answer them?**

Don't answer them (as a general rule). I didn't say "don't respond," but I will tell you that specific question for scoffers is rarely useful.

They are blind, and the Truth is irrelevant. It's a distraction... a straw man to keep them from facing God about the real issue: sin. Use the Law (ten commandments) to show them they are sinners; if they become convicted, then show them the solution to sin.

Otherwise, it's all a foolish argument with spiritually blind people. You might leave them with one simple challenge if they persist: "Prove to me one single thing about Scripture that is not credible, and I'll buy you lunch. Why? Because you can't find it. That's just something you heard and are repeating." That might open some doors for real spiritual conversation, but in my opinion and experience, most people just want to argue silly points that allow them to avoid the real issues.

Don't cast your pearls before the swine. Everyone wants to go on and

on about angels on pinheads, hypocrite Christians, and "other religions." Those folks are not truly interested in finding truth. They are interested in not having to face THE TRUTH.

Your only responsibility is to cast seed, water, and cultivate. Once you've done that, move on. God takes care of the growth.

Now, I will close with this caveat: I HAVE known, on occasion, those who have sincerely asked the "Bible authenticity" question and truly wanted to know. You can usually identify these sincere seekers pretty easily. In those cases, you should answer them with the point of leading them towards the message of the Gospel.

~~~~~

Spiritual Warfare – Should "Putting On Armor" Be A Daily Ritual?

Regarding the armor of God... my wife and myself during our morning devotionals and prayers ask the Lord to put on the full armor of God as described by Paul (Ephesians 6). As we see it we need all the protection we can get to help us to resist the devil. I have heard other Christians claim that this "daily ritual" (although we don't see it as that) is not necessary and that once we have received the armor of God we

don't need to ask again. What do you think?

Well, I usually get in trouble when I think, but I'll give it a shot anyway...

God chose through Paul to use the analogy of "putting on armor." So it would not be unreasonable to draw an OPINION from examining and extending the same analogy.

What soldier puts on his armor once, and that's it? None; rather he puts his battle gear on each day to do that day's fighting. Then he spends time AWAY from the battle to repair, retool, refit and reapply armor regularly and consistently to be ready for that day's warfare.

For the Christian, that "time away" is your alone time with God. The "retooling and refitting" is more Bible study and prayer that are appropriate for the situations and circumstances that face you on a given day.

The reapplying, or putting on, of new armor each day is simply getting a hold of God's Word through prayer and meditation in a way that prepares you for the conflict and the victory of any given day.

Now remember, the "armor" is an ANALOGY. All analogies break down if exaggerated, taken to extremes or dogmatically applied.

The idea Paul is communicating through the symbol of "soldiering" is that we are to pray, be in God's Word, prepare for spiritual warfare, and fight the "good fight" of faith every day.

Now tell me, how much sense does it make to say that we are supposed to read God's Word once, pray once, and prepare once.... then never do it again because "we have received it and don't need to" do it again?

This is not an issue or area of "positive confession" or "believing that you have received" as Christ tells us about asking for things in prayer (Mark 11:24). This is an issue of spiritual warfare and the daily preparation it takes to withstand the "principalities and powers of darkness" (Ephesians 6:12), our flesh (Gal 5:19) and serves to SENSITIZE us to the leading of the Holy Spirit during that day.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Suffering – Caused By God Because Of Your Sin?

What is your response when someone says that if your heart is not right with God you are going to experience suffering? I know the story of the blind man in the Bible but it is so hard to know how to respond to the "well meaning" people at church who say that.

"Well-meaning people at church" who say that need to SHUT UP. Is that putting it to harshly?

It takes great discernment and spiritual maturity to adequately address and counsel people in this area. Why? Because suffering comes for many reasons: the random result of living in a sin-cursed world, from God because he knows that a difficult

situation will bring about the change of character you need, or yes, sometimes as a result of sin. There are times when sin is the obvious cause of suffering and that needs to be addressed when obvious, but Christians need to be careful about assuming this and especially saying it.

As for suffering being "a result of sin," this even comes in two parts: a direct punishment from God at times, or (most of the time I believe) as simply the "harvest" of our sinful choices. Whatever seed you plant, that's what you are going to grow. Very often our "suffering" is the fruition of one or several bad "seeds" we planted in the past.

That is why the Bible says: "don't be deceived, God is not mocked. Whatever you sow, you will reap." (Gal 6:7) This can be in the form of consequences, and sometimes God may simply decide to send judgment or discipline your way to get your attention about some sin in your life.

For example, I may choose to fornicate and suffer for the next twenty years over children out of wedlock, failed marriages and such. This is suffering because I am reaping what I sowed.

On the other hand, known only to God, maybe money is my only focus in life and God sends a "judgment" in the form of some situation that wipes me out financially so I'll turn to God. That's a suffering do to judgment from God because of sin I won't turn away from.

However, sometimes we simply suffer because we live in a Creation that has been corrupted by sin, and suffering is an avoidable part of it. For Christians

though, suffering is an opportunity for blessing, a topic I have written about extensively. A good place to start is here:

<http://www.seriousfaith.com/dvo/devotionseriesdetail.asp?seriesid=25>

So how do you respond to the "well-meaning people" at church? Depends on your emotional state at the time. If you can firmly but lovingly tell them they don't know the whole situation and suffering is not always about hidden sin, then say so. There is nothing unloving about it. Be prepared to teach them, or direct them to solid teaching that supports your comment. Or, just say, "Yes, at times I know that can be true. Thanks for your concern..." and leave it at that.

Most of all, DON'T WORRY ABOUT WHAT THEY SAY. If they have a wrong or shallow misunderstanding of suffering, it won't be long before God will provide them with a real life object lesson.

~~~~~

## Suffering – Ministering To Those Who Are Hurting

**My sister is in constant pain from a car accident she was in 12 years ago. The pain ranges between a 7-10 on a pain chart. Many times her pain is at "suicidal levels." She was a Christian before this happened, but after about 7 years, she gave up her faith. I wasn't around at that time and didn't know what was going on (spiritually). I am with**

**her now and feel she wants to give God another chance, but she is angry and wants some answers. She feels God has abandoned her. How can I minister to her?**

While we may be answering one question from one person, this is a topic that is universal, and all of us for the most part will endure times of suffering.

If she is open to spiritual matters, or is seeking comfort, wondering if there is more to life than her suffering, then of course the Bible has that comfort.

IF IT WERE ME (and I don't claim to know the "perfect" way, I can only give you my most sincere and best suggestion), I would talk with her and say:

"I'm not going to try and tell you I understand what you are going through. I'm also not going to give you a bunch of clichés and nice Bible verses then walk away from you and let you suffer. However, I do know that of all the people that have ever existed, Jesus knows what it means to suffer. And, the Bible has much to say about suffering and stories of others who suffer. I would like to start talking to you about these things, and I truly believe that you will find comfort and hope in God if you'll open your heart to Him."

Here are some suggestions of things to discuss:

- Jesus understands her pain - Acts 17:3; Heb 14:5
- God has not abandoned her - Heb 13:5
- Her pain is temporary - 2Cor 4:17

- Her pain is momentary compared to eternity - James 4:14
- For Christians, God gives grace and strength in times of suffering - 2Cor 12:9
- We can learn from the Bible about God's chosen servants who have suffering - Job, Moses, Joseph, David, Paul and of course, Jesus

For Christians, pain has purpose and reward - reference the list below that is true FOR CHRISTIANS. Help her to understand that apart from God, suffering is just suffering. No hope, no purpose, no blessing, no eternal reward, nothing good comes from it. BUT IN CHRIST, suffering has purpose, hope and reward.

Apart from God, suffering is just suffering.  
In Christ, suffering is a blessing.

Only Christians can understand that. To the unsaved, it is nonsense. For Christians that purpose is:

To produce the fruit of patience - Rom. 5:3; James 1:3-4; Heb. 10:36

Through adversity Christians learn the blessing of long-suffering and delayed gratification.

To produce the fruit of joy - Ps. 30:5; 126:5-6

It is easy to be joyful when times are good but you have authentic rejoicing when you experience it through suffering.

To produce the fruit of maturity - Eccles. 7:3; 1 Pet. 5:10

Through affliction we discover the true reality of living in a sin cursed world. When we endure suffering with

the attitude of Jesus Christ, we are perfected, established and strengthened.

To produce the fruit of righteousness - Heb. 12:11

Adversity, when responded to according to God's word, will train us to be righteous and holy.

To silence the devil - Job 1:9, 10, 20-22

God permits suffering, and when we respond to it in a Christlike manner, the accusations of Satan against us will be in vain.

To teach us - Ps. 119:67, 71

The more we suffer, the more God's word becomes real to us and the less we will stray from obeying the Lord. It then becomes a good thing that we have suffered because it has resulted in increased Godliness.

To purify our lives - Job 23:10; Ps. 66:10-12; Isa. 1:25; 48:10; Prov. 17:3; 1 Pet. 1:7

God tests, strengthens and purifies us through affliction. Our faith is much more precious than anything the world can offer, and like pure gold it is refined in the fires of suffering.

To make us like Christ - Heb. 12:9, 10; 1 Pet. 4:12-13; Phil. 3:10; 2 Cor. 4:7-10

As we suffer, we come to understand and better relate to the suffering that Jesus endured on our behalf. Through persecution and affliction we are conformed into the image of Christ manifesting through our bodies a living example of Christ's sacrifice for us.

To glorify God - Ps. 50:15; John 9:1-3; 11:1-4; 21:18-19; Phil. 1:19-20

Every time we respond to suffering with a Godly attitude, we bring glory to God in such an unselfish manner that it directs attention solely to God, and not to us.

To prevent us from sinning - 2 Cor. 12:7, 9-10

God may permit us to suffer in order to keep us humble and to keep us from the sin of self-exaltation.

To make us confess when we do sin - Judg. 10:6-7, 15-16; Ps. 32:3-5; Hos. 5:15; 6:1; 2 Chron. 15:3-4

There will be times when God uses suffering to force us to confront our sin and confess it. Enduring the effects of a sin cursed world heightens our awareness of sin and deepens our understanding of just how truly awful sin really is.

To chasten us for our sin - 1 Pet. 4:17

Suffering may often times be a direct result of our own personal sin and God may be chastising us for it. Adversity motivates us to carefully examine our lives for holiness and devotion.

To prove our sonship - Heb. 12:5-6

Adversity is like an identification badge for the Christian. Scripture clearly says, "that whom the Lord loves He chastens." So any time that you suffer, you can be sure of two things: that you belong to the Lord, and that He loves you.

To reveal ourselves to ourselves - Job 42:6; Luke 15:18

When the pressure is on, you can be sure that what is deep down inside of a person will come boiling to the top. When you squeeze a lemon, you get lemon juice. There is no way to fake what you are truly all about when you are under great stress or enduring significant adversity. You can be sure that what you are genuinely made of will surface not only for you to see but also for everyone around you to see.

To help our prayer life - Isa. 26:16

There is no doubt that affliction helps our prayer life. For most people, greater suffering equals greater prayer.

To become an example to others - 2 Cor. 6:4-5; 1 Thess. 1:6-7

When we respond to adversity in a Godly manner it provides a living example for all those who observe us.

To qualify us as counselors - Rom. 12:15; Gal. 6:2; 2 Cor. 1:3-5

There is nothing like real-life experience to qualify you as a teacher. It is an academic exercise at best to proclaim truths that you have not lived and experienced.

To further the gospel witness - Acts 8:1-5; 16:25-34; Phil. 1:12-13; 2 Tim. 4:6-8, 16-17

By enduring suffering with a Godly attitude we participate in validating the power of the Gospel. When another person sees you rejoicing in the midst of affliction they can't help but wonder where you derive the power for such a response.

To make us more than conquerors - 2 Cor. 2:14; Rom. 8:35, 37

As God proves faithful to see us through adversity, we become more and more confident about the things of God. We become increasingly victorious over sin and "more than conquerors."

To give us insight into God's nature - Job 42:5; Rom. 8:14-15, 18

Through suffering we know more about God and His purposes. We better understand His attributes, His nature and His sovereignty.

To drive us closer to God - 1 Pet. 4:14; 2 Cor. 12:10

Whether we have actively strayed from God or are just in the sanctifying process of growing closer to him, suffering is an important means to push us and turn us towards God.

To prepare us for a greater ministry - 1 Kings 17-18; John 12:24

Like the potter's clay that is worked and reworked, or the lump of dough that is kneaded until soft and blended, affliction breaks us down, makes us soft and prepares us to be used by the Lord.

To provide for us a reward - Matt. 5:10-12; 19:27-29; Rom. 8:16-17; 2 Cor. 4:17

It is a wondrous truth that God permits us to suffer for His glory, and yet it turns out to be an incredible blessing for us, not only in this lifetime, but also through the eternal reward we will receive in Heaven.

To prepare us for the kingdom - 2 Thess. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:12

Suffering prepares us for our eternal life with God. It conditions us, trains

us and equips us to reign with Christ forever and ever.

To show God's sovereignty - Rom. 8:28; 1 Cor. 10:13; Ps. 66:10-12; Gen. 45:5-8; 50:20

The suffering Christian is a tangible demonstration of God's sovereignty, who in His infinite wisdom can take all things (good and bad) and work them together for His ultimate glory and eternal purpose.

Suffering drives us to God. Your sister is a living example of God's PURE love for us, even in her suffering. Why? Because God will do WHATEVER is necessary to draw us to Him, even if it takes suffering. He would rather have us suffer for a short time here in this life, than be lost for eternity in suffering that is infinitely worse and never ending. God loves us so much that He will do what is painful in our lives NOW in order to secure ETERNITY for us with Him.

Through this suffering, perhaps God knew that only this would draw your sister into a genuine and eternal relationship with Him. Nevertheless, she has two choices: 1) suffer bitterly and die without hope, purpose and being secure about her eternity in heaven, or 2) turn to God now for grace, strength, comfort and the HOPE that when this life of suffering is over, she will have an entire Eternity of blessing, perfection and NO PAIN.

~~~~~

Sufficiency – Is The Bible Really All We Need?

Does the Bible have all the answers for everything? Is the Bible written by God, or is it written by Humans? Is the Bible true, both the Old and the New Testament? Is the Bible open for interpretation? I get these questions a lot when I tell people I am a Christian. I don't know what to answer them. Please help me...

Everything? Of course not. While it clearly addresses many things of Science, it is not a Science textbook. While it contains many principles about health and medicine, it is not a medical text. It has gobs of history, but is not primarily a history book. And so forth....

The part of our life that the Bible plainly says it is sufficient for ALL of something is our emotional and spiritual life. Notice the all-inclusive nature of these verses:

2 Peter 1:3 - as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, (NKJV)

2 Timothy 3:16-17 - All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (NKJV)

Philippians 1:6 - being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; (NKJV)

Philippians 4:13 - I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (NKJV)

Psalm 36:8-9 - They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, And You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures. For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light. (NKJV)

I address the social aspects of this here:

<http://www.brenttriggs.com/blog/?ltemID=323>

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Suicide – Living An Unbearable Life Or Not

I have always had a fear of being, someday, terminally ill and suffering unbearably and wanting to die instead of continuing to suffer. However, I was always taught that choosing to die (suicide) was a sin and anyone who did so would spend eternity in hell. Does this mean that if we are truly sorry for our sins and try to follow the path where God has led us but at the time of our death we are weak and choose to die, we could still go to Heaven?

Suicide is one of those issues where God has not specifically and plainly spoke on the issue, but MEN insist on declaring dogmatic conclusions even though the Creator has not.

For the sake of this answer, we will be speaking about professing Christians who commit suicide, because the

destination of the unbeliever is not in question.

On one side, we have those who say, "Suicide is murder! If you commit suicide, you're a murderer and murderers go to hell!" Plain and simple. If only it was....

On the other side, you have the Gospel Lite, easy-believers, who claim that as long as you have "accepted Jesus in your heart," nothing will keep you from heaven, even suicide. This group is harder to answer because it goes back to the issue of what constitutes true salvation.

Now, I will go on recording stating that if a TRUE Christian (which only God knows the true condition of a man's heart) commits suicide, then that sin (if it was indeed sin) is just as forgiven as any other sin the Jesus paid for. To believe anything less is to say that Jesus' sacrifice was not sufficient for all sins (a foundational truth of Christianity).

Having said that, it should be noted that suicide will be the obvious RARE exception for true Christians. Why? Because we of all people are a people of hope (1Thess 4:13-18); and those who commit suicide have either 1) lost hope, 2) are momentarily weakened by extreme circumstances, or 3) had no choice but to choose "suicide" (which would not be suicide in the true sense).

Let's start with the last option. How could a person have "no choice?" Maybe in the purest sense there is always a "choice," but put yourself on the top floor of the World Trade Center on Sept 11th. The fire is burning, the heat is beginning to

blister your exposed skin as you lean out the window of the 110th floor. Jump? Or burn to death? Some merciless persons would say, "Either burn to death and go to heaven, or jump and go to hell, because that would be suicide!" Praise God that He is not heartless and legalistic like we can be.

Any extraordinary situation that leaves you the unbearable choice of which agonizing death you would prefer can hardly be categorized as suicide in the true sense of the word.

What about those who choose to take their life in the face of extreme circumstances but not circumstances that lead to death? For example:

A man gets the news that his entire family was just killed by a drunk driver and in his grief puts a gun to his head.

A distraught cancer victim in excruciating pain takes a bottle of sleeping pills and dies.

A woman catches her husband in bed with another and in a moment of emotional agony, takes her own life.

Are these situations so cut and dry that YOU want to declare them all murderers on their way to hell? Not me.

I will stand on what I know of God's character and principles:

Only God knows who is truly saved, and He is a merciful God who will not lose even one of His children

Christians will not be a people marked by hopelessness

Suicide is murder of one's self as a general rule; murder is the deliberate taking of life for personal satisfaction or reason instead of Godly and lawful reasons

Conclusion? I believe a TRUE Christian, in rare instances of extreme weakness or extraordinary circumstances, would still be forgiven and saved by their merciful and loving Heavenly Father even after choosing what appears to be suicide.

This would, by definition, make their suicide not the same as "murder," because it would lack the same elements that define murder.

It would be either a sin, forgiven as any other sin atoned for by the Savior, or merely an unavoidable choice that God would know the truth about.

At this point, I will get two responses for sure:

One, "It doesn't matter the reason or situation; that person died with a SIN being their last act and they didn't ask forgiveness; you can't go to heaven with a 'sin' unforgiven, so therefore, every person who commits suicide goes to hell."

This viewpoint is so lacking in the understanding of atonement, forgiveness and salvation, I really can't explain why it is wrong in this answer. I will go on record to say that this reaction is totally unBiblical and betrays a gross misunderstanding of true salvation.

The second response I will hear is: "You are giving people an excuse to commit suicide by saying that it isn't always a sin."

I can only stand on my answer and re-emphasize that we CANNOT be dogmatic where God has not been. There is no verse in the Bible that says, "Suicide is always sin; if you do it, you will go to hell." If there was a verse that said that, I would simply copy and paste it into this answer and be done with it. But there isn't.

Suicide is a wrong. True suicide is always a sin. If a professing Christian chooses suicide, we should place his destiny into the hands of the Perfect, All-Knowing and Merciful God. Suicide of a TRUE believer (whom only God knows), though extremely rare, is not a sin that Christ's blood does not cover.

We should teach that Christians are not to be hopeless; Christians should never choose or consider suicide if it can be helped. Suicide is never the answer. And yet, when it is chosen, we should leave the eternal destiny business to God.

~~~~~

## Suicide – Will You Go To Hell If You Kill Yourself?

**A person in our cell group asked if you commit suicide, can you still go to heaven? I see there is no such question posed on your website yet, so I hope you can give us an answer.**

This question has been asked countless times to Bible teachers, so I don't pretend that I am going to give



some definitive answer that will decide the issue. Here's my shot....

To start, let's answer the question about who is going to hell, regardless of how they die. Every person who has rejected God and not had their sin paid for and washed away by the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ by responding in repentance and obedience will be separated from God for all eternity in a place God has reserved for just this purpose (hell).

So the question about suicide is two separate issues. First, if a person commits suicide and has never responded to the Gospel, yes, tragically, they will spend an eternity apart from God.

Now we come to heart of the matter. Will a person who has professed and obeyed Christ yet chosen suicide still go to heaven?

I'll give you my final summary answer first: I DON'T KNOW. Sorry, to disappoint.

I would consider that to be God's territory Who is the Perfect Judge of man's heart; and only He can know the actual eternal destiny of that (or any) person.

(This is not a question or answer about "eternal security," so I'm not going to address all those issues here.)

Some things to consider:

There are those who say that suicide is "self-murder" and that no person who dies by committing a sin (suicide) will enter heaven because sin cannot be in God's presence.

While there is no doubt that sometimes, maybe even most times, suicide most certainly is a selfish, destructive act contrary to God's will, can it be said that this is 100% the case? Are there not times when a person in the midst of severe emotional distress can succumb to the temptation of suicide in the same way that others succumb to other types of temptations?

It's easy to be dogmatic about it until you start putting yourself in their shoes. What about the Christian on top floor of the World Trade Center facing the decision to be burned to death, or jump? What about the persecuted Christians who chose suicide (or to put to death their kids and family - murder?) rather than facing horrible torture?

What about a Christian who, in the face of some unspeakable horror, took their own life in a moment of unbearable agony and emotional despair?

Some would simplistically say, "Well, that's very sad, but sorry, that's just the way it is; they will go to hell because they 'died in sin'". This comes from the idea that if you die with ONE sin "unforgiven," you will not go to heaven, which stems from the idea that your sins are forgiven chronologically upon repentance and not all at once at the time salvation is granted.

In one sense this is accurate because you can NOT go to heaven with "one sin," but the issue is when and how your sins are forgiven (all upon salvation? or subsequently upon asking forgiveness? That is not the topic of this question, and I'm going to

avoid turning this into a question about "eternal security." Why? Because that topic is discussed constantly, and nothing I say will shed any new light on it. "Eternal security" is far too big a subject to tackle here; I'm just trying to make you aware of some of the issues).

I've heard it said that if someone commits suicide, they couldn't possibly have been "saved" in the first place. I've heard others take a very casual approach that as long as someone has "accepted Jesus" that suicide is just another sin which has already been forgiven.

All of these dogmatic or simplistic positions demonstrate a lack of thought about a very complicated issue. So let me close with two things to think about....

One, it is easily demonstrated that there are indeed extraordinary circumstances (i.e., Sept 11) where a true Christian could arguably be pushed to the choice of suicide. Can you dogmatically state for a fact that person is on their way to hell and support it Scripturally?

Second, as a general rule, true Christians will not readily or easily turn to suicide as the answer, because God's children are not without hope like the world (1 Thessalonians 4:13; hopelessness and selfishness being the typical essence of suicide). So can you dogmatically state that everyone who has "accepted Jesus" is going straight to heaven even when suicide was their choice to start the trip?

Let me finish where I started.... can a person commit suicide and still be saved? I DON'T KNOW. I consider

that to be God's territory Who is the Perfect Judge of man's heart; and only He can know the actual eternal destiny of that person.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Supernatural – UFO's

### **Does the Bible say anything about UFOs? Do you believe in UFOs?**

This would be a rather long answer if I tried to fully explain. I will give you the "bullet points" and let you research them.

Do I believe in UFO's and aliens? Yes (but not the way the world does). Are there higher life forms from other planets that are coming (or coming back) to "save" us or solve our world's problems. NO, NO, and let me emphasize, NO.

First, is there life on other planets that exist within our space-time dimension and have built spacecraft and traveled to earth? The Bible clearly indicates NO; the evidence says NO; and physics says NO.

The creation account in Genesis seems to include life only on earth. God never mentions other life on other planets. Christ died for ALL creation, so it would seem illogical that He died for someone on another planet.

Did Christ die on every planet? How do they get saved? All creation is sin corrupted.

The substances of life are finite so these beings would have to be carbon-based life forms like us, and it is easy

to conclude that the chance of life evolving is a ridiculous ZERO; unless you, in blind faith, accept Evolution.

So the fact that God didn't plainly tell us of life on other planets in our universe that we would interact with, would weigh very heavy against it. He told us about angels and demons and the Trinity. Why not other life if it existed?

All the accounts and evidence of UFO's and aliens seem to suggest a supernatural or extra-dimensional origin. As well, the accounts consistently reveal that the behavior and activity of UFO's and aliens are not possible within our laws of physics.

People say: you mean to tell me that this WHOLE universe exists, just for man? Yep. And it makes our God that much more awesome and wonderful.

Then, what about UFO's? In short, it appears to be a mixture of natural phenomena and very dangerous demonic deception, which IS clearly revealed in the Bible. This deception may very well be linked to what will occur in the last days that will threaten to fool even "the very elect." It would seem that this is certainly possible given the Bible's clear description of demonic activity in the "days of Noah" which will make a return in the days preceding our Lord's return.

And it makes perfect sense. UFO's and "Life on other Planets" directs people away from God, putting their interest and hope them "saving" our planet. We tend to believe that "other" life would be dramatically more "evolved" than we are.

A cursory study of UFO and "alien" accounts shows a consistent anti-Biblical message and characteristics of behavior that are not compatible with the physics of our universe. The accounts show all the signs of extra-dimensional capabilities that are totally consistent with what is revealed to us about demonic ability.

"Alien encounters" will no doubt increase as the modern world's belief and acceptance of it increases. It will also serve to increase trivializing the Bible and the Gospel when we have "proof" from "advanced alien life" that the Bible is incorrect.

It's amazing that "aliens" have traveled the universe to reveal themselves to us, and yet their message is not one that will solve crime, world hunger or disaster. It is a consistent message saturated with New Age religion, anti-Biblical proclamation, and most of all, that Jesus Christ is NOT the only way to salvation.

What should that say to any professing Christian about so-called "alien" life from other planets?

God doesn't tell us there is "other" life; doesn't tell us to look for it; doesn't tell us to evangelize it; doesn't tell us to interact with, seek advice from, or look for "rescuing" from "aliens."

As Christians, we have our clear purpose on earth: obey God and share the Gospel.

John Ankerberg has a very informative little book on UFO's you might want to get:  
<http://www.johnankerberg.org/catalog/jascat-new-age.html>

Dr. Chuck Missler has written one of the better books on the subject as well. [Click here for info about "Alien Encounters"](#) by C. Missler

That is a very short answer to a very deep issue. I think that "UFO's" will become more and more of a problem issue in the Church as we allow the metaphysical to continue its advance into our doctrine and practice and a true Biblical worldview continues to decrease.

~~~~~

Tattoos – A Sin?

I need some Bible reference points and verses in talking with teenagers about why God does not want us to get piercings and tattoos please.

Well if you are looking for some absolute commandment or a verse that says tattoos and piercings (other than girl's ears of course) are sin... you won't be getting any because they don't exist.

Getting that little detail out of the way, I can say the following... Primarily, we are looking at PRINCIPLES, not COMMANDS.

There is one Levitical law prohibiting tattooing (Leviticus 19:28). It is not accurate to say that the Bible is totally "silent" on the issue; it is accurate to say that New Testament is. Therefore, like the hundreds of other Levitical regulations, we are left to determine if tattooing was forbidden for health, religious, societal or unholy reasons.

Is the prohibition there because tattooing is inherently sinful (like adultery, or lying), or was prohibited for other reasons?

Will you automatically be sending yourself to hell for getting a tattoo? The only automatic ticket to hell is the willful rejection of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The unsaved are already going to hell, tattoos or not; and the genuinely saved may ask forgiveness for any sin they may commit. (1 John 1:9)

Yes, your body is the temple of God (1 Corinthians 6:19), not to be spoiled with sexual immorality; but the principle is broader than that. You are a "living sacrifice" (Rom 12:1) in all ways; so anything that negligently, knowingly or purposely destroys or degrades your body should be considered first with very serious hesitation and concern.

So does tattooing destroy your temple? Arguably, yes. It is a scarring process and permanently marks your body for the rest of your life. Does that alone make tattooing a sin, cut and dried, black and white? I'd say one must be very cautious about taking that position. Why?

Well what about earrings? Cosmetic surgery? What about sports or work that you know has a high probability of scarring or injuring your body? Many things can alter your body. Overeating, smoking, steroids, all types of medications..... it's not as simple as some would like to make it. Too many Christians look down their noses at the person with an eyebrow ring and tattoo while stuffing yet another Big Mac into their already

very healthy sized body. (ouch... I'll hear about that comment!)

"Yeah, but earrings or a nose job or hair plugs make your body BETTER." Who says? That's a matter of opinion. One person may admire the beauty of a tattoo more than a double-pierced ear. Who is right in the absence of clear Biblical command?

What about other "body piercings" since we are on the subject (bellybutton, tongue, etc.)? Is that sinful? THE FACT IS THE BIBLE DOES NOT GIVE A PLAIN, BLACK AND WHITE ANSWER. So to dogmatically declare it SIN in all cases is a step farther than Scripture itself.

Do you want my opinion? Thought you'd never ask....

My opinion is that body piercings (other than ears in moderation) and tattoos are not a GOOD IDEA for Christians because:

They are too easily and obviously identified with "worldliness" and non-Christian values.

"Abstain from all appearance of evil" ([1 Thessalonians 5:22](#) KJV).

They draw unnecessary attention to yourself.

Frequently they draw attention to parts of the body that should be covered violating principles of Christian modesty.

Some piercings and tattoos obviously violate the idea of humble adornment.

Many types of tattoos and piercings are done for sexual allurements, which of course in all cases is sinful.

That's MY opinion based on Biblical principles and societal realities; with the strongest of my opinion falling on the fact that tattoos and body piercings are just simply and honestly more associated with worldliness, rebellion and revelry than they are with piety, wisdom, holiness and Christ-likeness.

One more thing, CHRISTIANS SHOULD NOT VILIFY, EMBARRASS, HARASS OR THINK LESS OF PEOPLE WHO COME INTO OUR CHURCHES AND GROUPS WHO ARE ALREADY COVERED WITH TATTOOS AND EARRINGS. It is God's business to convict new Christians of the changes HE wants them to make. It's not our job to see that everyone conforms to our "idea" of what a Christian "looks like" (not ignoring the principles of modesty and holiness). People don't change overnight.

How welcome would a newly converted gang-member, Biker or ex-con feel in your church?

In closing, as I frequently point out, this question is the WRONG QUESTION. The question for Christians is not whether or not tattoos are wrong but what can we do with our bodies that will bring the most glory to Christ.

If you are convinced with a clear conscience that a tattoo is part of that answer (to bring Christ glory), then that is between you and the Lord. You answer to Him, not me.

One thing is for sure, I will get hammered by half my Christian friends for extending any liberty in this area; and hammered by the other half of my Christian friends for being "judgmental" and "legalistic" in my

opinion that tattoos are not a good idea.

Let the hammering begin...

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Teaching – Seems Like A Popularity Contest Doesn't It?

I'm amazed at how many casual, poor and Biblically uneducated Christian teachers there are today. It seems to be more about popularity and self-fulfillment than teaching. What are your thoughts about this?

It amazes me too. It's not so much that every person has to be some great dynamic teacher, but the responsibility seems to be taken so casually despite the Scriptural warning "let not many of you be teachers" The reason? God holds us accountable to teach TRUTH and be accurate with his Word (rightly handle). It's not about personality or charisma... it's about taking the responsibility of being a teacher of God's Word VERY seriously.

All these "sermonettes" (as a reader said yesterday) and fluffy little feel good humanistic ear tickling (is that enough adjectives?) devotionals and messages are like stuffing sugar and fried food in your mouth all the time. Believers get fat, lazy and unhealthy eating this spiritual fast food all the time.

I know a Pastor who prides himself on never going over 20 minutes in

teaching, and the best of his teaching is like an average high school devotional. Why? It's what people want. It keeps "his people" happy with him. It's sad to know that everyone who clamors for this type of "sermon" is starving to death spiritually week after week. I just want to shake him by the neck and tell him that he is SQUANDERING his God given opportunity and responsibility to feed, shepherd and spiritually challenge those whom God has graciously put in his circle of influence.

This same church recently had a blowup plastic football hanging from the Cross behind the pulpit to advertise the upcoming Vacation Bible School. With that type of mentality, what can you expect?

Sadly, it is indicative of the atmosphere in Christianity today that has largely turned to marketing techniques, sales methodology, entertainment and "meeting needs" as the primary purpose of the ekklesia (the assembly of Believers).

We use emotionally appealing marketing terms straight from Madison Avenue (vintage, modern, overdrive, dynamic, journey, purpose, potential, connection, discovery, destiny, abundant, etc.) under the guise of shaking traditionalism. There is nothing innately wrong with those words, but they expose a larger issue in modern American Christianity. We have to battle hard in the ever growing competition for families and members needed to support the expanding and expensive church complexes that seek to serve affluent Believers with a variety of services, programs, facilities and entertainment choices. We have growth experts,

church marketing experts and seminars, church expansion financing experts.... It is the professional business of "church," and it is BIG business.

Unfortunately, this too often (but NOT ALWAYS) leads to the need to teach and present messages that keep people happy (and thus, financially supporting the "ministry" work). Feel good messages of prosperity, happiness, abundance, purpose and personal fulfillment attract crowds and keep them. There is increasingly LESS place for teaching the depths of fundamental Christian doctrines, serious messages on sanctification and purity, and we are already past any need for teaching on lowliness and humility (i.e. Puritan type teaching). The messages of self-esteem and self-worth, personal purpose, abundance and individual fulfillment are far more effective at keeping members than teaching on the awful state of our sinful flesh or the filthiness of our best righteousness.

Yes, there most certainly is a balance between teaching the uplifting and the convicting... but that balance rarely exists anymore. In large part, it's all "feel good," positive, motivating and personally elevating. Even America's Most Popular Pastor stated on national television that God has not called him to teach about sin. I would have to question what "god" called him who told him to ignore half the Bible when he teaches.

The point is, it is this emerging atmosphere of frivolity, ear tickling and the extravagant nature of the "church business" today that has brought us to a famine of serious,

uncompromising Bible teaching in general. Make no mistake, I'm not talking about screaming, sweating, spit-flying, hellfire and brimstone preaching. I'm talking about Bible teachers and preachers who proclaim ALL aspects of God's Word, both positive and negative, happy and convicting, light and dark, hard and easy, popular and unpopular without regards to popularity, recognition or success (personal or "the ministry").

It is the combined lure of money, popularity, success and the demands by Christian masses for their "needs" to be met that entice a growing number of people to 1) want to be the "teacher," the lead personality, the founder, the "man," and 2) to teach what is "popular" and will attract and keep the people needed for a "successful" ministry.

To be balanced, this is not a broad stroke of all churches, preachers, teachers or ministries... of course not. There are plenty of great assemblies of Believers who God would be pleased with. However, we should not simply ignore the obvious and growing problem of "teaching" that is compromised in order to appeal to the masses and the number of people who take Bible teaching and preaching far too casually and too often for the purpose of personal aggrandizement.

It is at epidemic proportions in American Christianity. Believers should be aware and wary of it lest the ear tickling entice them as well. It should cause us to evaluate what the Christian life is truly all about (social events, support groups, programs and getting needs met?). It should drive us back TO THE BIBLE as our primary source of teaching instead of followers

of popular teachers, movements or ministries ("I am of Paul, I am of Apollos").

Answers like this are difficult because they just get me labeled as "negative" and judgmental. I guess I can't be worried about ear tickling or popularity when I'm writing about ear tickling and popularity, huh?

So quit reading this and go get your Bible out. Ten thousand words from me aren't worth one verse from God's Word.

~~~~~

## Teaching – Should Spouses Both Be "Called"?

**What do you recommend for the wife of a man called by God to be a preacher who feels like she is not ready to be a preacher's wife? I was not raised Christian and was new in my walk when I was thrown into a new church and left little opportunity to learn. I was just getting involved and LOVED going to church, and for the past 3 years, since we moved, all I have done is be in the nursery w/ my own children. I teach some, but I long to be taught and worship in church again.**

You shouldn't be forced by others' expectations or tradition into doing things God has not gifted you for.

If you are a young Christian, or still not a very mature Christian

(spiritually speaking), then you should be careful about who and when, or if, you teach. God holds teachers completely responsible for what they teach. (James 3:1)

A preacher's wife is just a wife. Institutional "church" may try to force you into roles and duties but your husband should protect you from that. The Bible makes no special demands on the "preacher's wife," only those that are common to all Christian women.

If a church is pressuring you to speak, teach, counsel, lead or otherwise fulfill needs that do not fit the gifts and maturity you currently have, your husband's duty is to step in on your behalf and be a husband first and preacher second.

~~~~~

Teaching Materials – Can I Use Seriousfaith Stuff?

Dear Brent, I do volunteer work at the Jefferson County Jail for the Chaplain (filling inmates' requests, Bible studies, Sunday services etc.). Can I use your Teachings at the Jail for Bible-studies?

I chose to answer this question because I'm asked this quite often.

All of my readers (or anyone for that matter) are welcome to use ANY of my materials, studies or audio downloads in any way the Lord leads them. You do not need to receive specific permission beforehand.

You have permission to reprint, copy and distribute any of my material. You can use any of my material for your magazine, website or newsletter. You can use any of my materials for Bible studies, private study, sermons, missions, prison ministries, home studies, etc.

Besides the Daily Devotional, you can find other teaching material here: <http://www.seriousfaith.com/bookstore.asp>

You may NOT sell my material or profit from my material in any way unless 100% of those funds go directly and solely for the Lord's work and does not become "income" in any way for any single individual. The exception to this rule is that profit from the sale of my teaching material can be used for the support of missionary families and their income needs.

When possible, I would appreciate a mention of the Daily Devotional and the Serious Faith website. Here is suggested wording:

"Brent Riggs is the author of the SeriousFaith.com Daily Devotional that is delivered via email each weekday to over 55,000 readers. Please visit his website at www.seriousfaith.com."

Also, when possible, please send me a copy of any reprints or materials that contain my teaching material so that I can keep a physical archive. Send to:

Brent Riggs
Box 14
Washington, OK 73093

~~~~~

# Temptation – Does God Tempt Us?

**In the Lord's Prayer, what does "lead me not into temptation" mean? Does God lead us into temptation? Is God responsible for possible sin?**

No, God certainly does not tempt us. We find the unequivocal answer to that in James:

James 1:12-15 - Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. (NKJV)

We are tempted by own internal desires that originate from the curse of sin. Our fleshly desires turn to sin, which in turn leads to death. The death here can come in many forms: actual physical death, death of fellowship, death of security, death of happiness.

So what does "lead me not into temptation" mean? It is a plea to God to guide our steps so that we don't follow our desires into sin; it is a plea to God to protect us from spiritual forces that can influence us to sin (Eph 6:12); and it is a plea to God to

help us find our way home when we do stray (Luke 15:31).

We are not capable of keeping ourselves from sin without God's help, so we petition God to protect us from being led into temptation.

~~~~~

Theology — What Does "Christology" Mean?

I've been hearing the word "Christology" a lot lately. What does it mean and how does it apply to my Christian life?

Christology is what a person believes about Jesus Christ. It comes from two words, "Christos" meaning "anointed one" and "logos" meaning "word;" so it is the words written about the anointed one, Jesus.

More simply put, it is a set of beliefs about Jesus. And of course this makes it the MOST important part of your Christianity along with your beliefs about God.

Christology is what divides cults and false religion from true Christianity. There are non-negotiable truths about Christ, anyone of which if left out or corrupted would constitute belief in "another Christ" and would not result in salvation. Examples would be:

- Christ was the eternal Son of God
- Christ was fully God and fully man
- Christ was born of a virgin

- There is no other name under heaven by which salvation is possible
- Christ died a physical death and rose from the dead three days later, conquering death
- This is not a comprehensive list but represents some major points of orthodox "Christology." You can have ANY kind of Christology you want, but there is only one correct one as put forth in God's Word.
- Some incorrect "Christology" to be wary of today is:
- Christ wasn't really a physical being, but only a spirit
- Christ lost His divinity on the cross and went to hell and was 'born again' there after getting beat up for three days by Satan
- Christ was just another prophet, among many other prophets
- Christ was a man who ascended to godhood
- Christ was the half-brother of Satan who achieved a god status
- Christ was not God, but a separate person totally

Don't let the fancy sounding word scare you off. Christology is very, very important in so much as it represents what you believe about Christ.

~~~~~

## Tithing — When To Give, Should We Tithe?

**I am brand new to your site. I learned about you through your post on Kayleigh's web site. I think it was wonderful what you posted**

**for the Freemans. As I was reading some of the comments from those who have donated, I was a little concerned that a few of those who are giving are giving their tithe money. I truly don't mean to judge, but I also don't think you mean for people to take their normal money away from their churches, either. I also don't believe the Freemans would want that. I'm not sure how you want to handle this, if you even want to say anything, because maybe God is leading them in this. What do you think? I honestly want your biblical feedback.**

To clarify, I wrote a post over on Adam Freeman's blog - [kayleighannfreeman.blogspot.com](http://kayleighannfreeman.blogspot.com) - asking people specifically to donate money to help them through some extraordinary financial and physical crisis they are in.

There was nothing in my post that mentioned tithes or even implied tithes. It was about giving to a Christian family in desperate need. The reason I don't mention tithing is simply because of one thing: New Testament Christians are not commanded to tithe. At all. In any way.

We are commanded to give with a cheerful heart as God has prospered us.

2 Co 9:6-7 - But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in

his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. (NKJV)

1 Co 16:2 - On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. (NKJV)

Those are the commands we have as New Testament Believers concerning giving. "Tithing" has traversed the Old Testament into the church for various reasons: poor teaching, tradition, or for "clergy" to claim authority over making people give a certain amount.

I write more about tithing here in previous answers:

<http://www.seriousfaith2.com/asr/question.asp?questionid=2540>

<http://www.seriousfaith2.com/asr/question.asp?questionid=1325>

<http://www.seriousfaith2.com/asr/question.asp?questionid=1034>

<http://www.seriousfaith2.com/asr/question.asp?questionid=648>

I get a lot of pastors and church leaders hot at me for daring to breach this sacred cow, but it is a form of spiritual bondage, legalism and manipulation (innocent or otherwise) to continue to have Believers live under this idea (and fear) that they MUST tithe a certain amount to "the church" to be pleasing to God.

As well, there is no commandment that a certain amount or part MUST be given to "the church." We are to give to the work of the KINGDOM, and yes, this obviously involves the ministry of the church, but also includes ministry

and good work that we come upon personally separate from the church. The only rule is that we give cheerfully, give willingly, give as we have prospered, and obey God's leading to give no matter what the personal sacrifice.

We live under grace now. Does that excuse us? Heavens no. In fact, our responsibility to give and be a "living sacrifice" is all the more greater. Under "tithing," I could give my percentage and be legalistically justified. Under grace, I give when God says give, with a cheerful heart, knowing that if it is my last penny, God will provide.

It is concerning that our churches have become a tremendous overhead with large staffs, huge facilities, tons of programs and resources... sometimes that is bad depending on what the church is doing and teaching... and in some churches it is all being legitimately used to support and further the Kingdom. It is not for Brent Riggs to decide which churches are "wasting" money and which are wisely using God's treasure. That is for each member of each church to decide.

To be compelled to give because of the concept of "tithing" is simply not Biblical. For Pastors and preachers to teach the obligation to giving under the banner of "tithing" may be innocent at times, but it is still a yoke and obligation that is not Biblical and of dubious advantage to the "authority" that is claimed by "clergy." This model of obligatory tithing was nailed to the cross with Jesus and should not be shackled to Believers today.

Now, having said that, if YOU, as an individual want to apply the principles of tithing as a personal standard, with a cheerful heart, as a way for you to personally measure and track your own giving, that is entirely a matter of personal liberty. But "tithing" or any obligatory percentage of giving should never be forced on other Believers if we want to stay true to the New Testament teaching on giving.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Tithing — Is It Biblical?

**Is tithing Biblical? I heard a sermon that not tithing was robbing God. Then I've heard other sermons that tithing is planting seed in God's Kingdom, and you can't get a harvest if you don't plant seed. Can you help me understand this?**

Yes, I can help. In the process, I'll make a lot of people mad, but the truth is the truth.

Tithing is Biblical. But it is NOT Christian. I'll explain that in a moment, but first let's address the two primary motivations behind the teaching today on tithing.

The first motivation comes from more traditional churches that preach on regular tithing. Many churches will even use tithing as a qualification for leadership. The pressure to teach on tithing and continually coerce people to give is simple: OVERHEAD. I'm not judging the heart or declaring to know the motives of other people, but the reality of "church overhead" is

undeniable. In what has become known today as “church,” there is a lot to maintain: Pastor/Preacher salaries, staff salaries, building payments and maintenance, sound systems, multimedia equipment, grounds keeping, programs.... The list of things that need to be supported are endless, and it’s all lumped in as “God’s work.” I’m sure that most Pastors and Ministers truly believe they are teaching “giving” to support “God’s work,” however, God’s work has gotten a lot more expensive and professionalized.

The pressure to preach and encourage a congregation to give a predictable and sustainable flow of money into this “work” is an obvious necessity. “Tithing” in traditional churches is ingrained into the culture as critical in maintaining the “system” (i.e. God’s work).

The second common motivation for preaching on tithing is today’s “health, wealth and prosperity” movement. It is the idea that if you give to God (“planting seed” or “seed faith”), God is entitled by spiritual laws to give you back even more. It is materialistic and carnal to the core, and what you routinely find is traditional discourse about “tithing” (obligation) mixed in with the concepts of “seed faith” to create a deadly pressure to give well beyond a person’s mean.

Verses like Malachi 3:8-12 are used to convict people that they are “robbing God” if they don’t tithe, and “faith” verses that are almost always talking about spiritual abundance are twisted to mean financial prosperity.

Those are the two primary circumstances that surround teaching on tithing today. But is it Biblical?

Tithing is Biblical because the Bible talks about it, but it is an Old Testament requirement of Israel. Tithing is never commanded to New Testament Christians, and in fact, it is clear that Jesus nailed the Jewish requirements to the cross for us. Tithing is Jewish, but not Christian.

Old Testament tithing was the 10% giving on the increase of THE LAND three times: 1) to support the Levites; 2) to support religious holidays and feasts; and 3) a tithe every third year for welfare work. All of this was a tithe of produce from the land which was sold and converted to money. The total tithe was 23.3%. Let’s see preachers get up and demand 23% giving!

Tithing was unheard of in the early church and only became an issue after 1) the church was given favored status and integrated into mainstream society under Constantine; and because of that, 2) the system of supporting professional clergy, church property and programs began to develop (sound familiar?).

2 Corinthians 9:6-8 - But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. (NKJV)

Let's contrast two realities....

The modern church typically has tremendous overhead, paid professional clergy and staff, multiple programs to support and a membership who statistically gives less than 2% with a large percentage giving nothing. If I were leading in this situation, I'd figure out a way to teach compulsory giving, too.

In comparison, the New Testament church met in homes with no paid staff, professional orators or preachers, and no property/programs overhead. The people gave cheerfully as God had prospered them, and they were to support the work of spreading the Gospel (1Cor 9), caring for widows and orphans (James 1:27; Act 6:1; 1Tim 5:9), and helping the truly poor...not the lazy welfare recipient (Matt 25:42-45; Prov 29:7; 2Cor 9:7). Giving was done with Spirit-led generosity. Money was collected via cheerful giving, and the entire sum then used for purely Christian work... not overhead or supporting a religious system.

(Note: 1Tim 5:17-18 are not verses that support paying Pastors and Ministers. The verses are correctly translated as giving "honor" - not money [though there is certainly no prohibition against giving a gift], and it is speaking about Elders, not paid professional preachers.)

As Christians we are to GIVE, not tithe. And a generalization of the word "tithe" to mean "giving" is confusing at best, manipulative at worst. We are to give as God has prospered us. We are to give generously. We give knowing that God will give a bountiful harvest (either financially or spiritually, or

both), but we don't give TO GET BACK a monetary windfall from God, like a heavenly stock market. We don't give grudgingly or because we feel like we have to.

God loves a cheerful giver... not a manipulated tither or a greedy "seed planter."

Finally, this begs the question, "Is tithing a sin?" Heavens no. If you feel like God is calling you to routinely give a certain percentage of your increase and income, then by all means, follow your Spirit-led conscience. You can even call it a "tithe," but I would encourage you to change that vocabulary so as not to confuse other Christians. The word "tithe" really has no business being used in New Testament Christianity. But, don't "tithe" because some Pastor or preacher has convinced you that you are robbing God if you don't help pay for the beautiful building you're probably sitting in when you hear that sermon.

Nor is every Pastor or preacher who preaches tithing some sort of manipulative, self-serving marketer. The pressure concerning giving comes from the "means" we've determined are needed for the "end", i.e. paid professional "clergy" and leaders, expensive buildings, programs, etc. I will leave it to each individual, leader or not, to determine whether this system of "church" is what God had in mind or does indeed constitute an innocent "means to an end."

Tithing is not Christian. It shouldn't be taught as Christian nor required. The primary motivation behind it is either the pressure to sustain a religious

overhead or a fleshly motivation of forcing God to give us “returns” on our giving.

It’s hard for me to teach this kind of lesson because it is so contrary to modern thinking. I anger many Pastor/Preacher friends who feel like I’m jeopardizing “God’s work” and quite frankly their own livelihood. That’s not to say that necessarily the teaching on “tithing” is motivated by self-protection of their salary, but who can deny that the pressure of getting paid and supporting their family is not an influence?

I also anger my Brethren who have given place to the “health, wealth and prosperity” faith teaching on this subject because obviously Biblical teaching on giving flies in the face of the “seed harvest” and “abundance” movements. The many verses about prosperity, abundance and return are almost exclusively speaking of spiritual and eternal rewards. It is generally true in principle that God blesses and prospers materially those who give generously and live by Godly principles, but this is a natural byproduct of a Godly lifestyle, not a “formula” to be manipulated. God may know that the best way to transform us into the likeness of Christ is through suffering and need (which He often does, even if temporarily).

Give generously. Give as God prospers. Give with a cheerful heart. Give for the Biblical reasons. Give for the Biblical work described.

Pastors, Preachers and Elders: teach people to give as the Bible teaches. Regardless of the pressure of overhead, teaching the false idea of tithing, no matter what the

motivation, is compromising your own integrity to speak the truth, and giving done by manipulation will never last, nor be truly fruitful. Consider where “overhead” might be reduced so that giving can be used more for Biblically mandated causes.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Tongues – Still For Today?

**I was just wondering if it was necessary to speak in tongues. I have been attending a church that believes in this, but there is something in my spirit that is stopping me. I do not think it is necessary. Please help!!!**

I believe the “checks” you feel in your spirit are correct. While it is much too large a question for me to answer in an email, I will give you some links that will support your intuitions that today’s teaching on tongues is unBiblical.

Modern Christianity is very “feelings” based, and you should always use Scripture to validate any “experience.” Today’s Church is all about “experience” and very little about DEVOTION, SACRIFICE and learning what the Bible says. We want to “feel” God, instead of “know” God.

I commend you on your effort to follow Scripture and let God’s Word dictate your beliefs. Let me know your conclusions.

You will find many teachers who support today’s experiential, exciting, tongues-miracles-healings movement

(I believe God can use these today, just not in the way that TV and Charismatic personalities do). Make sure that they support their opinions with logical, plain Scriptural; not experience, opinion or proof-texting (pulling Scripture out of context to support an opinion).

Ask the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom, discernment and discipline as you seek the truth. God has promised to reveal truth to the diligent, sincere seeker.

Questions to ask:

Does the Bible ever say tongues are necessary for salvation as some teach today?

Does the Bible say that people are to be taught and trained how to speak in tongues as is common today?

Did tongues have a specific purpose in the Bible, and does that purpose exist today?

What is the general spiritual depth of individuals that emphasize tongues? (This is not a Scriptural evidence, but very revealing anecdotal evidence.)

If tongues are for "today" and for "everyone", and you are a sincere seeker of God, why is He withholding tongues from you?

Why are tongues so over-emphasized today when the Bible calls them the "least" of gifts and says not all with speak in tongues? (Hint: because the church is an "experienced-based" and "feelings" church today, not a church that works hard to discern Biblical truth.)

Links to lessons on "tongues":

<http://www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/CHAOS10.HTM>

<http://www.desiringgod.org/library/sermons/84/042984.html>

<http://www.carm.org/oneness/tongues.htm>

Other good lessons along the same line:

<http://www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/CHAOS7.HTM>

<http://www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/CHAOS9.HTM>

<http://www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/CHAOS11.HTM>

~~~~~

Tongues – Are You Really Saved If You Don't?

**If you do not speak in tongues are you truly filled with the Holy Spirit?
If you do not speak in tongues is your salvation secure?**

We don't need to address the question "is tongues for today" to answer your question. That question has been addressed countless times by much better teachers than I.

First, there are no verses that state "you are not truly filled with the Holy Spirit unless you speak in tongues" - nor is there a verse that says, "your salvation is not sure unless you speak in tongues."

So based on the absence of Scriptural support, you would have to answer

that "tongues" is not a requirement for either the "true indwelling of the Holy Spirit" or true salvation, because the Bible simply does not say so.

That's based on the ABSENCE of Scripture. Is there Scripture that supports that both things (Holy Spirit indwelling & salvation) DO occur without regard to the presence of tongues? Absolutely.

First, let's consider salvation. There are dozens of verses that declare the essentials of salvation that have no mention of tongues whatsoever. A pretty significant exclusion if tongues are required for true salvation. It is obvious that Jesus, Paul and the Apostles would have made it very clear that tongues was a requirement, or even a required sign, of salvation - if indeed it was. So we can confidently say that the presence of tongues is not required in authentic salvation. It most certainly was a sign at times in Scripture, but not a required sign.

Now, what about the Holy Spirit? Is a person not truly filled (indwelt) with the Holy Spirit unless they speak in tongues? Is tongues the required sign of being "baptized in the Spirit?" Let's let Scripture speak:

John 14:15-17 - "If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. (NKJV)

Romans 5:5 - Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by

the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (NKJV)

1 Corinthians 3:16 - Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? (NKJV)

Galatians 4:6 - And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" (NKJV)

Ephesians 1:13-14 - In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory. (NKJV)

1 John 3:24 - Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us. (NKJV)

Many mentions of the indwelling Holy Spirit with no mention of tongues. We find many signs that witness to the presence of the Holy Spirit in someone (tongues being one of them), but nowhere do we find a REQUIRED sign that marks "real Holy Spirit indwelling" or "extra Holy Spirit indwelling" or "special Holy Spirit indwelling." The indwelling of the Holy Spirit was one and the same for all true Believers (but manifested in different ways) and there were many signs that authenticated it, such as obedience in 1John 3:24.

Each authentic case of salvation includes the regeneration of the human spirit (Titus 3:5) and the immediate indwelling of the Holy

Spirit who becomes the seal and guarantee of salvation (Ephesians 1:13-14) as well as our Comforter, Teacher, Guide and Counselor (among other things).

So whether or not a person believes in tongues for today, it cannot be supported Biblically that tongues are required for authentic salvation or is a required sign of the true indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Transformation – The Purpose Of Hard Times

I am at a loss for words as to what to say. I feel like such a fool. A selfish fool for how I respond to suffering. I feel so ashamed, so ridiculous and almost overwhelmed with my selfish, self-consumed self. I wonder why I am this way. I am disgusted I am this way. I fear I will make my kids this way. What is the balance? How are you real but still have faith in God especially when you are suffering and when God doesn't seem to make sense. I wish I were different with different attitudes and reactions in good and bad circumstances, being a righteous example for my children. Man do I feel like a failure. Man am I afraid to be stuck in this pit. I don't want circumstances to dictate my life anymore. I want a genuine intimate relationship with my

Heavenly Father to do that. I am so sorry for my failures in suffering. Father forgive me and save me from myself.

You are that way because you struggle with sin, just like me, just like anyone reading this. Contrary to all our "self-esteem, love yourself, be positive no matter what" teaching today, your "disgust" at your sin is the **BIBLICALLY** correct response.

Be merciful to me, a sinner! Luke 18:10

My heart is wicked. Jeremiah 17:9

Create in me a clean heart. Psalms 51

I could go on and on with verses that tell us to be aware of potential for sinfulness and our struggle with sin, from the Psalmist David to the Apostle Paul who tells us in Romans of his great battle against the flesh.

You are much more spiritually ready for God's transforming power than the person walking around every day telling themselves **NOTHING BUT** how special they are and how much "blessing" is theirs by divine right. Notice I said **"NOTHING BUT..."**

There is a balance. The positive things are true as well, but today we don't hear about the negatives from men such as America's Favorite Pastor who said God didn't call him to talk about the negative parts of life. Funny... God called every single writer of inspired Scripture to talk about it. I think I'll throw my hat in with the inspired writers of God's Word.

The "miracle" for Christians **ONLY** is this:

You are never more than one choice, one repentance, one prayer away from changing your life around completely.

You are never more than one day away from a fresh supply of God's mercy and faithfulness.

We get to start over every day... and we should. You are not stuck unless you choose to be. You are not in a rut unless you don't climb out. You do not have to continue to be a slave to your past, put it behind you. God says you can, you just have to choose it.

Circumstances have no power over the Christian. We live with an ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE. When we live life with our focus on what it means in the long run, the REALLY long run (eternity), the temporary circumstances of this life seem laughable.

STOP! Think about that. When we measure life against an eternal perspective, EVERY hardship and circumstance of this life seem laughably insignificant.

It's not laughable while we are dealing with cancer or adultery. But if you think about it compared to eternity, there is nothing to be hopeless, anxious or stressed about which is exactly why it is A SIN TO WORRY.

You can stop worrying by choice when you embrace this truth. You can stop being anxious by choice. You can stop being negative, having pity parties, whining and complaining BY CHOICE.

Why? Because you now understand that compared to what is in store for Christians in eternity, our light and momentary afflictions in this life are

insignificant and will fade instantly when it meets the glory of the Lord Jesus.

Your spirit of repentance and acknowledging your sin is the correct first step. The second is to acknowledge the truth of what I've said here, and simply CHOOSE to live it.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Trinity – Can You Deny The Trinity And Be Saved?

If a person denies the Trinity are they in danger of losing their salvation? I have some friends that belong to a Oneness Pentecostal Church and I'm concerned about this issue. I know they love the Lord. Thank you, Jean

The Trinity is a foundational truth of Christianity, and a person who flatly denies it after having studied it, I believe is denying an issue that may very well directly affect salvation.

You say your friends "love the Lord," but if you deny His deity, and remove Him from His rightful place as God, how can that demonstrate love for Him after all He has done for us?

Without God being Three Persons, the sacrifice of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit is rendered meaningless. We would then be left with three separate gods; or two gods and one man; or one god, a man and whatever you do with the Holy Spirit.

The Godhead, along with the resurrection of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, are doctrines that cannot be compromised, and there is no room for alternative interpretations. While this may sound "intolerant" in our current culture of "unity," it is no less the truth.

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit: truths, that when denied, constitute "another gospel" and can in no way lead to salvation. I am being very frank and very direct because there is no Biblical sway on this issue.

To deny the Godhead is to deny the God of the Holy Bible and the Son who gave His divine life to pay our rightful debt. This issue is too extensive to cover explicitly in this email. So I have given you the "answer" to the question, and hope that you and your friends will test it against Scripture.

I have purposely left out Scripture references so as not to "proof text" my answer. Read the Bible. The answer is clear.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Truth — Foundational Issues

What are the foundational questions and issues that a Christian should know when they are trying to show someone that Christianity really is THE TRUTH?

First, when it comes to salvation itself, a person can discover and believe the EVIDENCE but choose NOT to submit to it. So even if a person has the right

answers to the right questions and believes it, they may not be saved.

However, I do know for a FACT that the major questions that are the foundation of TRUTH can be answered irrefutably and plainly.

Logically, a person can discover God by the sheer weight of the evidence. In logical succession, I think the questions are:

Is there a real, personal, Creator God?

If yes, can He be known? Has He revealed Himself to us?

If yes, has He communicated with us in any absolute manner?

If yes, how can we know which "holy book" or religious ideas, if any, are really the ones He gave us?

If the Bible really is God's "book", can we know this book is uncorrupted and true to the message this Creator wants us to know?

If yes, what then should we do? What does He require of us? What does He offer? What does He want?

Each of those questions is answerable with undeniable evidence. Any honest human can know with certainty the answers to these questions and still decide not to submit to that Truth.

It's also important to understand that the EVIDENCE that supports the answer to these questions also answers beyond doubt "is there more than one way?" Perhaps that is why these questions are avoided.

No "religion" but Christianity can answer all those questions beyond any reasonable doubt and without

authentic competitors. That's why Christianity stands unique among the world's religions, holding itself out to be the ONE and ONLY way to salvation. That's why Christians are hated, mocked and ridiculed by a world who wants all "truth" to be equally true. An absurd notion for anything BUT religion (according to the world).

Can you answer those six questions privately for yourself? Publicly?

What questions do you have about those questions?

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Twitter – What's The Purpose?

I saw your short little messages on Twitter and Facebook. What's that all about? I love your SeriousFaith stuff, should I sign up on one of those?

Twitter and Facebook are "social platforms" where people communicate and keep up with each other.

Facebook "status" messages answer the question "Brent, what you doing right now?" Twitter "tweets" do the same thing.

People typically write stuff like "I'm watching a movie with my kids" or "We are driving to Grandma's house." No rules really, just "what are you up too..."

It's a way for people to get little peeks into your everyday life. The "updates" and "tweets" are limited to a short number of characters, for Twitter it's 140 characters per tweet.

You can "follow" someone on Twitter or Facebook and get their "tweets."

I use Twitter and Facebook "tweets" to "mini-teach." I send out questions, comments and thought provoking tidbits, all original, to those who follow me as a way of teaching in little spurts all day long.

You can find me on Facebook here: <http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=620006817&ref=name> You become "friends" with someone on Facebook to get their status updates.

I prefer people follow me on TWITTER.com which is quickly outgrowing Facebook as the platform of choice for this type of thing. Find me here:

http://twitter.com/Brent_Riggs

You'll see as you read down my page that several times a day I "tweet" little mini-teachings. It is definitely a new and effective extension of what I'm doing on SeriousFaith.com.

I hope you'll sign up on Twitter and follow me.

Questions?

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Witnessing – Is Every Christian Required To Evangelize?

Are we supposed to witness to everyone all the time, or do we live our lives according to God's will, or Jesus' example, and leave it to God to present the situations to us?

Yes.

Okay, that wasn't really an answer... it's one of those kinda "yes" and kinda "no" things. Let me explain.

First, we, like the Apostle Paul, are to be "debtors" (Romans 1;14) to every lost person. Why? Because God forgave us and has saved us from hell. And so originating in a debt of love that we have to God for saving us, we are "in debt" to share what God has done to every person who does not know. Know what?

That God's Law exposes them as a sinner; that God's holiness requires the only appropriate penalty (death); and that Jesus Christ can save them from that penalty because He already paid it.

So in a sense, yes, we should strive to witness to "every one, all the time." On the other hand, it is not practical, nor possible, that we will be able to witness to "every one, all the time." So we move to answer the question within the realm of reality....

But first, let me answer your last question and then return to the point about witnessing to "every one, all the time."

The answer to your last question is a resounding "YES!"... we should live a life of exemplary holiness and obvious obedience that glorifies God and draws people to Jesus. Our example should draw people to Christ even if

words were absent (though a Christian that does not declare the Gospel message is like a Doctor who is silent about a cure for cancer).

While being a Godly example, we should pray that God will point us to, lead us to, and present us with situations where we have the opportunity to witness the Gospel of Christ.

Now back to the other point ("every one, all the time")... there is a reason I wanted to finish with it. It's not that we should have a rigid performance-oriented standard of witnessing to "every one, all the time"... again, it's not practical or possible.

BUT - - - neither should we use that as an excuse to be lazy about witnessing, to be cowardly about witnessing or to be casual about witnessing.

The problem in the Church today is NOT, by a long shot, a problem of witnessing TOO MUCH. The problem today is that the overwhelming majority of Christians rarely, if ever, share their faith with anyone at all!

O to God, that we would have to say to Christians, "You're witnessing too much!" (is that even possible?) But this is not the problem and doesn't appear it will be any time soon.

So where does that leave us? Simply this: if you pray and ask God, He will gladly present you with ALL the opportunities to witness that you can handle, and that will bring glory to Him. God will give you JUST THE RIGHT AMOUNT of witnessing opportunities according to His plan. The actual number or percentage is irrelevant.

So don't worry about "frequency" or "percentage." Just be AVAILABLE and WILLING, and God will see to it that you have plenty of chances every day to share the Gospel! If you are willing, ready and able to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ, you've done your part. God will make sure the opportunities are there. That's His part.

~~~~~

## Witnessing – What Is It, Really?

**You mention on today's "Serious Answer" (11/17/04) that we should be ready to witness anywhere anytime that God presents the opportunity, but in previous Answer questions you state that the old "Asking Jesus into your heart" tactic is not NECESSARILY based in the Bible... What are steps toward leading people to Christ? It has been a long time since I have had the opportunity to try to lead someone to Christ, and when I did, it was along the lines of "asking Jesus into your heart." Are there specific passages in the Bible that you can give to lead someone to Christ along with my own personal testimony? I am not looking for a checklist but some guidance with some specific scriptures.**

That is a great question, one that I look forward to answering because it is so vital and relevant to the common Christian life today.

To begin, I don't want to overly criticize or belabor any commentary about the state of ambassadorship (witnessing, evangelizing, etc.) for the common Christian today. So let it suffice to say...

Individual evangelism (sharing your faith) is first and foremost primarily absent in the lives of a super-majority of people who profess to be Christians. It has been relegated to church staff, Pastors, visitation night and youth group activities for the most part.

Where it IS present, it is primarily centered around the "sales" approach of "Jesus will improve your life, so say 'yes' to Jesus" rather than a more Biblical presentation of the Gospel (which we'll cover in a moment). To explain what I mean, let me retell a common story that makes the point:

A guy gets on a commercial airliner and is approached by the airline attendant. She tells him to put on this big bulky parachute saying that it will "improve his flight." She explains that the flight will be more pleasant, that he will feel better and that the flight in general will just be more enjoyable if he will put on the parachute. And when the flight is over, he will be happy.

So he puts on the parachute and tries to squeeze into the cramped little airline seat. As the flight goes on, he gets more and more uncomfortable. His back hurts, his shoulders hurt, he can't find a way to sit that is relaxing. What's more, people begin to make fun of him. They snicker and laugh at him and make comments about what an idiot he is to wear a parachute on a commercial airliner. After a while he

gets sick of hearing the criticism and taunts, and along with the discomfort and aching muscles, decides to take the parachute off. The parachute apparently does NOT make the flight better, he is not happier, so why bother?

Another guy gets on the same airplane and the airline attendant gives him a parachute as well. Then she leans over and whispers in his ear, "At 30,000 feet we are going to open the door and throw everyone out." This guy sits down and experiences the same discomfort, the same aching muscles, the same taunting and criticism, but of course there is no possible way that he is going to take the parachute off because he understands the consequences of the decision. What's more, he tries to warn people, and they just laugh at him even more. He realizes the perilous situation and will not for any reason forsake the thing that will save him.

Today's Gospel message is much like the "improve your flight" approach. "God has a wonderful plan for you, your life will get fixed... you will be happy." This is a very "marketable" Gospel. Who doesn't want to be happy? Who doesn't want things fixed? People say YES to this Gospel.

But then life comes along and ruins it for them. They have heartaches, suffering and trials. People make fun of them, and they are criticized and persecuted for their faith.

When the promised "improved flight" does not materialize, many people cast off their "parachute" (the Gospel).

That is the "Jesus will improve your life" Gospel dilemma the Church finds

itself struggling with today. It's much easier to get people to say yes, and pews are filled... but studies consistently find that only 6-7% of "converts" do NOT chunk their parachute not long after their "salvation experience."

What is the Biblical approach to the Gospel message? Well Jesus and the Apostle Paul give us examples and clues. It basically follows this general flow:

Reveal God's Law which exposes sins and brings conviction.

Reveal the penalty that God's Holiness demands for sin.

Reveal the Gospel of Jesus Christ that saves us from that penalty and frees us from our sin.

That's not some checklist or dogmatic formula. It is the general flow of ideas when you take the compilation of Gospel experiences and teaching in the New Testament.

Why is it important to consider this? Because it does absolutely NO GOOD for Christians to walk up to the lost and declare, "You're going to hell, you need to accept Jesus as your personal savior!" That means NOTHING to a lost person! It doesn't make sense to them; it doesn't touch their conscience nor their intellect. You aren't reaching the head or heart, because there is no foundation for the statements.

People have to understand WHY before they can respond to "hell" and "salvation." For example, if I came walking up to you in the street and said, "You're gonna die today if you don't listen to me and dive over into



that ditch!" You would think I was nuts, and rightly so.

But, if I came up to you with a sense of urgency and said, "A bus is coming around that corner where you can't see and is hurdling straight for you. If you don't dive into that ditch in the next five seconds you will be run over and killed," what would you do then? At a minimum, you would be interested enough to turn around and see if what I was saying was true. Even if you chose not to believe, you would still understand why I was telling you to "dive."

If you understood and believed what I said, then nothing would keep you from diving into the ditch.

Analogies break down if you press them too far, so just take that for what it's worth. Realize that:

- People need to know WHY sin is sin
- People need to know why THEY are sinners
- People need to know WHY God responds to sin in such a harsh manner
- People need to know WHY they are going to hell
- People need to know WHY they need a Savior

The Gospel message answers those questions when the LAW and then GRACE are clearly communicated.

God's Law convicts us of our sin. Paul tells us in Romans 7 that the Law reveals sin. What is sin? Transgression of God's Law. What is God's Law? For the purpose of sharing

the Gospel, the 10 Commandments are a good place to start.

A person doesn't need a Savior unless they see they are in need of being saved.

They cannot understand the need to be saved unless they see they are condemned.

They cannot see they are condemned unless they see they have done something wrong.

They cannot see they have done something wrong unless they can see what constitutes right and wrong.

Which brings us back to: the LAW OF GOD. The Law reveals WHAT is sin by declaring God's standard of holiness; when sin is revealed, it destroys the notion of innate human "goodness."

Generally speaking, most people believe they are "good." They don't see that they are under God's judgment, justly condemned, and going to hell. After all, what loving God would send a "good" person to hell for all eternity?

The Law shows us we are not good. Check it out (following the 10 commandments, last to first):

Have you ever, even one time, been jealous or coveted something that someone else had? Their car, house, money or job? Their beautiful wife or girlfriend?

Have you ever, even once, lied, exaggerated, deceived or told partial truths?

Have you ever stolen anything, even once? A pencil, personal use of the company copier, a "business lunch" that wasn't really business? Cheated on your taxes, not declared all your income?

Have you ever committed sexual immorality? Have you ever lusted after another person? Have you ever watched, thought, or spoken and impure sexual thought?

Have you ever hated anyone, anytime for any reason?

Have you ever been disrespectful to your parents? Ever been thoughtless towards them or dishonored their name by your actions?

Have you ever failed, even once, to set aside part of your time on a regular basis to worship, rest and glorify God?

Have you ever taken God's name in vain? Used His name casually or flippantly? Ever used Jesus name, or the Holy Spirits name in a casual manner?

Has anything ever, even once, replaced God as the most important thing in your life? If someone were to look at your schedule or checkbook, what would they say is most important?

Have you ever failed to put God number one in all things at all times?

The Law reveals that NO ONE is "good." 99% of people will have to admit to being guilty of 99% or more of that list. 99.9% of humans (before Christ) are lying, thieving, adulterous, murderous (hate), coveting, idol worshipping, God profaning degenerates. (And don't think it

doesn't apply to you. One lie, you're a liar. One lazy hour at work and you have stolen from your boss, you're a thief. One lustful episode, you're an adulterer according to Jesus. See the point?)

NO ONE IS GOOD! That is what the Law exposes about our self-righteousness (read Romans 3 & 7).

Once the Law is used to reveal sin, then the hearer is now prepared (if their conscience is penetrated) to hear that God's holiness demands a penalty for sin - DEATH.

When someone says to you, "It's unfair that God would eternally condemn us for sin"... tell them that they misunderstand how horrible sin is. For example, humanly speaking we can gauge the "seriousness" of a crime by the severity of the penalty. A \$10 fine would tell us that the infraction was petty. A \$100,000 fine and 10 years in jail would tell us that the crime was serious.

The fact that God declares all sin to be worthy of eternal death in the fires of hell only serves to reveal to us how HORRIBLE sin is rather than the common idea that God is somehow "unfair."

God is the Creator and Ruler. God declared the Laws. God is the only Person who can declare with perfect justice how severe and serious transgressions of that Law are. And He HAS declared it. Sin is worthy of eternal death. That's how terrible sin is. It doesn't matter whether we understand or agree with it.

The Law reveals sin and convicts the sinner. The penalty for sin is death,

and after learning this, the sinner now understands his condemnation.

What you have now is properly prepared "soil" ready for the seed of the Gospel to be planted. Now the person knows what sin is, sees sin in himself, understands the penalty for sin.... and realizes perfectly WHY he needs a Savior.

And so we are ready to share the saving message of Jesus Christ to a person who sees his need to be saved.

In closing, I have avoided giving a "step-by-step-with-Bible-verses-checklist for presenting the Gospel" because I believe it is important for Christians to truly KNOW and UNDERSTAND what they are presenting, rather than following a memorized pattern.

Don't get me wrong... if a memorized list is ALL someone ever did or was capable of, it is infinitely better than doing nothing and more than most are doing now. Even my checklist, or memorized presentation, in ALL ways that Christ is declared, regardless of method or motive, God can use it productively (Phil 1:12-18).

But ideally, a Christian should know the Law (and applicable verses); know and understand why people are eternally condemned to hell (and applicable verses); and finally, know the saving message that Jesus lived, died and rose again to save us from hell and the penalty of sin (and applicable verses).

Knowing these things thoroughly would allow them to share the Gospel at every opportunity that God arranged in just the right way and time. Sometimes it would be planting

a "seed" concerning just one part of the message; sometimes it would be a full presentation of the message. But it would always be with a sensitive submission to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

To help you along, let me leave you with some Bible references to get you started:

The Law: Rom 7; James 2:10; Gal 3:24; Rom 3:19; 1John 3:4; Rom 2:15; 1Tim 1:8-9;

The penalty: Rom 3:23; 6:23; Rev 20:15; Heb 9:27; Matt 7:13; 2Thess 1:19; Rev 14:10; Rom 2:8-9

The solution: John 3:16; Rom 5:8; Eph 2:4-5; John 15:3; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Rom 5:2; 2Cor 6:2; Rom 10:13

~~~~~

Witnessing To Muslims

How do you witness to a Muslim?

The same way you witness to anyone. Like the Apostle Paul's great example, you start where THEY are at.

To the Corinthians, Paul didn't start spouting a bunch of Jewish history, prophecies and facts that they had no clue about. He started with the SIN they experienced in this culture and the "gods" they worshipped: gross immorality, paganism, etc. ... and convicted them of their sin.

To the Jews, he started with Scripture and expounded because they already had a Biblical worldview.

Forty years ago in America, we would start by simply talking about "Christian" things: salvation, church, Jesus, etc. That is no longer effective because that foundation doesn't exist anymore in our country. So now we have to approach Americans like Corinthians... you start with where our society is today: immoral and ungrounded in Biblical understanding.

With the Muslim, you start where he is at too. You can't start spouting "Christian'eze" because they have already been taught that Christians are wrong, corrupt and infidel unbelievers who worship a pantheistic god.

In all cases though, the path is the same: convict a man of his sin and then give him the answer. The answer (salvation) is unnecessary until they believe they need it (eternal condemnation because of their own sin). Remember this phrase at all times: THE LAW CONVICTS, THE GOSPEL SAVES.

No matter their background, a person doesn't want to hear the Gospel until they understand they have a need for it. Otherwise it is foolishness, a stumbling block. The Law, the 10 Commandments, teaches a person they have sinned and are justly condemned. Until they reach that point, the Gospel is useless.

To pursue arguments about doctrine, the Koran, etc., may open some doors in conversation, but the real effort for any and every opportunity to evangelize is simple: conviction of sin, presentation of the solution. The Law convicts, the Gospel saves.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Women Pastors And Leaders

Can women serve as Pastors, Elders or general leaders in the Church?

Oh boy, this question always gets me tar-and-feathered because I have many female clergy on my Devotional subscriber list. But the Bible can speak for itself:

1 Timothy 2:11-15 - Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control. (NKJV)

These verses speak specifically of the Church authority structure. Does this somehow make a woman weaker or less than a man? Absolutely not.

It does two things: assigns the woman a role that she is best fitted for given God's plan and symbolizes the way God has chosen to show a tangible picture of the Church/Christ and Husband/Wife relationships.

This is not an issue of value, intelligence, skill or competition. It is an issue of accepting God's will and submitting to His wisdom. When we argue that this is not "right," we are in essence declaring that we are smarter than God and that His old ideas aren't useful anymore.

Women are encouraged to teach other women (Titus 2:3-5), and there is no

www.brenttriggs.com

prohibition against them teaching youth.

Women and men who accept their God-ordained roles are healthy and fulfilled; far from feminist accusations of "male dominance" that we hear today.

Compare the contentment of those who embrace God's plan to the strife, confusion and hatred that is generated by those who wish to deny this God-given order. Instead of fighting, ignoring or re-inventing what God says, we do well to accept God's plan and the blessing it brings.