“Did Christ HAVE to be Deity?”

Greetings Don,

I came across your website article concerning the deity of Christ and thought I would respond. if you have the time and interest, please entertain some of my thoughts and get back with me if time allows. My questions surround the topic of the necessity of Christ being deity. I accept that He is, but wonder if He MUST be for both the atonement and eternal salvation. What I would like to do is copy the text from my interaction with a good friend yesterday. That way I won’t have to rewrite our dialogue. When you have time, please interject if you would. WB is my good friend, a pastor. I am DB.

WB: Your questions about Christ’s deity in regards to salvation do sound like the JWs. “God can do it anyway he so pleases” (even Calvin suggests this as well). If God wanted, he could have made a world without the possibility for sin as well. He can do it any way he pleases, but he has reasons for doing it the way he does.

DB: Yes, he does. But as God, he could do it any number of ways. If you hold to the middle/knowledge position, you would have to agree to this idea, and the idea that he chose the best possible way to redeem mankind. That, in-and-of-itself, doesn’t demand that Christ be deity.

WB: The early church fathers reasoned (there, I used the dirty word “reason”) that Christ had to be God for our salvation to be effectual. You have heard it before, even from me. Be patient as I explain it again. If I sin against you, how long does the sin remain? Answer: until you forgive me or until you die. Even if I die first, the sin remains as an offense

against you.

DB: No problems here at all. I agree wholeheartedly.

WB: If I sin against God, how long does the sin remain? Until he forgives me or until he dies. Since he does not die, and is an infinite being, then the sin is eternal: actually, my sin against him becomes an infinite offense. Now: how can an infinite transgression be forgiven? (I hope we don't have to revisit justification in all of this). Only an infinite being can pay for an infinite sin – only an infinite being can absorb an infinite curse and satisfy the infinite penalty of an infinite crime. Only an infinite being can bear an infinite wrath. If Jesus was a man, his death would have no efficacy.

DB: Here's where questions arise on my part. I agree that my sin is an infinite offense against God. Actually, God is eternal and infinite and we are neither (in the absolute definitions of those terms—i.e. "immeasurable or without beginning or end"). Hence, maybe there is some reservation on my part to claim I, a finite being, can commit an infinite act. I suppose since we live forever (in glory or judgment), our sins remain always or are cleansed and forgiven always; hence, they are infinite or erased. All that being said (I'm typing out my thoughts), I don't feel it requires that Christ must be deity to be a sufficient sacrifice for my sins. What is required is a perfect sacrifice. If Christ was a created being, one who was higher than angels and who took on the form of man, lived a perfect, sinless life with free will (like Satan but succeeding), his sacrifice would be sufficient. I don't understand how, using reason, it would not. Like us, he would have had a beginning. Like us, free will. Unlike Adam, he did not sin (even if he could have—if he was not deity, this would give even more credence to the example that even though he was a man, he did not sin vs. our position as Trinitarians). As he was sinless, created or not, his perfect example and sacrifice would be sufficient. It seems that if there coexisted TWO forms of deity at the same time, and it

was possible for them to sin against each other as does man, then a mediator, who would then have to be deity, would be required. To require deity to be sacrificed for the sins of finite man seems overkill and doesn't pan out in my mind as reasonable. It's certainly plausible, but I don't see how it has to be. Please correct me here. If God requires a perfect sacrifice, Jesus would have been a sufficient sacrifice if God said he was having lived a perfect life (as a perfect man or perfect Adam).

WB: The applicability of Christ's atoning work to us as human beings depends upon the reality of his humanity.

DB: Absolutely.

WB: The efficacy depends upon the genuineness and completeness of his deity. DB: Not if God only requires a perfect, sinless sacrifice vs. the sacrifice of a deity. I still fail to understand why reason disallows this. It seems to me we are predisposed to this position to embrace our view of the trinity vs. the other way around. Reason, in my mind, doesn't exclude this argument.

WB: The JWs reject this saying that God can do anything he pleases. Okay, why didn't he just let a muskrat die for our sins then? The beauty of the cross is not that we have been redeemed, but that the eternal Holy God was willing to undergo the kenosis (humiliation from glory to earth to servant to criminal to death to tomb).

DB: I agree—that is the beauty of the cross. But if God created for himself a son with free will (much like Satan—and NO, I don't think they were brothers!!!) to be a sacrifice for a lower mankind who despises them both and who hates them, then his suffering and sacrifice on our part for the love of his father, who he could disobey at will, is a lovely story as well. That's just as moving in my mind. If he was deity and couldn't sin (if he was impeccable), we can only glory in his

suffering, not his resistance to sin. Again, reason warrants that conclusion.

WB: This reveals God. And it is this that is the centerpiece of the Christian faith (our salvation was the result, and the reason, but the emphasis is on the grand mystery of God himself. (How boring it would be to send someone else to do his dirty work).

DB: I addressed this above.

Hello _____,

Thanks for your e-mail. Don is overwhelmed with other duties and asked me to respond in his place. I hope you understand.

Since you claim to accept the doctrine of Christ's deity, I will simply assume this is a belief we share. Thus, rather than offering any arguments for this important doctrine, I will simply assume it is true for the purpose of this response.

Let me make just a few points by way of introduction. First, I think you raise an important issue that needs to be carefully considered and discussed. Second, I will have to reply in a somewhat abbreviated fashion, merely outlining what I consider to be some important points. Third, at the time of this writing, I freely admit that I CANNOT offer a conclusive argument that it was necessary for Christ to be God in order to provide an acceptable atonement for the sins of man. However, I want to offer a cumulative case for this position which I think is nonetheless compelling. This will involve both a response to some of your statements, as well as a brief, positive presentation of some evidence which I think makes it at least highly probable that Christ would indeed have to be God to provide an acceptable atonement for our sins. Finally, I offer these thoughts for your consideration since you wrote to Probe requesting a response. Although I have to reply rather quickly because of many other pressing

duties, I am also offering a tolerably thoughtful response that I ask you to read carefully.

Please allow me to focus on your statements beginning with the remark, “Here’s where questions arise on my part.” You state:

> *“I don’t feel it requires that Christ must be deity to be a sufficient sacrifice for my sins. What is required is a perfect sacrifice. If Christ was a created being, one who was higher than angels and who took on the form of man, lived a perfect, sinless life with free will (like Satan but succeeding), his sacrifice would be sufficient. I don’t understand how, using reason, it would not.”*

I wonder HOW you actually KNOW this to be true? Granted, you MAY be right. But HOW do you really KNOW? I note that you appeal to “reason” – a faculty for which I too have great respect – but it’s important to remember that reason, like ALL of man’s faculties, is fallen. This remark is not intended to denigrate reason. But it’s common knowledge that man often makes errors in reasoning about all sorts of things. Not only that, we often begin our reasoning from false presuppositions, which often results in correctly reasoning to false conclusions. Finally, we almost never have all the essential information which we would need to reason to the right answer – even if we didn’t continually commit errors in our reasoning.

I would argue that the question of whether or not it was necessary for Christ to be God in order to provide an acceptable atonement for the sins of man is the sort of question about which it would be quite easy to reason incorrectly. I would also argue that YOU BEAR THE BURDEN OF PROOF here. This is so for the simple reason that Christ was in fact God (as you admit), and the Father did in fact send His Son to be “the propitiation for our sins” (1 JN. 2:2). Since God is a rational moral agent, it seems fair to assume

that He had some good reason for actually doing things as He did. Not only this, I think it's fair to ask whether God would have sent His only Son as the sacrifice for our sins if He could have achieved this end in some other way. It is at least odd that God would have sent His only Son to do what a morally perfect creature could just as easily have accomplished. Since God did in fact send His Son, however, you clearly bear the burden of proof in demonstrating that this was, in fact, not necessary. I don't think you can do so. Hence, I think your argument is ultimately unsuccessful.

Let me briefly illustrate this last point from a section of the dialogue between you and your friend:

> *WB: The applicability of Christ's atoning work to us as human beings depends upon the reality of his humanity. DB: Absolutely. WB: The efficacy depends upon the genuineness and completeness of his deity. DB: Not if God only requires a perfect, sinless sacrifice vs. the sacrifice of a deity. I still fail to understand why reason disallows this. It seems to me we are predisposed to this position to embrace our view of the trinity vs. the other way around. Reason, in my mind, doesn't exclude this argument."*

Concerning your final comments, I would agree that reason, in itself, doesn't necessarily exclude the possibility that God only requires a perfect, sinless sacrifice rather than a Divine one. But remember my comments on "reason" again. Just because human reason cannot exclude the possibility that you mention does not in any way prove that a Divine sacrifice was not necessary! And since you bear the burden of proof here, I must ask you HOW, specifically, you KNOW that God does NOT REQUIRE A DIVINE SACRIFICE? Since this is what God actually did, I would argue that it is more reasonable to believe it was necessary than that it was not. Admittedly, this does not PROVE my argument is true, but I do think it's more reasonable. And I am not obligated to assume the burden of

proof here anyway.

I think you make an interesting, and potentially revealing, comment when you write:

> *"It seems that if there coexisted TWO forms of diety at the same time, and it was possible for them to sin against each other as does man, then a mediator, who would then have to be diety, would be required."*

Again, I wonder HOW you KNOW this? Why, specifically, would a Divine mediator be required? Certainly reason does not demand this! Why would any mediator "be required" at all? It's quite possible that the gods could mediate their own dispute, just as two men might do. It's also possible that a man, or a talking raccoon, could serve as a mediator. But here's what's interesting. If your logic is valid, and a god must mediate between gods, why would it not also follow that a God-Man must mediate between God and man?

But here's another point. The example of reconciling two gods likely involves the reconciliation of equals. But this is not the case when we consider the reconciliation of man to God. Here, the parties are NOT equal. God is the Creator, man is His creation. It seems at least reasonable to believe (and is in fact true, I think) that the Creator may have a particular character which requires that reconciliation be achieved ONLY through a means which is perfectly consistent with all His attributes. And this, of course, may radically limit the means by which such reconciliation can actually be achieved. Again, I personally think it would be odd for the Father to send His only Son to accomplish on behalf of man what a morally perfect creature was capable of. Indeed, you yourself confess:

> *"To require diety to be sacrificed for the sins of finite man seems overkill and doesn't pan out in my mind as reasonable. It's certainly plausible, but I don't see how it has to be."*

But since this is what God actually did, you bear the burden of proof in demonstrating that such a sacrifice was, in fact, overkill! Since God is a rational moral agent, it is at least reasonable to think that a Divine sacrifice may indeed have been NECESSARY. And if it was necessary it cannot, by definition, be overkill.

Let me conclude with two more observations. First, we both agree that Jesus was, in fact, the God-Man. I could easily demonstrate from the Scriptures both that Jesus believed this of Himself and that His disciples believed it as well. But here's the point. Every time that Jesus, or one of His disciples, makes the claim that He is the ONLY way to God there is, at least potentially, an implicit argument that only a God-Man can reconcile man to God! I could quote many verses, but let me offer just a few. When Jesus says to Nicodemus, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so MUST THE SON OF MAN BE LIFTED UP; that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life" (JN. 3:14-15, emphasis mine), He is speaking as the God-Man. I admit that it is not necessary to interpret such a statement as requiring a Divine sacrifice, but it certainly has this potential – and that's something to think about. In other words, since Jesus is the God-Man, He could be implicitly understood as saying that ONLY such a One as He is capable of reconciling man to God. It's the same with many such statements of Jesus (e.g. JN. 14:6, etc.). And Jesus' disciples, who also believed in His deity, repeatedly claim that there is no other way for man to be reconciled to God. For example, in Acts 4:12 Peter declares, "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved." Again, this does not PROVE that a Divine sacrifice was necessary (the burden is yours to show it was not), but it may certainly be read as implying its necessity.

Second, consider this. In Paul's famous verse on substitution, 2 Cor. 5:21, we read: "He (the Father) made Him (the Son) who

knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Luther referred to this as the "Great Exchange." Christ takes our sin on Himself and gives us His righteousness in its place! Now an argument could be made that, in order to be acceptable to God, man must be clothed in His righteousness. If this is so, then it would seem to follow that a Divine substitute was not superfluous, but ESSENTIAL. For how could we become "the righteousness of God" in Christ, unless Christ was actually God? It's reasonable to believe He could only give us God's righteousness if He was, in fact, God. And if such righteousness is essential for our reconciliation to God, then it follows that a Divine substitute would be necessary to achieve this goal. Again, I fully admit that this argument is NOT CONCLUSIVE—it is merely suggestive. But as I've said repeatedly (I'm sure you're sick of it!), you bear the burden of proof – not me. Thus, I think I've offered some good reasons to believe that a Divine sacrifice was indeed necessary and not overkill. I also think I've demonstrated that you're far from proving your own position (if in fact it's actually your position; I'm not saying it necessarily is).

Wishing you God's richest blessings,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

"Does God Saying Something Is Right Make It Right?"

My daughter's philosophy professor posed the question, "Does God saying something is right make it right?" He says that if the answer is "yes" then God is arbitrary, and thus not

loving, and if the answer is "No" then right and wrong had to exist prior to God and He is not all powerful. (The professor says that the later is the Catholic view, and seems to indicate that these are very early levels of philosophical thought.)

On a Web site about Socrates' ideas on the good life (http://academics.vmi.edu/psy_dr/socrates.htm), there is this paragraph:

> *In the Euthyphro the main question raised is: Are right/good acts right/good just because God (or the gods) says so, or does God say so because they are right/good? If it is just because God says so, then God's commandments seem arbitrary. And what if God does not exist? Does anything go? On the other hand, if God's commandments are made for a reason, i.e. if there is something else (other than God's arbitrary decree) about bad acts that makes them bad, what is it? And is God then irrelevant to ethics?*

The answer to the next-to-the-last question is the option your daughter's professor didn't offer, namely, the nature or character of God. Theologian J. Oliver Buswell said this about God's law: "The divine character is expressed by the divine will in the divine law" (*A Systematic Theology,* 1:264). What God says is good is good because it reflects the character of God which is good. What makes things bad is being against God's character. If God just plucked a law out of thin air, He would be arbitrary. However, seeking some other source of right and wrong wasn't the only other option. God's law reflects God's character. Thus, the answer to the last question in the above paragraph is no—God isn't irrelevant to ethics. Morality is grounded in His nature and made known by His will.

I hope this helps.

Rick Wade

“I Have Some Questions About What Happens After Death”

I have read one of your publications titled [“What Happens After Death?”] In the section “One Minute After Death” you make this statement:

> *“What happens when we breathe our final breath? The Bible teaches what will occur. First our immaterial soul and spirit will be separated from our physical body. Second, we will immediately receive the judgment that will determine our eternal destiny. Those who have trusted in Christ’s payment on the cross for our sins will enter into eternal life in the presence of God.”*

My questions are these:

a) It sound that the judgment of man is by batch, for not all men died at the same time (from Adam to our time). My question is: Does this mean that there are already people now in heaven (paradise) and there are already people cast to hell?

b) Does this mean that there are already people now in paradise and that they have seen our Lord and His son Jesus Christ.

c) Since you are using Revelation 20:11-15, my question is: What do you mean by “first resurrection” and “thousand-year reign” in Revelation 20:5?

d) In 2 Thessalonians 4:16, What do you mean by “dead in

Christ shall rise first" relative to the thousand-year reign and judgment day?

Thanks for reading the article. Here are some answers for you.

> *a) It sound that the judgment of man is by batch, for not all men died at the same time (from Adam to our time). My question is: Does this mean that there are already people now in heaven (paradise) and there are already people cast to hell?*

Yes, there are souls in heaven and hell now. When we die, our soul separates from the body and goes to heaven or hell.

> *b) Does this mean that there are already people now in paradise and that they have seen our Lord and His son Jesus Christ.*

Yes, those in heaven are in the presence of the Lord.

> *c) Since you are using Revelation 20:11-15, my question is: What do you mean by "first resurrection" and "thousand-year reign" in Revelation 20:5?*

At the rapture, when Christ returns for the church (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18), the bodies of the "dead in Christ" are resurrected in the new glorified state and unite with their souls. Then those who are alive and in Christ are raptured and join the saints in heaven. After the seven years of tribulation when God's wrath is poured out on the earth, the bodies of those martyred for Christ in the Tribulation and the bodies of the Old Testament saints are resurrected in their glorified state. The resurrection of the bodies of all those in Christ, Old and New Testament saints, is the first resurrection, the resurrection unto life. After the resurrection of the saints comes the thousand-year rule of Christ on the earth.

The second resurrection is the resurrection of all those not in Christ, and they are judged and sentenced to hell (Revelation 20:11-15). This occurs after the thousand year rule of Christ.

> *d) In 2 Thessalonians 4:16, What do you mean by "dead in Christ shall rise first" relative to the thousand-year reign and judgment day?*

Presently, those who are in Christ (or Christians) are in the presence of the Lord. The souls of Christians are in heaven. At the rapture when Christ returns for the church, the bodies of these believers will be resurrected from the dead and unite with their souls. Their resurrected bodies will be glorified and eternal as Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 15.

Thanks for asking your questions. I will use these questions on my radio show in the future.

Patrick Zukeran
Probe Ministries

"When Are We Truly Forgiven, at the Cross or at Confession?"

Some Christian writers have claimed it's unnecessary for Christians to ask for God's forgiveness since all our sins (pre- and post-conversion, past and future) were forgiven when Christ said "It is finished" (John 19:30). But two scriptures seem to contradict this: Jesus' model prayer instructs us to pray for forgiveness for ourselves (Luke 11:4), and he says in

Matthew 6:15 that God will not forgive us (assuming "us" refers to believers, as he is addressing his disciples) if we do not forgive others. When do you consider that we are truly forgiven, at the cross or when we confess our sin (1 John 1:9)?

Great question!

I think it's frankly obnoxious to teach that we don't have to ask for forgiveness when we sin. One follower of one of these writers you mention carried it so far as to make a personal vow that he didn't ever have to say "I'm sorry" or "Please forgive me" when he hurt anyone because after all, his sins were forgiven at the Cross! (Need I elaborate on what that did to his marriage and family and workplace relationships???)

There is a difference between knowing we were forgiven at the cross, and experientially RECEIVING that forgiveness after we sin. It's like the difference between standing at the bottom of a waterfall, thirsty, with our cup upside down. . . and turning the cup right side up to receive the water.

Forgiveness was offered to everyone at the Cross, but we don't experience it until we confess our sins and receive it by faith (turning our cups right side up). The question of when we are truly forgiven depends on if you're looking at it from God's perspective or from ours. God-wise, we were forgiven before we even knew we needed forgiveness. Man-wise, we are forgiven when we receive it.

Also, receiving forgiveness afresh when we sin is what reconnects our broken relationship with God and with others. Confession and forgiveness are intrinsically related to fellowship and intimacy.

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“The Doctrine of the Trinity is Stupid”

I want to make it clear that I am not a Jehovah’s Witness, yet when considering this Nicean doctrine, it way amazes me how people can define the form of a God that Jesus confirmed that no one had seen at any time, neither have we seen his shape, what makes it rather annoying is that people seem to patronize you and in the process try and undermine one’s faith in a loving God. I have a question for you.

Is God subject to Jesus as Jesus is subject to God?

I believe that there is God and he reveals himself in these last days by his Word (Jesus), Hebrews 1:1-2. Where do you see Jesus sending God to do something or the Holy Spirit telling God to do something? Jesus said he could do nothing of self, Jesus confirmed that the Holy Spirit can do nothing of self, but all power belongs to God.

In the book of Corinthians 14:11-24, you would see that there is a time when the power that was given and I stress that word given to Jesus will be submitted on to God. I wish for once you Trinitarians will allow the Holy Spirit to reveal who God is by his Son and not through pulpits.

Frankly speaking if you have to have the Holy Spirit reveal all things you would find the doctrine is stupid, and hey if the Jehovah Witness is right in this instance so be it, even in the time of Christ our Lord he acknowledged the Pharisees to be right in at least one instance, it didn’t do anything to his pride, and I believe that that is the example we must follow.

Thank you for your response. I believe you have misunderstood the doctrine of the Trinity. Simply stated it is, There exists one God who has revealed Himself in three distinct persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We see throughout scripture the Father is called God. However, the Son is called God as well, John 20:28, Matthew 1:23, Titus 2:13 and many other passages. The Son is worshipped, has authority over areas only God has authority over. The Son shares in the attributes only God can have. The Holy Spirit is also called God, Acts 5:3-4, Romans 8, Genesis 1:2, Matthew 28:19. All three are equal in nature yet there is an economy among the persons of the Trinity. The Son submits to the Father and the the Holy Spirit submits to the Son. 1 Corinthians 11:3 states, "…the head of every woman is man…" Does that mean that women are inferior to men? By no means, men and women are equal in nature, yet there is an economy of headship and submission in marriage, where the man is head over his wife. In the same way God the Father is head over God the Son. They are equal in nature, but different in position as illustrated in marriage.

Regarding the fact that no one has seen God, you are quoting John 1:18. "No one has seen God, only the begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father." This verse means, no one has seen God as He really is in all His glory and splendor. There are several passages in the Bible where men have seen God. Exodus 24:9-11, Deuteronomy 34:10. However, they did not see Him in His full glory but in a veiled form that could be withstood. Same with Jesus, He is God the Son revealed in veiled form. Regarding this verse, the JW's have been dishonest in their translational work. The Greek reads, "*Theon oudies eoraken popote monogeneies theos*…" they translate it "No one has seen God at any time, the only begotten god… " Why do they use a little "g"? They do this to make it match their theology, but this is dishonest translation. They feel they can justify using a little "g" because *theos* has no article or is anartharous. However, in the beginning of the verse "God" or the Greek *Theon* is also anartharous, it has no article. So the

JW's should translate it "No one has seen god" but they do not. They use a capital "G." Once again, dishonest translation by the Watchtower. When you honestly look at this verse, it supports the deity of Christ, He is God the Son incarnate as stated in John 1:1. The translation properly reads, "No one has seen God at any time, the only begotten God (capital G) who is in the bosom of the Father has made him known".

Thanks for your inquiry.

Patrick Zukeran

Probe Ministries

"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

“God is a Child-Killer!”

This is about your mentioning that the bible says abortion is a sin. Then I would say that God should also not abort the unborn. But when he drowned the world, he aborted thousands of sinless unborn children.

So!!!!! don’t talk about abortion. (That is if you believe in the ark nonsense!)

We have over 5 billion people in this world, and when there will be more, there will be famine, and those people that listened to you will come after you, and demand an explanation. And then your home made GOD will not be there to help you. He never was there anyway. He is a figment of your imagination. Those people have been black mailed by your teachers and the teachers before them, but the time of reckoning is not that far off. You have leached enough monetarily of them. Your Churches are becoming emptier.

PS. In 2 Kings 2:23,24– he kills 42 Children by sending 2 she-bears to rip them apart, because they called an old man a baldhead. This has not a thing to do with abortion: But it shows that if there was a God like the Bible describes, He does not like children at all. I could give you many more text to this effect, but I had my say.

I can tell you are very angry. I don’t know what caused your anger, but whatever it was, I’m sorry.

Since you have arrived at the point of decided that there is no God, then it seems to be inappropriate and pointless to be angry at people who believe in Him. Because if there truly is no God, then the Bible is a man-made book of myths, and all the stories in it are meaningless. And if there is no God, then you have no basis for outrage at anything that anyone says about anything at all because there is no ultimate meaning or purpose in life. And if there is no meaning or purpose in life, why waste your time getting angry at other people’s false beliefs? You may as well rage at the fact that the sky is blue or that there are 24 hours in the day. None of it matters in the end anyway.

But I think underneath your insistence that there is no God, you probably know better, and He may have allowed something painful to happen for which you are angry at Him. I’m sorry for that.

And if nothing happened, you’ve lived a great and charmed life but you’re angry anyway, then I’m sorry for that too, because it’s sad to be angry for no reason. Uses lots of energy that could be used for other things.

Concerning the 2 Kings passage you mention, “children” is an unfortunate translation. It should really be translated “young men” like the majority of the other times this word appears in scripture. Their disrespectful taunt of God’s prophet incurred the discipline of God because He is holy and His prophet is holy, and treating God and His prophet with contempt is a very serious sin. God loves children, but He is also holier than we can really imagine with our puny little minds. I don’t know the answers to all the questions that bother you about God’s actions in the Bible, but I do know that He is bigger than our questions, and we don’t have all the facts that would allow us to fully understand why an immense and powerful and holy God

would do things that make us shake our heads and wonder about.

But I do know He loves us. Even when doing hurtful things, like drowning the world. Just like a cancer surgeon can be loving even when he's cutting into people's bodies to take out cancerous growths.

Thank you for writing.

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries

"Does Calvinism Make People into Choiceless Puppets?"

When I look at the doctrine of predestination from the Calvinistic perspective I seem to come to the same final conclusion. It appears to me that in the Calvinistic approach, man is only an observer. Which would mean that my actions, thoughts, hopes, dreams, relationships, etc., are all meaningless. I call man an observer because, according to Calvin, ALL is predetermined.

There is no "choice." There is double predestination. Life would end up being deterministic and fatalistic. I am merely a linear program executing my own destruction. What's the use in doing anything? To me love then becomes meaningless. More importantly, how do I know for sure that I am really one of the "chosen"? Since every part of my being is totally deprived, how do I know if I really believe what I need to believe since my intellect is deprived also? I have talked to some Calvinists about this. They seem to ignore the philosophical problems I pose and move on without ever

answering my questions. I get the old "That's the way it is," answer. It appears to me that if you follow Calvin's view to its logical extreme, man becomes only an observer who can affect nothing. My problem arises when I conclude that if this is the case, then God sends a person to Hell for sins that God determined and orchestrated for the observer to "commit." Why would God hold me responsible for a sin that He "programmed" me to commit? Perhaps I am misunderstanding Calvinism but this is the way I see it. Please correct me if I am mistaken. Thank you for you time. Sorry about the length of my question. I am in search of knowledge. I have changed my mind many times on this issue. HELP!

You ask a very important question. Unfortunately, it cannot be adequately answered in an e-mail (not by me, at any rate). I will attempt to sketch out a few lines of thought for your consideration, but let me also recommend a couple books that might help you think through some of these issues in a little more detail. On the side of what might be called "theistic determinism" you may want to look at Jonathan Edwards' *Freedom of the Will*. On the other hand, Norman Geisler's *Chosen but Free* presents a position which some might call "moderate Calvinism," insofar as he does not embrace all five points of Dortian Calvinism and argues for genuine, self-determining, human freedom and responsibility. There are also some good articles in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* on "Calvinism," "Predestination," and "Freedom, Free Will, and Determinism". In my response, I will simply try to set forth a few passages from the Bible which seem to shed some light on this difficult and controversial issue.

In the first place, there are certainly verses which teach that God "works all things after the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11). Without doubt, then, God is sovereign and is providentially guiding history to its predetermined end. But as W.S. Reid (himself a Calvinist) correctly observes in his article on "Predestination" in the *Evangelical Dictionary of*

Theology, “At this point the question arises of the possibility of individual freedom and responsibility if God is absolutely sovereign. How can these things be? Yet the Scriptures repeatedly assert both. Joseph’s remarks to his brothers and Peter’s statement concerning Christ’s crucifixion highlight this fact (Gen. 45:4ff.; Acts 2:23). Man, in carrying out God’s plan, even unintentionally, does so responsibly and freely” (871). This statement makes it plain that at least some Calvinists do indeed make room for a degree of genuine human freedom and responsibility, while at the same time affirming the full and unmitigated sovereignty of God. Although it may certainly be a mystery (at least from man’s perspective) how both of these things can be simultaneously true, I agree with Reid that the Bible does indeed “repeatedly assert both.”

But doesn’t the Fall of man affect human freedom? Indeed it does! Before the Fall, man’s will was perfectly free both to obey and disobey God. However, after the Fall the freedom to obey was lost (whether partially or completely need not concern us here). Nevertheless, through His gift of salvation (including both regeneration and sanctification), God is restoring this original freedom in His people (2 Cor. 3:16-18). In addition, however, it must also be kept in mind that even unregenerate men are acting freely when they sin. They freely CHOOSE to sin because their nature is now depraved, fallen and sinful. But when someone becomes a new creature in Christ, the freedom to do good and obey God is, to some degree, restored. And through the process of sanctification, God is progressively restoring this freedom in His children more and more.

Again, as Norman Geisler points out in his article on “Freedom, Free Will, and Determinism” in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, even fallen man retains a degree of genuine human freedom. This is taught in many passages of Scripture (e.g. Matt. 23:37; John 7:17; 1 Cor. 9:17; 1 Pet.

5:2; Philem. 14). Thus, even if it is not fully explicable (for man at any rate), the Bible clearly teaches both Divine Sovereignty and a degree of genuine human freedom and responsibility. Indeed, in some passages, both ideas appear virtually side by side. For instance, in Prov. 16:9 we read, “The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.” Passages such as this may teach that man has a measure of self-determination, while at the same time indicating that what man freely chooses is also (on some level) directed by God.

Finally, the Scriptures clearly indicate that God is graciously working in His people “both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). I don’t think that this work of God should be viewed as a coercion of our wills. Rather, it seems to me that it would be more properly understood as a persuading and empowering of our wills so that we freely choose to do what God wants us to do. We may not have chosen to do such things apart from this work of God in our lives, but it is nonetheless WE OURSELVES who choose them in response to this gracious work. In a similar way, Satan is described as “working in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2) with the result that fallen, unregenerate men “want to do the desires” of the devil (John 8:44). But of course even here such men freely choose to follow Satan in his disobedience and rebellion against God (even if unconsciously). In addition, one must also keep in mind that even Satan’s sin and rebellion against God is part of the plan and purposes of God (though freely chosen on Satan’s part). And while Satan can only carry out his malicious intentions to the extent that God permits (see Job 1-2 and 2 Cor. 12:7-9), they are nonetheless Satan’s (NOT God’s) malicious intentions.

Thus, the biblical position (as I see it) affirms BOTH Divine Sovereignty AND some degree of genuine human freedom and responsibility. There is, I will certainly grant, a mystery here, but (at least in my opinion) no contradiction. Man is

finite in his understanding and limited in his actions by time and space, but God is infinite in His understanding and not limited in His actions by time and space. It is therefore not unreasonable to think that what man may be incapable of comprehending (e.g. Divine Sovereignty and human freedom operating simultaneously and harmoniously) might nonetheless still be true. I therefore think that we are safest to stick closely to the express affirmations of Scripture, even if we cannot formulate a mathematically precise explanation of the relationship between Divine Sovereignty and human freedom. The Scriptures seem to affirm both and we must be content with this. This, at any rate, is my opinion on the matter.

Wishing you God's richest blessings!

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

"Did Christ's Sinlessness Begin Only After His Baptism?"

I recently heard someone state that Jesus did what all children do: lie, steal, etc. When I confronted him on this, he stated that the sinless life of Christ didn't begin until after His baptism. Is there a particular individual (i.e., Aquinas, etc) or a particular group that espoused this belief? I want to bring this up with the person again.

Thanks for your question. It's difficult to know where this

person got this information. They obviously didn't get it from any of our canonical gospels (or any other canonical text). It could be that this person imbibed such ideas from reading something like the (fictional) Infancy Gospel of Thomas—which does portray the young Jesus as quite mischievous, temperamental, and even deadly! But no scholar of any persuasion regards this gospel as giving us historically reliable information about the young Jesus.

Bottom line: the person who made this statement needs to give some account of how they know this. Where did they get this information? How reliable is their source of information? Why do they believe their view is correct? If they don't have good grounds for saying or believing such things (and they most certainly don't), then they need to be shown the error of their ways. The Bible affirms that Jesus was without sin (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:5; Heb. 4:15; etc.). It does not say that He was sinless from His baptism on.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

"How Did the Church Recognize Which Books Were Inspired by God?"

Please elaborate on this statement from your article on *The Da Vinci Code*: "…the Canon gradually took shape as the church recognized and embraced those books that were inspired by God."

How did the church "recognize" which books were inspired by God? Did the church, therefore, consider other texts not to be "inspired by God"? Can you suggest any material that refers to the above?

Thank you for your thoughtful question and for visiting our web site.

Below is a document that I composed from information found in F. F. Bruce's book *The Canon.* I highly recommend his work if you are interested in digging deeper into the subject of canonicity.

Other works were used by the early church (Didache and Shepherd of Hermas) but were not equated to scripture. Later writings were weighed against the Apostles' teachings and rejected or read accordingly.

Sincerely,

Don Closson

The Canon

From *The Canon of Scripture* by F. F. Bruce

"That the New Testament consists of the twenty-seven books which have been recognized as belonging to it since the fourth century is not a value judgment; it is a statement of fact. Individuals or communities may consider that it is too restricted or too comprehensive; but their opinion does not affect the identity of the canon. The canon is not going to be diminished or increased because of what they think or say: it is a literary, historical and theological datum."{1}

Bruce defines the criteria for canonicity in chapter 21 of his book; he includes the following items:

Apostolic Authority – All of the NT writings contained a degree of apostolic authority. This could be established by direct apostolic appointment (those chosen directly by Jesus), writing on behalf of one with apostolic authority (Mark writing on behalf of Peter), or being a member of Jesus' family (James & Jude). The *Acts of Paul*, which was written in the middle of the second century, was orthodox but the author had no apostolic authority and it was a work of fiction. Bruce also points out that any book known to be pseudonymous [written by a person other than the attributed author] would not have been included in the canon.

Antiquity – The writing must belong to the apostolic age. Anything written later, although useful and theologically accurate (Shepherd of Hermas) would not be considered canonical. "Writings of a later date, whatever their merit, could not be included among the apostolic or canonical books."{2}

Orthodoxy – Any writing considered to be part of the canon must be theologically consistent with the apostolic faith. This faith rested upon the undisputed apostolic writings and the teachings established in those churches founded by the apostles. The Bishop of Antioch (199 AD) named Serapion had *The Gospel of Peter* removed from books that were read in the church of Rhossus when he discovered that it included a docetic (heretical) view of Christ. Docetism and Gnosticism were two views of Christ that competed with the orthodox apostolic teachings in the early church.

Catholicity – Only those works that were received by the greater part of the catholic or universal church could be acknowledged as canon. This might be combined with the notion of traditional use. Bruce writes, "If any church leader came along in the third or fourth century with a previously unknown book, recommending it as genuinely apostolic, he would have found great difficulty in gaining acceptance for it: his fellow Christians would simply have

said, ‘But no one has ever heard of it!'”{3}

Inspiration – Canonicity and inspiration have been closely connected in the minds of Christians since the early days of the church. Even when apostolic authority was questioned (as with Mark and Luke) works were accepted because they were considered authoritative (inspired, God breathed) and trustworthy witnesses to the saving events of Christ’s ministry.

Notes

1. F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), p. 250.

2. Ibid., p. 259.

3. Ibid., p. 263.

Edited by Don Closson, Probe Ministries, 2004

See related posts for more relevant articles and answers to questions.