

“You Shouldn’t Talk About Evidence When the Subject Is Faith”

In your article [“Evidence for the Existence of God,”](#) the link between the remarkable things about earth and God is called “faith.” I believe in God. The author misuses the word “evidence.”

The author takes away from issues of religion and faith by throwing in a reference to “Saving the Whales” because there are all sorts of flawed and fraudulent environmental agendas floating around by various groups and the true conservationists are not represented by these groups. “Saving the Whales” is fraught with political ramifications and does not belong in a commentary supposedly “proving” the existence of God. The title of this article is inaccurate and is a disservice to your organization.

Thanks for your comments about my article.

If I indicated that I was trying to “prove” the existence of God, then please help me see where, so I can change it. I don’t think anyone can prove the existence of God, but we can point to evidence for Him. I am very aware that our sinfulness makes it easy for people to dismiss perfectly good evidence of our Creator NOT because the evidence isn’t good enough, but because they are disturbed by the implications of the existence of a God to whom we are all accountable.

My reference to “Saving the Whales” was simply to make the point that people resort to the moral argument regardless of their relationship to God, because our morality is ingrained in us as people made in the image of God. The politics of that movement really don’t have anything to do with the point I was making; I was only concerned with the motivation behind it.

I do think that evidence and faith are not diametrically opposed. We have faith not just because we choose to believe, but because there is good reason to believe; and that constitutes evidence. I think Christianity is an evidential faith; that's why Jesus appeared to over 500 people after His resurrection, so there would be eyewitness testimony (evidence) of the foundation of our faith. For some, the faith comes first, and for others, the evidence comes first and THEN they put their trust in God. Either way, the important thing is the object of our faith and not how we got to Him.

Thanks for writing.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“What’s the Difference Between Moral Relativism and Pluralism?”

Moral relativism and pluralism: I said they are, in effect, the same. The Unitarian academics smiled and suggested that I am unlearned on the topic. What say you? ☐

The two terms are not necessarily linked. One could be a moral relativist and an atheist, which isn't quite the same as a religious pluralist. Theologian John Hick is an example of a religious pluralist who accepts all major world religions as viable paths to what he calls the “Other.” However, he would reject the label of moral relativist, claiming that these belief systems cause followers to seek a good beyond themselves and that this lends to their behavior a certain

ethical dimension not found in unbelievers.

The problem with John Hick's system is in its rejection of what these religious systems claim to believe about salvation and humanity's destiny in order to blend them into his pluralistic system. Harold Netland has written a helpful book for thinking through the problems of religious pluralism called *Dissonant Voices*.

For Him,

Don Closson

Probe Ministries

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“How Do You Answer the Claim That Jesus Was 100% Man Emptying Himself of God?”

I recently heard a pastor speak about some things that really bothered me. First, he said that Jesus was 100 percent man that emptied himself of God. He said that the miracle of God becoming man would not be taken away if you do not believe this. His term was, “Jesus was 100% man that was God.” He also threw in the comment that Jesus and the Father are one, not as in the Trinity but that Jesus was God and for instance in the garden when He was praying, He was praying to Himself. He also believed that in the temple when Jesus was young, when it says he grew in wisdom and stature that means he was learning, hence that he did not know everything.

Secondly—he does not believe that the serpent in the garden

was Satan. He actually seemed that he didn't believe that there is a Satan. He used the meaning of Satan as tempter and not an actual creature. This has really been bothering me and I would like your answers and some advice in where to study this myself.

Thanks for your letter. It sounds like you have some good reasons to be concerned about the pastor. The orthodox doctrine of Christ holds that Jesus was fully God and fully man. He was not a man who "emptied Himself" of God, for in that case He would no longer be divine. What Philippians 2:5-11 rather tells us, I think, is that He "emptied Himself" by becoming human and temporarily (and voluntarily) giving up the independent exercise of His divine attributes. Jesus was fully God, but He voluntarily submitted, for a limited time, to a limitation in the independent exercise of His divine attributes (e.g. omniscience, omnipresence, etc.). Jesus could still exercise these attributes, but only insofar as it was consistent with the Father's will during His earthly sojourn. This, I think, is a better explanation of Philippians 2:5-11.

A good analogy is to imagine the world's fastest sprinter running in a three-legged race. He would voluntarily restrict and limit himself for a time, but even while running much more slowly than he was capable of, he never stops being the world's fastest sprinter. Jesus never stopped being divine even while He voluntarily limited Himself concerning His omniscience, His omnipresence, His omnipotence, etc.

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed to the Father. Christian orthodoxy believes in the Trinity. God is one in essence, but subsists as three distinct Persons. The Father is not the Son and neither are the Holy Spirit. Rather, each is a distinct Person, but all share mysteriously in the One divine essence. This pastor sounds like he rejects Trinitarianism, or holds to some form of what is known as "[modalism](#)." Some people have described modalism as "the swapping hats" theory: God swaps out the Father hat for the Son hat or the Holy Spirit

hat, depending on who He wants to “be” at any given moment. According to orthodox Christianity, rejecting the Trinity or embracing modalism are heretical viewpoints.

Your pastor is correct, however, to say that Jesus grew in knowledge. But He did so as a human being. As God, He is all-knowing. However, as I said above, in the incarnation Jesus voluntarily surrendered the independent exercise of His divine attributes. Jesus Himself confessed that there were some things that He did not know during His time on earth; see Mark 13:32; etc.

Finally, while it is certainly true that Genesis 3 does not identify the serpent with Satan, this identification does seem to be made explicitly in Revelation 12:9. Also, a careful study of what the Bible teaches about Satan reveals that personal attributes are consistently applied to him. The Bible views Satan as a personal being, not as a metaphor for temptation, etc.

Hope this helps a bit. If you would like more information about biblical and theological issues, please visit The Biblical Studies Foundation website at Netbible.org. They have lots of great information about the Bible.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

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“Is It True That Whites Have a Higher IQ Than Blacks, Per The Bell Curve?”

In *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*, the authors maintain that whites have a higher IQ than blacks, but I would not label the authors racist. What do you think?

Thank you for your question. You deserve a longer answer than I can give you in an e-mail, but perhaps I can give you some perspective and let you read further if you are interested.

The Bell Curve (by Herrnstein and Murray) derives its conclusions about IQ scores from the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT). Other researchers (e.g., *Inequality by Design: Cracking the Bell Curve Myth*) question whether that test and the assumptions made from developing a bell-shaped curve are valid. The AFQT probably best provides a test of the level of schooling not necessarily IQ. And the authors of *Inequality* believe there has been a good deal of statistical mashing and stretching in order to form the bell-shaped curve you find in the book.

The argument of the authors in *The Bell Curve* is that IQ is a better predictor of life outcomes than the usual measure of socioeconomic status (SES). One concern is that Herrnstein and Murray define SES very narrowly (level of education, income, parents occupations). Each factor was given equal weight even though it is generally assumed that parental income has a much greater effect than parental education on a child's life outcome.

As I hope you can see, there is some question about the methodology and statistical analysis used in *The Bell Curve*.

So while we can perhaps agree that American blacks score lower than American whites on standard IQ tests, that may be due as much or more to SES.

This is the classic debate of nature versus nurture. I don't think *The Bell Curve* proves that most of life's outcomes are due to nature.

Kerby Anderson
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“What’s the Difference Between Moral Relativism and Pluralism?”

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For Him,

Don Closson

Probe Ministries

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“When Does Human Life Begin?”

I am in an exchange of views with someone in regard to the question of when life begins. He is a very well read and educated person, however I cannot vouch for what or who he reads! According to him, “There is no hard line to draw where life of a human being begins. We only know that as soon as the sperm cell and egg fuse, the resulting cell bears the genetic and biochemical potential to become a new human person. Everything else is an opinion, not science, only God knows at what stage the life of a human person really begins.” What recommendations might you have in dealing with this discussionspurred by the stem cell research issue during the election.

Your friend is essentially correct from a scientific perspective, but what he cites is very important. Having the full genetic and biochemical

potential to develop
into a baby in nine months is the only certain point of
demarcation. Anything else
will be an arbitrary point chosen largely for convenience. So
why not establish
fertilization as the point at which human life ought to be
protected?

U.S. law was originally quite clear that where there was
doubt, err on the side of
life. Now we choose to err on the side of death just so we can
pursue the next series
of experiments. Nobody wants to worry about what if we're
wrong? We just redefine
life so we can proceed ahead. And those who think religious
perspectives should be
left out are fooling themselves. If scientifically we cant
make any other clear
point of reference then the point you do choose has been
chosen for reasons
other than science, which means personal values and beliefs.
This should be
a lesson that so-called personal values intersect with facts
all the time
and they truly cannot be separated.

Of course, biblically and theologically, the line of
demarcation is quite clear.
Beginning with Psalm 139:13-16,

*13 For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's
womb.*

*14 I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and
wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows
it very well.*

*15 My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in
secret, And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth;*

16 Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your

*book were all written The days that were ordained for me,
When as yet there was not one of them.*

followed by Isaiah 49:1,

*Listen to Me, O islands, And pay attention, you peoples from
afar. The LORD called Me from the womb; From the body of My
mother He named Me.*

Psalms 51:5,

*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother
conceived me.*

and Jeremiah 1:5,

*“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you
were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet
to the nations.”*

The Scriptures clearly indicate that a person made in the
image of God is
present even before there is a biological manifestation of
such.

I would basically tell your correspondent that he has helped
make your case for
protecting the earliest life. Fertilization is the only sure
point of demarcation.

We were all once a blastocyst and even a fertilized egg. But
none of us was ever
just a sperm or egg cell.

Respectfully,

Ray Bohlin, Ph.D.
Probe Ministries

“Where Should We Give Our Tithe?”

Is there any specific biblical instruction that we give our tithe to where we regularly hear God’s word or the church we belong to? What if I feel like giving my tithe to churches that are in need even though I’m attending there?

Galatians 6:6 and 1 Timothy 5:17-18 seem to suggest that we should certainly help support those who teach and preach the word of God to us. Usually, this will be our local church. However, in 2 Corinthians 8-9, Paul urges the Corinthians to share with the church in Jerusalem, which was currently in great need. The Bible also urges us to help support traveling missionaries, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Generally, I think that believers should give FIRST to those who are helping them grow in the faith and teaching them the Word of God, etc. Afterward, they should also give to other Christian organizations that they believe in and respect. However, there may also be occasions when the Lord moves His people to help other believers in other parts of the world.

The key issue, in my opinion, is first the readiness to give in obedience to God’s word. And second, a sensitive spirit that is open to the Lord’s leading in one’s giving. Of course, as good stewards of God’s resources we should also check out (as best we can) the churches or organizations receiving our money. Are they faithfully preaching and teaching God’s word? Are they genuinely concerned to advance the cause of Christ in the world? Are they good stewards of the gifts they receive? Are they genuinely in need?

It's helpful to remember that the Old Testament pattern of giving was one of both tithes AND offerings. Offerings were gifts above and beyond the tithe (one-tenth of one's income). The circumstances of your question would suggest that if the Lord is calling you to give to struggling churches, making an offering on top of your regular giving to your local church would be an excellent solution.

There are other issues to consider, but these are some to keep in mind.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

See Also:

- [Probe Answers Our E-Mail: "What Does the Bible Say About Tithing?"](#)
- [Probe Answers Our E-Mail: "What's the NT Understanding of Tithing?"](#)

"Is There a Spiritual Gift of Intercession?"

I'm confused about intercession. Is there a gift of intercession as well as it being a discipline? Some people certainly pray more often than others and some love doing it, yet there are those who don't love it but get woken in the middle of the night to pray for hours anyway.

I also look at people sometimes and really want to pray for

them, right then and there. I don't because I'm a bit too scared to walk up to someone and say "I so want to pray for you" and I'm not really sure what I'd be praying about. I find this both amusing and confusing. Do you have any light to shed?

As far as I know, there is no "gift" of intercession, although people with the spiritual gift of faith (1 Corinthians 12:9) usually have a (super)natural affinity for praying for others. Whether we love doing it or not has nothing to do with whether God is using us as channels of His power.

One of my dear friends is a pastor. One weekend afternoon he was feeling rather "prickly and grumpy," to quote him, when he got a call from one of his congregants asking him to come to the hospital and pray for their daughter. She was supposed to have surgery but an infection had invaded her body and they couldn't do it until the infection was cleared up and her fever went down. Bob knew in his spirit that if he prayed for her, she would be healed, but he reeaaaaalllllllly didn't want to go. He went anyway, just as prickly and grumpy as you please, laid his hands on the girl, and asked God to get rid of the infection so they could go ahead with the surgery. He left to go back home, and as he walked in the door, the phone was ringing; her temp was normal. That fast. He says it was quite humbling that God wanted to use him, as fleshly and uncooperative as he was feeling, but the issue wasn't the attitude of the channel, but the divine power that flowed through it.

When you get an impression in your spirit that you should/want to pray for someone, please give yourself permission to trust the Lord's leading on that. (And I would ask, are you being impressed to pray for them just internally, or does He want you to bless them by praying out loud? Consider that having someone pray for you out loud is an intense blessing for most

people, and if you don't follow through, you may be depriving them of a blessing God wants to give them through you!)

What you're dealing with is discomfort over operating in the supernatural, and the more times you overcome your reticence, the easier it will become to follow through on His leading. You can go up to someone and say, "Excuse me, I know this may sound crazy, but I think the Lord wants me to pray for you right now. May I have your permission?" A number of years ago I decided I wanted to be the kind of person who would stop in the middle of a sidewalk and pray for someone right then and there if it was the right thing to do, but it was unfamiliar territory to me. So I told myself, "I need to get over the discomfort of the unfamiliar, and then it will be familiar, and it will feel natural, and that's where I want to live! Where praying out loud at the drop of a hat feels natural and comfortable. So I will push past the discomfort to get to the place I want to be." It worked.

I heard a great story at one of the Exodus conferences. (Exodus International used to be the umbrella organization over many ministries that deal with the homosexuality issue; I serve with one.) Andy Comiskey, a former homosexual struggler (to whom God has brought great healing) and his wife were in New York on an anniversary trip. They took a walk to Greenwich Village and ended up in a park across the street from Stonewall, the bar where the gay rights movement was launched in 1969. It was a gay park, and they sensed a lot of demonic oppression in that place. Andy said, "Enough! We need to take authority right now!" and invited Jesus to be Lord of that park. He prayed, "Your kingdom come, Lord!" and so the two of them kept their eyes peeled for what God was going to do. They saw a lady who looked oppressed to them, so they walked up to her and Andy said, "Excuse me, but my wife and I are Christians, and we believe God wants us to pray for you. Would that be OK? If it isn't, we'll just pray for you as we leave." The lady's eyes filled with tears and she said, "This morning

I prayed and said, 'God, if You're real, show me.'"

If you get the urge to pray for someone and don't know what to pray for, I would 1) trust that if you obey His prompting, God will impress you with what to pray for if He wants you to pray something specific, and 2) ask the Father to bless that person with His love and the awareness of His presence and His pleasure in them as a person He made in His image and sent Jesus to die for. Ask Him for His peace and a lingering sense of blessing on the person throughout the day. No matter what the person's issue is, you can bless them in Jesus' name and it is a REAL THING you are giving them! I would also suggest that you dive deep into God's word to grow your familiarity with, and make a list of, His promises and truths that you can feel confident praying because He has already revealed it as His will. (One of my favorites is from Ephesians 3:18, that the person will have power "to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ" for them.)

Hope this helps!

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"Does Jesus' Vine/Branches discourse in John 15 Mean You Can Lose Your Salvation?"

Does John 15:1-7 have anything to do with losing your salvation? I would like your input. Personally I believe it

does not.

Thanks for your letter. John 15:1-7 definitely presents the interpreter with some difficulties. Nevertheless, I personally tend to agree with you and do not think that this passage teaches that a genuine believer (and this, of course, is important) can lose his/her salvation. Since my own studies are informed by the expertise of others, and since I share the viewpoint presented in the NET BIBLE, I have pasted their comments on this passage below:

The Greek verb *airō* (airo) can mean lift up as well as take away, and it is sometimes argued that here it is a reference to the gardener lifting up (i.e., propping up) a weak branch so that it bears fruit again. In Johannine usage the word occurs in the sense of lift up in 8:59 and 5:8-12, but in the sense of remove it is found in 11:39, 11:48, 16:22, and 17:15. In context (theological presuppositions aside for the moment) the meaning remove does seem more natural and less forced (particularly in light of v. 6, where worthless branches are described as being thrown out an image that seems incompatible with restoration). One option, therefore, would be to understand the branches which are taken away (v. 2) and thrown out (v. 6) as believers who forfeit their salvation because of unfruitfulness. However, many see this interpretation as encountering problems with the Johannine teaching on the security of the believer, especially John 10:28-29. This leaves two basic ways of understanding Jesus statements about removal of branches in 15:2 and 15:6:

(1) These statements may refer to an unfaithful (disobedient) Christian, who is judged at the judgment seat of Christ through fire (cf. 1 Cor 3:11-15). In this case the removal of 15:2 may refer (in an extreme case) to the physical death of a disobedient Christian.

(2) These statements may refer to someone who was never a genuine believer in the first place (e.g., Judas and the

Jews who withdrew after Jesus difficult teaching in 6:66), in which case 15:6 refers to eternal judgment. In either instance it is clear that 15:6 refers to the fires of judgment (cf. OT imagery in Ps. 80:16 and Ezek 15:1-8). But view (1) requires us to understand this in terms of the judgment of believers at the judgment seat of Christ. This concept does not appear in the Fourth Gospel because from the perspective of the author the believer does not come under judgment; note especially 3:18, 5:24, 5:29. The first reference is especially important because it occurs in the context of 3:16-21, the section which is key to the framework of the entire Fourth Gospel and which is repeatedly alluded to throughout. A similar image to this one is used by John the Baptist in Matt 3:10, And the ax is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Since this is addressed to the Pharisees and Sadducees who were coming to John for baptism, it almost certainly represents a call to initial repentance. More importantly, however, the imagery of being cast into the fire constitutes a reference to eternal judgment, a use of imagery which is much nearer to the Johannine imagery in 15:6 than the Pauline concept of the judgment seat of Christ (a judgment for believers) mentioned above. The use of the Greek verb *meno* (meno) in 15:6 also supports view (2). When used of the relationship between Jesus and the disciple and/or Jesus and the Father, it emphasizes the permanence of the relationship (John 6:56, 8:31, 8:35, 14:10). The prototypical branch who has not remained is Judas, who departed in 13:30. He did not bear fruit, and is now in the realm of darkness, a mere tool of Satan. His eternal destiny, being cast into the fire of eternal judgment, is still to come. It seems most likely, therefore, that the branches who do not bear fruit and are taken away and burned are false believers, those who profess to belong to Jesus but who in reality do not belong to him. In the Gospel of John, the primary example of this category is Judas. In 1

John 2:18-19 the antichrists fall into the same category; they too may be thought of as branches that did not bear fruit. They departed from the ranks of the Christians because they never did really belong, and their departure shows that they did not belong.”

The NET Bible is a really great site. If you’re interested in exploring the topic of salvation, they have a number of articles at www.bible.org/topic.asp?topic_id=13. Articles specifically on the topic of “Assurance” can be found at www.bible.org/topic.asp?topic_id=31.

Hope these resources prove helpful.

The Lord bless you,

Michael Gleghorn

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“My Son Curses”

I have a 17 year old son who is a Christian. I am having some trouble with him using curse words. He says it is not wrong as long as he does not use God’s name in vain. I have told him he is not being a good witness and the Bible says to speak in ways to encourage and build people up. I told him is not suppose to be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of his mind. And his mind can’t be renewed with words coming out like curse words. He says he is not cursing at anyone but that it helps him to express his feelings. I told him he is supposed to be in control of himself including his tongue. He says he is in control and is able to not curse

when he chooses not to. What can I say to him and back up with scripture to show him that it is wrong as a Christian to curse?

Dear friend,

Ephesians 4:29 says, 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.

Other versions translate unwholesome as foul, dirty, corrupt, abusive, and rotten. Notice none of them have anything to do with taking Gods name in vain.

Its interesting when you look up the meaning of the Greek word translated unwholesome

- 1) rotten, putrefied
- 2) corrupted and no longer fit for use, worn out
- 3) of poor quality, bad, unfit for use, worthless

These all describe cursing, which has been rightfully called words used by angry people with stunted vocabularies.

You can offer all this to your son, but I think that as a parent, your power comes from providing him with the motivation to control his tongue like he says he can (and you KNOW he can!)like losing privileges when he loses control. You are the gatekeeper of the perks and privileges of living in your home, and you can encourage him to develop his self-control and character by choosing not to curse. Of course, the way to change is to displace the unwanted behavior with a new one, so be prepared to provide him with alternative words and phrases. You might even give him the assignment of Googling the phrase alternatives to cursing (after you do it first, so you know what hell encounter).

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin

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