“Will Greater Evil Merit Greater Punishment in Hell?”

Will those who have done greater evil on earth receive greater punishment in Hell?

I think so. Luke 12:47-48 seems to lend some justification to this view.

> *“That servant who knows his master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows.”*

And consider Matthew 11:21-24:

> *“Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”*

Of course, there is no reason that anyone need be sent to Hell. Even the most vile sinner can be cleansed and forgiven through genuine repentance and faith in Jesus Christ (John 3:16, etc.).

But for those who reject Christ and persist in their sin and disobedience, there does seem to be a biblical basis for believing that there are gradations of punishment in hell—just as there are different levels of reward in heaven (1

Corinthians 3:10-15, etc.).

Hope this helps.

Shalom in Him,

Michael Gleghorn

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"Was Jesus Actually a Pharisee?"

[I am] an Indian Christian, residing in southern India. I shall be grateful if you could help with a question. The other day I ran into the following quote from *"The Passion" From a Jewish Perspective*:

> ***"I would suggest that Jesus argued so much with the Pharisees because he was closest to them and it is not by chance that they are absent from the Gospel Passion narratives. Indeed, Jesus may even have been a Pharisee."***

Could you please let me know if Jesus was indeed a Pharisee, as suggested? Also, could you please let me know the things I need to know pertaining to the [other] question at hand? I thank you beforehand for your patience in helping me with my request.

Thanks for your letter. No; I don't think it likely that Jesus was a Pharisee. Consider the following:

> *1) Jesus is nowhere called a Pharisee in the New Testament. With as much talk of Pharisees as we find there, this would*

be a very strange omission indeed! There is simply no positive evidence to support this thesis.

2) The Pharisees are mentioned quite often in the Gospels during Passion Week (the week before Jesus' death).

3) The Pharisees are mentioned in John 18:3 as part of the group that came to arrest Jesus. It seems to me that this could be considered as evidence that the Pharisees are indeed mentioned in the passion narratives.

4) Consider how Jesus often speaks of the Pharisees. Read Matthew 23 and note how the Pharisees are spoken of by Jesus. He says to His disciples, do what they tell you but not what they do (Matt. 23:2-3). He repeatedly calls them "hypocrites," etc.

5) Finally, in passages like Matt. 9:14 Jesus seems to be distinguished from the Pharisees. The passage says, "Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" If Jesus was a Pharisee, then why weren't His disciples fasting as well? Jesus seems to be distinguished from the Pharisees by the way the question is asked.

In all these ways (and others I've not mentioned) the New Testament gives repeated indications that Jesus was not a Pharisee.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

See also the Probe resources on the historical Jesus listed under related posts.

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“Which Is It: Man’s Free Will or God’s Omniscience?”

A friend of mine posed this question to me. I would like to pass it along for your reflection:

> ***When we say that God “knows the future”, are we saying that He possesses knowledge of all future events? My premise is that in order for free will for Man to exist, then it is impossible for God to know all future events. In other words, these concepts are mutually exclusive. If that is true, then which one exists – free will in humans, or knowledge by God of all future events? (Or is my premise wrong?) My opinion is that free will exists, and therefore God cannot know all future events. Furthermore, Christians should not be troubled by the concept of a God that does not possess knowledge of all future events. They should rest assured that – one way or another – He will execute His plan and carry out His promises.***

Thanks for any insights that I could pass along to him.

This is a big issue in theological circles today—sort of the “God version” of the “what did he know and when did he know it?” question. The debate over the extent of God’s foreknowledge is called “open theism.” (Check out Rick Wade’s article called “God and the Future“).

But I can tell you what we believe. God does, indeed, know every single detail of the future, which is why the Bible contains accurate prophecy of future events—because not only did God know they would (and will) happen, but because He is sovereign, He superintends them.

I think many people misunderstand the concept of “free will,” which is not a biblical term. The reality is that while we have the ability to make truly significant choices, we don’t have truly “free” will. You cannot, for example, choose to wake up tomorrow morning in China when you go to bed in Chicago. Or wake up speaking Chinese when all you know is English. You cannot choose to be a different gender than what God made you. (Yes, I’m aware of sex-change operations and know people who’ve had them—we’re not even going there! <smile>) But we can make choices that make a difference: for example, in our attitudes, in who we marry and most importantly, which God we serve. We have limited freedom in our choices, and God does not force us to choose things His way; He respects our choices. But we do not have totally free will.

I think your friend misunderstands the concept of God’s sovereignty (“one way or another – He will execute His plan and carry out His promises”) if he thinks that God can have a plan and execute it if He doesn’t know everything that’s going to happen. You can’t have it both ways. A God who is not omniscient cannot be sovereign. A sovereign God MUST be omniscient.

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“Where in the Bible Does It

Prove that Jesus Was 100% Man and 100% God?”

Thanks for your question! There are actually many biblical passages which teach both the deity and humanity of Christ. I’ve listed just a few for your consideration.

1. Isaiah 9:6-7

> *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*
> *Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.*

Note that the promised Messiah (or Christ) would be born as a son to Israel. He was thus a Man. At the same time, however, His name will be called Mighty God, etc. He is thus also God.

2. Micah 5:2-3 (quoted in Matt. 2:6)

> *“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”*
> *3 Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites.*

Again, Messiah is born of a woman (v. 3) to be ruler in Israel (v. 2). He is thus a Man. However, His goings forth are “from the days of eternity” (v. 2). He thus had no beginning and

must therefore be God (Who alone is eternal).

3. John 1:1-3, 14

> *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*
> *2 He was with God in the beginning.*
> *3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*
> *14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

Notice that the Word is God (v. 1). Notice also that the Word became a human being (v. 14). Jesus is both God and Man.

4. Philippians 2:5-11

> *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:*
> *6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,*
> *7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*
> *8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!*
> *9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,*
> *10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*
> *11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

This is a classic passage on both the deity and humanity of Christ.

5. Colossians 1:13-23

> *For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and*

brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,
14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.
15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.
16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.
17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.
18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.
19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,
20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.
21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.
22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—
23 if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

Again, this passage strongly affirms both the deity (v. 19) and humanity (v. 22) of Jesus.

These are just a few passages which can be offered. Many passages, taken in isolation, affirm either the deity of Christ on the one hand, or His humanity on the other. When all this evidence is taken into account, it becomes clear that the Bible repeatedly affirms that Jesus was indeed the unique God-Man.

God bless you,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

“Where Do I Find Biblical Support for the Trinity?”

I’m having a hard time with the issue of the Trinity in terms of finding support for this concept in the Bible. I am searching your website and other sites to get a handle on this doctrine. I need to be well versed on this issue as I am in a discussion with two Jehovah’s Witnesses where we will be addressing the explanation of the Triune nature of God. All of the other issues I can address and I’m doing okay, but the Trinity has got me a little stumped right now. Can you help me?

I’m so glad you wrote!! I can imagine why you would be having a hard time with the concept of the Trinity if Jehovah’s Witnesses are talking to you. And that’s why I’m doubly glad you have access to the Probe website to help you be grounded in the truth, as well as equipping yourself to answer their faulty arguments.

The scriptural support FOR the Trinity is so strong that you have to work hard at finding proof texts AGAINST the Trinity! We have several excellent articles on the Trinity, written by a staff member (Pat Zukeran) who has extensive experience in dialoging with Witnesses. Start here:

Why We Should Believe in the Trinity

then go here:

Jehovah's Witnesses and the Trinity

If you have further questions, we are available to answer them through e-mail (info@probe.org) or telephone.

I am sending this along with a prayer that the Lord will show you clearly and with the peace that accompanies His truth, His triune nature. (Consider, for example, the baptism of the Lord Jesus, where all three persons of the Godhead are present: the Father speaking His approval of the Son from heaven, the Son standing in the water in human flesh, and the Holy Spirit appearing as a dove Who came upon Jesus.)

Warmly,

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

"Is It Small-Minded of Me to Base Morality on Scripture?"

A friend of mine and I were recently discussing different things and two things relating to scripture things came up. The first (what started the argument) Was I asked whether morality could be determined by age; for example, we say that is wrong for a kid but OK for an adult. My view was, if something is wrong should it not be wrong for all? She is a Christian but made some comments I wasn't sure how to respond to. She implied that I "thought small" because after about thirty minutes of debate I realized my morality was based totally on scripture. When I said "moral" I meant biblical. She however was saying the Bible doesn't answer everything and it is up to society to decide, because as she pointed out not

every one is Christian and I needed to see the whole picture. This sounds immoral to me and in arguing it (using the Bible) she asked what seems un-biblical, yet I was stumped she said that "If the Old Testament grew into the New Testament then who's to say it isn't still growing?" She almost seemed to be implying that 1) scripture is not a complete canon yet and 2) it should change based on society. This seems very un-biblical and wrong but I wasn't sure how to respond effectively.

Thanks for your e-mail. The two questions you brought up show a great deal of insight on your part. I would be honored to help you work through these issues.

First, let's deal with morality. It's great that you base your moral behavior based on biblical principles. Unfortunately, not everyone is so wise. But even biblically speaking, there are some things that may be appropriate for some people that are not so wise for others. For instance, look at marriage. Wouldn't it be safe to say that a grown up married man is morally free to have sexual intimacy with his wife, but an unmarried teenage boy is not morally free to have sex with his girlfriend? Circumstances may determine some of our standards of behavior. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:23-33 that we are free to act the way we think we should (since we have been freed from the Law), but that we must first consider that our actions affect others. Christian morality is not based on a list of rights and wrongs, but on the law of love for one another. Sure, there are some things that are always wrong (such as murder), and some that are always right (such as love), but to say that every wrong is wrong for everyone is going to lead to trouble.

Your friend has a point that not every issue is covered specifically in the Bible. But the Bible's principles can be applied to every issue. So, in fact, to think biblically is to think about the "big picture." Society is actually more interested in keeping order than in encouraging morality. Age, therefore, does make a difference about what a person ought to

do; not because morality is relative, but because sources of weakness can be different in people.

The freedom that we Christians have to make decisions is kept in check with our biblically-minded discernment about what is best for others and ourselves.

To answer your second question: yes, the canon of Scripture is closed. The New Testament is not just a highlight in the evolutionary development of the Old Testament. It is the "New Covenant." It's called a covenant because Jesus Christ fulfilled in person the "Old Covenant's" purpose. Hebrews 1:1-2 points out that God has spoken in these "last days" in the person of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament is the inspired foreshadowing of Jesus. The New Testament is the inspired testimony to His life and works. The first few centuries of Christians had divinely guided criteria for evaluating the worthiness of a letter to be included in the New Testament. (For more on this, see Don Closson's article on the Web.) Nothing society or anyone else can come up with since could come close to adding to what Jesus has already done.

Furthermore, Jesus is the Word of God. How can God's very presence on earth be matched? His ascension into the heavens ended His earthly ministry. In the same way, His ascension also ended any speculation about another testament. (That's why there can be no new New Testament.) When He spoke the words "It is finished" on the cross, it illustrates that there is nothing else to be revealed. All that is necessary now is the fulfillment of His New Covenant, with the ministry of God's Spirit (through His church) and Jesus' glorious return. Our job is not to write more books of the Bible in order to make it apply to society. Instead we need to take what's already there and interpret it's vital and timeless message to every new society.

I hope this helps with your questions. If you have any more questions or need some elaborating, please feel free to

respond. Awesome questions! He rewards those who seek Him.

Kris Samons
Probe Ministries

"How Old Was Jesus When He Died?"

Until now I've been told that Jesus died at the age of 33 years of age. However your Christmas Quiz says 37 to 38 years old. . .? Please help.

I believe that chronology that Dale Taliaferro was using in the Christmas Quiz was based on the work of Dr. Harold Hoehner (*Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ,* Zondervan, 1977).

Dr. Hoehner assumes that Christ was born in the Winter of B.C. 5 or Spring of B.C. 4. He also assumes that Christ was crucified on April 3, A.D. 33. As you can see, that would make Jesus 37 to 38 years old. You might want to consult the book and the excellent research by Dr. Hoehner (ThM, ThD at Dallas Theological Seminary, PhD at Cambridge University).

Kerby Anderson
Probe Ministries

“Dr. Laura is an Unsaved, Hypocritical Fool”

I read your webpage on Laura Schlessinger and I totally disagree with what you said. Laura is an unsaved, hypocritical, fool. The devil has more use for her than does the Lord. She should be at home with her child and under her husband’s authority just like the Word of God says so. Amen…

God Bless

Well, I thought I had explained that Dr. Laura is Jewish but not a believer. You are right, it would seem that she is unsaved. But she is having quite an impact on the culture, which is why I wrote an article examining what she says from a biblical perspective.

At Probe Ministries, we are big believers in helping people to develop discernment. My hope is that those who read my article would be able to sort through the good things she says from the unscriptural things she says. When she says things that are true, the reason is that she’s agreeing with God. After all, even a broken clock is accurate twice a day. . .

I hope you will join me in praying that the veil will fall away from her eyes and she will see the glory and majesty of the Lord Jesus, to know Him as her Messiah.

In His grip,

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“Can I Get HIV From Washing Machines?”

Hello Mr. Ray,

I would like to get some advice from you regarding HIV transmission.

Because of the nature of my job, I have to always travel from one place to another. During this I have to stay in the hotel for many days. For washing my clothes, I often use the washing machines which are kept in the hotel for washing clothes. These machines are used by many people for washing clothes. Do I need to take any special care when using these machines for washing my clothes, as these machines are used by several people; some of them might be infected with the disease or the clothes which are brought for washing might be contaminated with body fluids of the infected person.

Please advise.

There is no danger to you in using these washing machines. Infection with HIV requires direct contact with body fluids contaminated with the virus. HIV is actually a very fragile virus outside the body so even if someone were to have washed clothes containing blood or semen from an infected individual in the machine you are about to use, the virus will have been disabled long before by exposure to air, drying and the chemicals in the detergent. Infection also requires exposure to a large number of virus particles. So even if, by the remotest of chance, some virus particles survived all this (and the heat of the dryer), there simply would not be enough of them to cause infection by the time you put your clothes on or even handled them in the laundry facility.

I am confident that you have nothing to be afraid of.

Respectfully,

Ray Bohlin, Ph.D.
Probe Ministries

"What Does the Bible Say About Masturbation?"

Dr. Bohlin:

I have just read your article on "Sexual Purity" & found it to be an excellent resource. You have really hit this subject on the head.

Can you please address the following question?

I am a Christian male, age 36. My girlfriend, maybe soon to be fiance is also a Christian. We do not cohabit, nor do we have sexual relations, albeit we are not virgins.

The secular world would have us believe that masturbation is a healthy practice. Research has shown that men think about sex more often than women. Obviously men and women are wired differently.

I catch myself entertaining sexual thoughts and I feel a tremendous amount of guilt. What does the Bible say about masturbation & entertaining sexual thoughts? I know that we can commit fornication in our hearts by our lustful thoughts & desires.

You raise a difficult and even controversial topic. Christians have disagreed on the issue of masturbation. Some allow it and some do not. Here is my take. The Bible is clear that any

sexual activity outside of marriage is sin. The biblical term “fornication” (sexual immorality) simply refers to any sexual activity outside of marriage. Jesus also clearly indicated, as you mentioned, that we can commit adultery in our hearts without any physical activity involved. Part of our sanctification process is to be transformed from being self-centered to being other-centered. With this background, consider these realities. Masturbation is sexual activity outside of marriage. Most if not all masturbation is accompanied by sexual thoughts to accentuate the experience. Masturbation is essentially self-centered, seeking to fulfill one’s own needs by oneself. There is no specific Biblical admonition to refrain from masturbation. However, based on the review above, it is difficult to find any justification for it either.

This is not to say, of course, that avoidance of masturbation in young men is easy. We praise God for His finished work on the cross that allows for forgiveness of past, present, and future sin, even besetting sins.

Respectfully,

Dr. Ray Bohlin
Probe Ministries