

# **“Why Did Jesus Seem to Want Parables To Obscure His Message?”**

In Matt 13:10 the disciples ask Jesus why he spoke to the people in parables. It seemed that His answer was Him not wanting them to understand and in doing so being saved. If God desires for everyone to be saved and gave His most valuable treasure (His Son), why did He not reveal His Word to all so that they would come and be healed and saved?

Great question! God does indeed want all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). In Matt. 13:10-17 Jesus is referring to God's judgment on willful unbelief. The religious leaders had just accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons (Matt. 12:24). People were willfully rejecting God's revelation in the person, teachings, and deeds of Jesus. Notice that Jesus says that in them Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled (Matt. 13:14). Notice, further, what this prophecy says in Matt. 13:15. They have willfully “closed their eyes” lest they should see, understand, repent and be forgiven.

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and be forgiven.

Hope this helps. Shalom in Christ, Michael Gleghorn

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## There is a God

*In his 2008 article, Dr. Michael Gleghorn examines some of the arguments and evidence that led Antony Flew, the world's most notorious atheist, to change his mind about God. Dr. Flew died in April 2010. To our knowledge, he never entered into a saving faith in Jesus Christ. That is a point of great sorrow for us at Probe.*

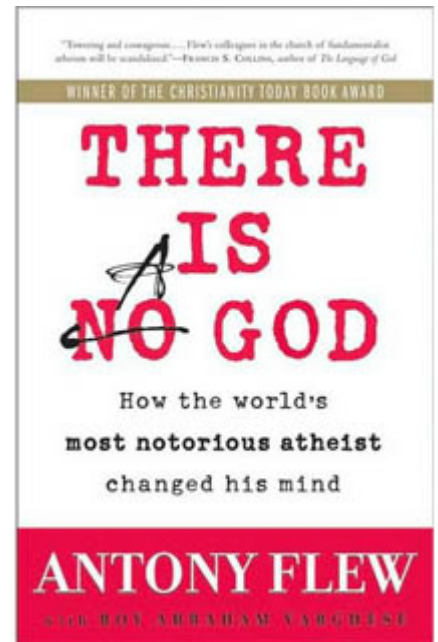
### A Much-Maligned Convert



I remember how astonished I was when I first heard the news of his “conversion.” In 2004, longtime British atheist philosopher Antony Flew publicly announced that he now believed in God! I could hardly believe it. Professor Flew had been an atheist for the greater part of his life and, until 2004, his entire academic career. As the “author of over thirty professional philosophical works,” he “helped set the agenda for atheism for half a century.”[\[1\]](#) But then, in 2004, at the age of eighty-one, he changed his mind!

As one might expect, the reaction to Flew's announcement varied widely. Theists naturally welcomed the news that one of the most important atheistic philosophers of the past century had come to believe in God. Skeptics and atheists, on the other hand, made little effort to conceal their contempt. Richard Dawkins characterized Flew's conversion as a kind of apostasy from the atheistic faith and implied that his "old age" likely had something to do with it.[\[2\]](#) Others suggested that the

elderly Flew was trying to hedge his bets, fearful of the negative reception he might have in the afterlife. And Mark Oppenheimer, in an article for *The New York Times*, argued that Flew had been exploited by Christians and that he hadn't even written the recent book that tells the story of his "conversion."[\[3\]](#) That book, *There Is A God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind*, is the subject of this article.



By his own admission, the eighty-four-year-old Flew suffers from "nominal aphasia" and has difficulty recalling names. Nevertheless, it's quite unfair to insinuate that his belief in God is due to something like senility. He may have problems with his short-term memory, but he's still capable of explaining what he believes and why. In the introduction to his book he responds to the charge that he now believes in God because of what might await him in the afterlife by pointing out that he doesn't even believe in an afterlife! "I do not think of myself 'surviving' death," he explains.[\[4\]](#) The charge that Flew didn't actually write his book is also misleading. While it's true that he didn't *physically* type the words, the *content* was based upon his previous writings, as well as personal correspondence and interviews with Mr. Varghese. In other words, the *ideas* in the book accurately represent the

views of Professor Flew, even if he didn't type the text. With that in mind, let's now take a closer look at some of the arguments and evidence that led "the world's most notorious atheist" to change his mind about God.

## Did Something Come from Nothing?

In a chapter entitled "Did Something Come From Nothing?" Flew addresses issues surrounding the origin of the universe. Is the universe eternal, or did it have a beginning? And if it had a beginning, then how should we account for it?

Flew observes that in his book *The Presumption of Atheism*, which was written while he was still an atheist, he had argued that "we must take the universe itself and its most fundamental laws as themselves ultimate." [\[5\]](#) He simply didn't see any reason to think that the universe pointed to some "transcendent reality" beyond itself.[\[6\]](#) After all, if the universe has always existed, then there may simply be no point in looking for any explanation why.

However, as the Big Bang model of the origin of the universe became increasingly well-established among contemporary cosmologists, Flew began to reconsider the matter. That's because the Big Bang theory implies that the universe is not eternal, but that it rather had a beginning. And as Flew observes, "If the universe had a beginning, it became entirely sensible, almost inevitable, to ask what produced this beginning."[\[7\]](#)

Of course, many scientists and philosophers felt quite uncomfortable about what a universe with a beginning might imply about the existence of God. In order to avoid the absolute beginning of the universe, an event which seems to smack of some sort of supernatural creation, they proposed a variety of models that were consistent with the notion that the universe had existed forever. Unfortunately, all these

models essentially suffer from the same problem. When carefully examined, it turns out that they can't avoid the absolute beginning of the universe. Thus, according to Stephen Hawking, "Almost everyone now believes that the universe, and *time itself*, had a beginning at the Big Bang."[\[8\]](#)

Reflecting upon his initial encounter with the Big Bang theory while he was still an atheist, Flew writes, "it seemed to me the theory made a big difference because it suggested that the universe had a beginning and that the first sentence in Genesis ('In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth') was related to an event in the universe."[\[9\]](#) He concludes his discussion by noting that "the universe is something that begs an explanation."[\[10\]](#) He now believes that the best explanation is to be found in a supernatural creative act of God. Interestingly enough, this view finds dramatic confirmation in the exquisite "fine-tuning" of our universe which allows for the existence of intelligent life.

## **Did the Universe Know We Were Coming?**

Flew observes that "the laws of nature seem to have been crafted so as to move the universe toward the emergence and sustenance of life."[\[11\]](#) Just how carefully crafted are these laws? According to British physicist Paul Davies, even exceedingly small changes in either the gravitational or electromagnetic force "would have spelled disaster for stars like the sun, thereby precluding the existence of planets."[\[12\]](#) Needless to say, without planets you and I wouldn't be here to marvel at how incredibly fine-tuned these constants are. The existence of complex, intelligent life depends on these fundamental constants having been fine-tuned with a precision that virtually "defies human comprehension."[\[13\]](#)

So how is the observed fine-tuning to be explained? Flew notes that most scholars opt either for divine design or for what

might be called the “multiverse” hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, our universe is just one of many others, “with the difference that ours happened to have the right conditions for life.”[\[14\]](#)

So which of these two theories best explains the amazing fine-tuning of our universe? Flew correctly observes that “there is currently no evidence in support of a multiverse. It remains a speculative idea.”[\[15\]](#) The fact that multiple universes are logically *possible* does absolutely nothing to prove that they *actually* exist. Indeed, the multiverse hypothesis appears to be at odds with the widely recognized principle of Ockham’s razor. This principle says that when we’re confronted with two explanations of the same thing, we “should prefer the one that is simpler, that is, the one that uses the fewest number of entities . . . to explain the thing in question.”[\[16\]](#)

Now clearly in the case before us, the theory of divine design, which posits only *one* entity to explain the observed fine-tuning of our universe, is much simpler than the multiverse hypothesis, which posits a potentially *infinite* number of entities to explain the same thing! The philosopher Richard Swinburne likely had Ockham’s razor in mind when he wrote, “It is crazy to postulate a trillion (causally unconnected) universes to explain the features of one universe, when postulating one entity (God) will do the job.”[\[17\]](#)

The observed fine-tuning of our universe is one more reason why Antony Flew now believes there is a God. And as we’ll see next, the mystery of life’s origin is yet another.

## How Did Life Go Live?

One of the reasons consistently cited by Flew for changing his mind about the existence of God has to do with the almost insuperable difficulties facing the various naturalistic

theories of the origin of life. In particular, Flew observes, there is a fundamental philosophical question that has not been answered, namely, "How can a universe of mindless matter produce beings with intrinsic ends, self-replication capabilities, and 'coded chemistry'?"[{18}](#)

When considering the origin of life from non-living matter, it's crucially important to note a fundamental difference between the two. "Living matter possesses an inherent . . . end-centered organization that is nowhere present in the matter that preceded it."[{19}](#) For example, lifeless rocks do not give evidence of goal-directed behavior, but living creatures do. Among the various goals one might list, living beings seek to preserve and reproduce themselves.

This leads naturally to the second difficulty, namely, providing a purely naturalistic account of the origin of organisms that are able to reproduce themselves. As philosopher David Conway points out, without this ability "it would not have been possible for different species to emerge through random mutation and natural selection." Since different species can't emerge from organisms that can't reproduce themselves, one can't claim that self-reproduction emerged through the evolutionary process. Conway concludes that such difficulties "provide us with reason for doubting that it is possible to account for existent life-forms . . . without recourse to design."[{20}](#)

The final difficulty Flew raises concerns a purely naturalistic origin of "coded chemistry." Scientists have discovered that the genetic code functions exactly like a language.[{21}](#) But as the mathematician David Berlinski asks, "Can the origins of a system of coded chemistry be explained in a way that makes no appeal whatever to the kinds of facts that we otherwise invoke to explain codes and languages?"[{22}](#) In other words, if every other code and language we're aware of results from intelligence, then why think the genetic code is any different? As physicist Paul Davies muses, "The problem

of how meaningful . . . information can emerge spontaneously from a collection of mindless molecules subject to blind and purposeless forces presents a deep conceptual challenge.”{23}

Ultimately, such challenges became too much for Flew. He concludes his discussion of these difficulties by noting, “The only satisfactory explanation for the origin of such ‘end-directed, self-replicating’ life as we see on earth is an infinitely intelligent Mind.”{24}

## **The Self-Revelation of God in Human History**

In a fascinating appendix to his book, Flew has a dialogue with prominent New Testament scholar N.T. Wright about Jesus. Although Flew is not a Christian and continues to be skeptical about the claims for Jesus’ bodily resurrection, he nonetheless asserts that this claim “is more impressive than any by the religious competition.”{25} But why is this? And what sort of evidence is there for the resurrection of Jesus? This is one of the questions to which N.T. Wright responds in his dialogue with Flew.

Although we can only scratch the surface of this discussion, Wright makes two points that are especially worth mentioning: the historicity of the empty tomb and the post-mortem appearances of Jesus. But why think these events actually happened as the Gospels claim? Because, says Wright, if the tomb were empty, but there were no appearances, everyone would have concluded that the tomb had been robbed. “They would never have talked about resurrection, if all that had happened was an empty tomb.”{26}

On the other hand, suppose the disciples saw appearances of Jesus after His crucifixion. Would this have convinced them of His resurrection if His tomb were not empty? No, says Wright. The disciples knew all about “hallucinations and ghosts and



visions. Ancient literature—Jewish and pagan alike—is full of such things.”{27} So long as Jesus’ body was still in the tomb, the disciples would never have believed, much less publicly proclaimed, that He had been raised from the dead. This would have struck them as self-evidently absurd. For these and other reasons, Wright concludes that the empty tomb and appearances of Jesus are historical facts that need to be reckoned with. The question then becomes, “How does one account for these facts? What is the best explanation?”

Wright concludes that, as a historian, the best explanation is that “Jesus really was raised from the dead,” just as the disciples proclaimed. This is clearly a *sufficient* explanation of Jesus’ empty tomb and post-mortem appearances. But Wright goes even further. “Having examined all the other possible hypotheses,” he writes, “I think it’s also a *necessary* explanation.”{28}

How does Flew respond to this claim? Asking whether divine revelation in history is really possible, he notes that “you cannot limit the possibilities of omnipotence except to produce the logically impossible. Everything else is open to omnipotence.”{29} Flew has indeed come a long way from his former atheist views. For those of us who are Christians, we can pray that he might come further still.

## Notes

1. Roy Abraham Varghese, preface to Antony Flew, *There Is A God: How the World’s Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), vii.
2. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Bantam, 2006), 82; cited in Varghese, preface to *There Is A God*, xviii-xix.
3. Mark Oppenheimer, “The Turning of an Atheist,” *The New York Times*, November 4, 2007, <http://tinyurl.com/2lvkaj>.
4. Flew, *There Is A God*, 2.
5. Ibid., 134.
6. Ibid., 135.

7. Ibid., 136.
8. Stephen Hawking and Roger Penrose, *The Nature of Space and Time, The Isaac Newton Institute Series of Lectures* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 20; cited in William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 478.
9. Flew, *There Is A God*, 136.
10. Ibid., 145.
11. Ibid., 114.
12. Craig and Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations*, 483.
13.  
[www.reasonablefaith.org/podcasts/defenders-podcast-series-2/s2-excursus-on-natural-theology/existence-of-god-part-14](http://www.reasonablefaith.org/podcasts/defenders-podcast-series-2/s2-excursus-on-natural-theology/existence-of-god-part-14)
14. Flew, *There Is a God*, 115.
15. Ibid., 119.
16. Craig and Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations*, 244.
17. Richard Swinburne, "Design Defended," *Think* (Spring 2004), 17; cited in Flew, *There Is A God*, 119.
18. Flew, *There Is A God*, 124.
19. Ibid.
20. David Conway, *The Rediscovery of Wisdom* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 125; cited in Flew, *There Is A God*, 126.
21. Walter L. Bradley and Charles B. Thaxton, "Information and the Origin of Life," in *The Creation Hypothesis: Scientific Evidence for an Intelligent Designer*, ed. J. P. Moreland (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 205.
22. David Berlinski, "On the Origins of Life," *Commentary* (February 2006): 30-31; cited in Flew, *There Is A God*, 127.
23. Paul Davies, "The Origin of Life II: How Did It Begin?" [tinyurl.com/yq4geu](http://tinyurl.com/yq4geu); cited in Flew, *There Is A God*, 129.
24. Flew, *There Is A God*, 132.
25. Ibid., 187.
26. N.T. Wright, "The Self-Revelation of God in Human History: A Dialogue on Jesus with N.T. Wright," in Flew, *There Is A God*, 210.
27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., 212-13.

29. Flew, *There Is A God*, 213.

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## **“If Judged at Death, Why Judged Later?”**

I found your article on [what happens at death](#). My question is, if we are judged at death immediately, why do we say the in the creeds that at the second coming Jesus will judge the quick (living) and the dead since the dead have already been judged? Anxious to hear back from you. Thanks.

Thanks for your letter. There is what some have called a “judgment of faith” which takes place immediately at death and a “judgment of works” which takes place at some time afterward.

The “judgment of faith” may be in view in Hebrews 9:27. A good biblical example is the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. Notice that the rich man finds himself in “Hades” after death, while Lazarus is in Paradise. This judgment is based on one’s relationship with the Lord and has nothing to do with works per se.

However, the Bible also speaks of a “judgment of works.” For unbelievers, this judgment will apparently take place just prior to the creation of the new heavens and new earth (see Rev. 20:11 – 21:1). Notice that even death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire at this time (Rev. 20:14). In other words, “Hades” (where the rich man went at death) is not to be equated with the lake of fire (which is where unbelievers will

spend eternity after the Great White Throne judgment).

Believers will also experience a “judgment of works” at the judgment seat of Christ (see 1 Cor. 3:10-15). This judgment does not determine whether the person is saved or not, for this judgment only includes those who are already saved. It rather determines whether one will receive eternal rewards or not. Apparently, some believers will not receive any rewards (1 Cor. 3:15). Theologians do not agree on precisely when this judgment will take place. But most believe that it follows the initial “judgment of faith” at some later time. It certainly occurs before the creation of the new heavens and new earth (where resurrected believers will spend eternity in joyful fellowship with God and one another).

Hope this helps clear up some of the confusion.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

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## **“I’m Doubting the Truth of the Bible and God’s Existence”**

I was wondering about some matters pertaining to truth, specifically the truth of the Bible and existence of God. I’ve grown up in Arkansas in the bible belt my entire life and of course of been surrounded by churches, christianity, and an unquestioning world view that God exists and the bible is the truth.

Recently, I've started questioning reality and my perception of the world. I know it is dangerous to get caught up in humanly philosophies and crap like that, but a lot of things don't make sense to me about God. I'm trying to look at truth from all perspectives so I've been reading this book called *The God Delusion*. I know you might say I'm crazy and I'm going to be completely disillusioned by some stupid science and philosophy, but some of what it says doesn't seem to be completely crazy. Right now, specifically I'm struggling with contradictions that the Bible seems to present. I'm wondering whether all the Gospels are in agreement as to the birth of Jesus. I'm sure there are several other contradictions that atheists would point out also. If you could address some of those and give me another viewpoint.

Thanks for your letter. There's nothing wrong with wanting to think carefully about what you believe and why. There's also nothing wrong with reading Dawkins' book, *The God Delusion*—although many serious scholars don't think very highly of his arguments or condescending attitude. For a good critique of Dawkins' book, you may want to also read [The Dawkins Delusion](#) by Alister E. McGrath. It would offer an informed rebuttal of many of Dawkins' claims by a world-class scholar with doctoral degrees in both molecular biology and theology.

I deal with alleged contradictions in the infancy narratives in [my article on the virgin birth](#) here on the Probe Web site. A more in-depth article can be found here: [www.tektonics.org/af/birthnarr.php](http://www.tektonics.org/af/birthnarr.php).

Two other sites you should be familiar with are [Bible.org](http://Bible.org) and [ReasonableFaith.org](http://ReasonableFaith.org). The latter site is that of Christian philosopher/theologian William Lane Craig. I would highly recommend his articles on the existence of God, the historicity of Jesus, etc. Both sites have lots of great resources.

Wishing you all the best in your studies!

Michael Gleghorn

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## **“What Resources Can Help Me Witness to Hindus?”**

Please could you send me details about how to share my Christian faith with Hindu friends and any literature that I could use with them. At present I am running a large parent toddler group here in the UK [United Kingdom] and many Indian Hindus are coming and I need some good literature and advice on how to share Jesus with them. If you can help me please reply.

Thanks for your letter. One of the most useful resources I've found for this purpose is [\*The Compact Guide to World Religions\*](#). This book not only includes chapters on the history and doctrine of various religions (including Hinduism), but it also includes helpful suggestions on how to share the gospel with such people.

Helpful articles on the Probe site include “[Hinduism](#)” and “[Do All Roads Lead to God?](#)”

Of course, by far the most important thing you can do is pray for these people, show them the love of Christ, and offer them peace and rest in their hearts through the forgiveness of sins by faith in Christ Jesus.

Hope these resources are helpful to you. Blessings to you in your ministry!

Michael Gleghorn

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# **“What Sources Can Shed Light on the Bible Since It’s Not Authoritative?”**

I don’t think I can truly look at the bible and tell my children it is the authority for them.

How can I cross reference historical documents and other sources for them, in addition to the bible, to present my religious faith to them?

I truly cannot look at the bible, a man made document, as “It.” Yet, I know one can believe without seeing it as the “end all.” It is wrong to tell my children to take all of it at face value. Yet, we know it presents the truth of our faith. I don’t want them to take it out of its historical context.

Thanks for your letter. Although we at Probe would hold the view that the Bible is a divinely-inspired text and historically accurate in all its details in the original manuscripts, nevertheless, if you want to educate your children about the Bible and be sensitive to its historical context, etc., then one of the best ways to do this is by reading good, scholarly commentaries on the particular book of the Bible that you’re currently studying.

In addition to commentaries, of course, there are excellent books dealing with Old and New Testament backgrounds. These

books would discuss customs, important historical persons and events, etc., that really make the biblical text come alive.

For example, here is a link to some books on [Old Testament Backgrounds](#) and here is one for [New Testament Backgrounds](#).

Finally, a very helpful site, with hundreds of articles on all sorts of biblical and theological topics is [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org) . For example, here is a list of topics they have articles on: .

I hope this information is helpful to you and your family in studying the Bible!

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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## **“Woman Caught in Adultery Story Not Found in Early Manuscripts”**

**I’m interested in John 8:1-11. The notes in my NIV Bible say that these verses are not found in early manuscripts, and I was wondering what your thoughts are on this account of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery.**

Yes; you’re correct. The earliest and best manuscripts do not contain this story. It was almost certainly not an original part of John’s Gospel. Could it still be historical, though? Perhaps. It would be an unusual instance of a story passed down orally (and later included in John’s Gospel) that



actually goes back to Jesus. Of course, I don't think we can be dogmatic on this point. At most, I think we can say simply that it may be historical.

W. Hall Harris has a good discussion of this passage at [Bible.org](http://Bible.org).

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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## **“My Friend Believes Jesus’ Miracles Were All Done by Mind Power”**

I just had a conversation with a friend about his spiritual beliefs. I was talking about Jesus and my friend said that the miracles He performed were from His own mind power. That he had a higher control over his brain than other people. Jesus attributed his miracles to God's power but that's only because he didn't understand where the power came from.

He generally believes that there is a lot of power in oneself and if one will only utilize it and become self actualized one can become god-like.

I responded by talking about my belief in the fall and its effect on humanity. How man is hopelessly flawed and incomplete without Christ. I noted how man's efforts and science have failed to deliver. The world is still wrought with disease and suffering. I'm trying to be brief so I'll not

**go into the rest of the conversation. How would you have responded and do you have any suggestions on what to bring up the next time we talk about that kind of thing?**

It sounds like you're doing a great job talking with your friend! Here are a few thoughts: It might be worth asking your friend, "If Jesus had such incredible control over His brain, including the ability to perform miracles by the sheer power of His mind, then how is it that He was deluded about where His power actually came from?" I would challenge your friend, "If Jesus was so superior to you in mental power and abilities, then why should you think that you know more about where His power came from than He did?" It's a question that deserves a careful answer, I should think.

More generally, however, I would ask your friend why anyone should believe his rather original spin about where Jesus' power came from? Why does he think he's correct? What evidence supports his opinion? Further, why does he reject what the New Testament says about Jesus? Shouldn't the original witnesses to these events have been in a better position to judge what happened than he is? What does he do with the evidence for the [historical reliability of the Gospels](#), etc.?

Finally, if Jesus really died on the cross (which no serious scholar disputes) then how can your friend explain Jesus' greatest recorded miracle—His resurrection from the dead? If Jesus was dead, then how could He have used His brain to accomplish the miracle? If your friend doubts that Jesus rose from the dead, then challenge him to investigate the evidence for himself by reading some good books and articles on the subject. Challenge him to read Lee Strobel's book, *The Case for Christ*. Or challenge him to read some of William Lane Craig's work on the historicity of the resurrection. Log onto this site and register for free, then search for the following [www.reasonablefaith.org](http://www.reasonablefaith.org):

- *Article: The Resurrection of Jesus*

- *Section: Scholarly Articles/The Historical Jesus (numerous relevant articles).*
- *Audio-Visuals Page and Debates Page: Dr. Craig also has audio and visual stuff as well as debate transcripts regarding the resurrection here*

I have tried to give you some helpful information here. But the most important thing is to share this information with genuine love, compassion and respect. No one likes an intellectual bully. So please be sensitive to the Spirit's guidance.

Hope this helps.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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## **“Can the Truly Saved Commit Such Sins as Adultery and Murder?”**

I wanted to ask if a truly saved person can fall into the sin of fornication, adultery or murder... Wouldn't the Holy Spirit deal with a truly saved person if he/she is tempted? Please explain in detail. Thanks and God bless you!

Yes, a truly saved person can indeed fall prey to such sins. A good example is King David. He was truly saved and yet committed the grievous sins of adultery (2 Samuel 11:2-5) and

murder (2 Samuel 11:6-17). Because of his sins, God sent Nathan the prophet to rebuke David and he repented (2 Samuel 12:1-13). Nathan told David that the Lord had taken away his sin, but that there would still be negative consequences for it (2 Samuel 12:13-14).

It's important to realize that, like believers today, David was indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We know this because, in Psalm 51 (David's psalm of repentance), He prays that the Lord will not take His Holy Spirit away from him (see v. 11). Of course, today believers are permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17), but this was not so in David's day. Hence, David's request in Psalm 51:11.

Of course, the Holy Spirit will certainly convict us when we sin and it is God's desire that we so depend on the Holy Spirit that we do not sin (Galatians 5:16-26). Furthermore, God always provides a way of escape when we are tempted (1 Cor. 10:13). Thus, if we avail ourselves of God's provision, and rely on the Holy Spirit, we can resist our fleshly desires. We need not fall into such sins as fornication, adultery or murder. And we need to be ever mindful, and appropriately fearful, of future judgment (2 Cor. 5:11). But if we do sin, we have an advocate who pleads the blood of Christ on our behalf (1 John 2:1).

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

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# “Body Building”: Edifying Thoughts about Our Bodies

## Why Should I Care About This?

Our culture is obsessed with the human body. Have you turned on the television or stood in the supermarket checkout line recently? Images and information about the human body bombard our senses from almost every direction. And what we believe about the body can make a huge difference for our daily life, and for the life beyond! That’s why we need to think carefully about a Christian view of the body. For when our ideas about the body go wrong, a lot of related Christian beliefs can also be affected.



For example, in the early centuries of the Christian church there were some religious groups called Gnostics. Their name derived from the Greek term *gnosis* which means “knowledge,” because they thought that salvation came through secret knowledge. In their view, reality consisted of two primary components: matter (which was evil) and spirit (which was good).[\[1\]](#) Since matter was evil, the human body was likewise viewed as “intrinsically degenerate.”[\[2\]](#)

The Gnostics’ negative beliefs about the human body influenced their thinking in other areas as well. Their ideas about the incarnation, the afterlife, and human sexuality, were all affected. Consider the incarnation. Christians believe that God the Son became a real human being with a real human body. But this view was repulsive to some of the Gnostics. While some believed that the divine Christ temporarily assumed a human body, they did not think this state was permanent. And

others denied that Jesus had a physical body at all. They believed that Jesus only *appeared* to be human.<sup>{3}</sup> In reality, he was a completely spiritual being. This was especially true after his resurrection, which Gnostics generally held to be a purely spiritual (and not physical) event.<sup>{4}</sup>

The Gnostic view of the afterlife was similar. After death, Gnostics believed, they would be reunited with God in the spiritual realm. Unlike Christians, they had no desire for the resurrection of the body. The body was a prison from which they would gratefully escape at death.

Consider finally their views about human sexuality. Although some Gnostics may have lived a sexually immoral lifestyle, the majority seem to have rather been ascetics.<sup>{5}</sup> They treated the body harshly and rejected sexual activity and procreation as earthly, physical, and unspiritual. Such activities kept one in bondage to this evil material world.

Unfortunately, these Gnostic beliefs about the body influenced Christianity to some degree. But if we look at what the Bible teaches, what we find is much more interesting and exciting.

## **The Goodness of the Human Body**

What do you believe about your body? Is it something good—or evil?

In striking contrast to the Gnostics, who believed both the material world and human body were intrinsically evil, the biblical writers present a positive conception of both.

The first verse of Genesis declares, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). A few verses later we learn that God created human beings in His image and likeness (Gen. 1:26-27). And at the end of chapter one we’re told that everything God made “was very good” (Gen. 1:31). So unlike the Gnostics, who believed the material world was the

work of an evil, inferior deity, the biblical writers viewed the physical universe and human body as part of the good creative work of the one true God.

Moreover, in the biblical view humanity occupies a very special place in the created order. Having been made in God's image, men and women are viewed as the crown of creation. But what does it mean to say that we are made in God's image? As one might expect, this is a question that has been given extensive consideration throughout the history of the church.

On the one hand, we probably shouldn't think of the divine image primarily in *physical* terms, for God is a *spiritual* being. Still, it's probably also a mistake to think that our bodies aren't *in any sense* made in God's image. Genesis 1:27 says that God created man in His image. Reflecting on this statement, some scholars have noted that it's "not some part of a human or some faculty of a human, but a human in his or her wholeness [that] is the image of God. The biblical concept is not that the image is *in* man and woman, but that man and woman *are* the image of God." [\[6\]](#) Since God created man in His image as an embodied personal being, it seems quite natural to suppose that the material (as well as immaterial) aspects of our being are *both* included in what it means to be made in God's image.

In Genesis 2 we have a more detailed account of the creation of man and woman. In verse 7 we read that "the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." This verse indicates that there are both material and immaterial components of man's being—and each *in some sense* bears God's image. This is why in the Christian view human beings have inherent worth and dignity. It's also why in contrast to the Gnostics we believe in the goodness of the human body.

# The Importance of the Incarnation

Did you know that your beliefs about the human body can affect your view of Jesus and why He came? As we've seen, the biblical writers saw the human body as God's good creation (Gen. 1-2). Naturally enough, such radically different views of the body influenced how Gnostics and Christians understood the doctrine of the incarnation as well.

The term "incarnation" means "'to enter into or become flesh.' It refers to the Christian doctrine that the pre-existent Son of God became man in Jesus."[\[7\]](#) Our first hint that something like this would happen comes shortly after man's fall into sin. In Genesis 3:15 God tells the serpent, the agent of temptation in the story, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel." The verse promises a coming Champion or Deliverer, who would be born of a woman, and who would deliver the decisive death-blow to Satan. Later we learn that this Deliverer, the Lord Jesus Christ, redeems humanity from the tragic consequences of sin and death by giving His own life as a substitute in our place (1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10). The death of God's Son for the sins of the world was possible because of the incarnation. By becoming a real man, with a real body, He experienced a real death on the cross.

One of the clearest statements of the incarnation is found in the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word . . . and the Word was God . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us" (1:1, 14). This Word made flesh, the Lord Jesus Christ, told His followers that He had come "to give His life a ransom for many" (Mk. 10:45). While Gnostics generally regarded the death of Jesus as irrelevant for salvation, Christians see it as absolutely essential.

In Revelation 5:9 a song is sung in praise of Christ, who through His death "purchased men for God from every tribe and



language and people and nation.” In the early church, some theologians said that what Christ did not assume, neither did He redeem. They meant that if Christ did not really have a human body, then neither did He redeem our bodies. This is why the incarnation is so important. By becoming fully human and dying for our sins, Christ secured the complete redemption of all who put their trust in Him.

## Human Sexuality

Those unfamiliar with the Bible might be surprised to learn how much it has to say about sex. And what it says is neither prudish nor out of date. On the contrary, its counsel is both supremely wise and eminently practical. [\[8\]](#)

In fact, unlike the ancient Gnostics, the Bible has a very positive view of human sexuality. An entire book of the Bible, the Song of Solomon, is largely devoted to extolling the beauty and wonder of sexual love within the God-ordained covenant of marriage. Sex was God’s idea and is rooted in His original creation of man and woman as sexual beings (Gen. 1:27). While one of God’s purposes in creating us this way was for procreation (Gen. 1:28), it certainly wasn’t His only purpose. God also intended sex to be a pleasurable and meaningful expression of intimacy and love between husband and wife (Prov. 5:18-19).

According to Jesus, the biblical ideal of marriage is a lifelong, exclusive commitment of one man to one woman (Mk. 10:2-9). Citing the Genesis creation account He says, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh” (Mk. 10:7-8; cf. Gen. 2:24). As one writer has observed, “Here we have a blueprint for human sexual love: through the sexual act the man and woman have a wonderful new kind of intimacy. This is called being ‘one flesh,’ and it is designed to be exclusive and faithful.” [\[9\]](#)

Unfortunately, man's fall into sin brought about the misuse and abuse of God's good gift. And as one might expect, the Bible doesn't shy away from addressing such things. Essentially, the biblical view is that sex is to be fully enjoyed as a wonderful gift from God, but *only* within the sacred bonds of marriage between one man and one woman. Every other kind of sexual activity is lumped into the category of "sexual immorality." And this we are told to flee, for as Paul told the Corinthians, "he who sins sexually sins against his own body" (1 Cor. 6:18).

But Paul then went even further. He called the believer's body "a temple of the Holy Spirit." He said that Christians have been "bought at a price" and should "honor God" with their bodies (1 Cor. 6:19-20). This reveals something of the value which God places upon the human body. And He encourages us to do the same.

## **Bodily Death and Resurrection**

Did you know that your view of the human body affects your view of eternity?

Throughout history humanity has entertained a variety of ideas about what happens after death. Some think that physical death is the end of our personal, conscious existence. While we might "live on" in people's memories, we don't live on in any other sense. Others believe that while the body dies, the human soul or spirit continues to exist—perhaps on a higher spiritual plane, perhaps in a spiritual heaven or hell, or perhaps somewhere else. According to this view, our bodily existence is only temporary. Once we die our bodies are discarded, but our souls go on living forever.

In the early years of the church, many Gnostics believed that people would experience different fates at death. Some would just cease to exist. For them, death was the end. Others could

enjoy some sort of afterlife through faith and good works. From a Gnostic perspective, these people were the Christians. Only a few, however, namely, the Gnostics themselves, could expect a truly fantastic afterlife in which they would be reunited with God in the divine realm.[{10}](#) In other words, the Gnostics anticipated being liberated from this evil material world, including their bodies, and being reunited with God in a completely spiritual existence. Interestingly, although there are differences, many Christians seem to expect an afterlife that's very similar to that envisioned by the Gnostics.

But what the Bible teaches is really quite different. Although it comforts Christians with the reminder that to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8), this is not the believer's final state. Instead, we're told to eagerly await the resurrection of our bodies, which will be modeled after Jesus' resurrected body (1 Cor. 15:20-23, 42-49). As Christians, we don't look forward to a purely *spiritual* (in the sense of *non-physical*) afterlife. Instead, we await a *bodily* existence in a new heaven and new earth which is completely free from the presence and power of sin (2 Pet. 3:10-13)! Just as Christ was raised *physically* from the dead, so one day He will likewise raise all men from the dead. Some will enjoy His presence forever; others will be shut out from His presence forever (Matt. 25:46; Jn. 5:28-29). Which experience shall be ours depends entirely upon our relationship to Christ (Jn. 3:36; 2 Thess. 1:8-10). So why not put your trust in Him and enjoy forever the new heavens and new earth in a new, resurrected body? You're invited, you know (Rev. 22:17).

## Notes

1. Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: Christian Scriptures and the Battles Over Authentication*, Course Guidebook, Pt. 1 (Chantilly, Virginia: The Teaching Company, 2002), 20.
2. Mary Timothy Prokes, *Toward a Theology of the Body* (Grand

Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 9.

3. J. Ed Komoszewski, M. James Sawyer, and Daniel B. Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus: What The Da Vinci Code and Other Novel Speculations Don't Tell You* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 2006), 200.

4. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 29.

5. Ibid., 21.

6. *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, eds. Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), s.v. "Image of God."

7. *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (1st ed.), ed. Paul J. Achtemeier (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), s.v. "Incarnation" by Frank J. Matera.

8. A number of ideas in this section were informed by the article "Sex, Sexuality," in *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*.

9. Amy Orr-Ewing, *Is the Bible Intolerant?* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 113.

10. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 21.

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