

“How Do I Answer the Argument for Satan Because All Positives Have a Negative?”

I was hoping you could help me give an answer to my co-worker. He follows a lot of pagan beliefs. Today he was discussing how the “elite” run the world, and I asked him who he thinks influences the unjust “elite.” He responded, “Satan.” I asked, Do you believe that there is such thing as Satan? and he replied, “Yes, every good thing in the world has a counterpart, hot and cold etc. Therefore since every positive force has a corresponding negative force, a negative ‘spirit’ must exist.”

I was not sure how to respond, other than to say that is not what the Bible teaches, evil is not eternal, and Satan will be overthrown and sent to the lake of fire and tormented forever. I guess he is positing dualism. I wanted to know how I could break down the argument that Satan must exist because “all positives have a negative.” Obviously I agree that satan is real, and I am not disputing his existence; I am disputing the argument he uses to arrive at Satan’s existence.

It seems to me that you are quite right to point out that this is not what the Bible teaches. God is the eternal Creator of all that exists (other than Himself). Hence, there can be God without any Satan, good without any evil, etc. I think your response was right on target.

Not only is this true, but (as something of an aside) it’s also important to remember that God did not originally create the angel who became Satan as an evil being. Rather, Satan fell into sin of his own free will. [Please see my answer to email, [“What Caused Lucifer \(Satan\) to Fall?”](#)]

The principle that every positive must have a negative is therefore simply false. Cold is the absence of heat. And one can certainly conceive of a logically possible “hot” world that no human being would ever regard as “cold.” In addition, we must also remember that just because we can conceive of something’s opposite, this does not mean (or prove) that the opposite actually exists. One can have heat without cold, light without darkness, love without hatred, etc. None of these REQUIRES an opposite. And for someone to claim that they do would require some sort of argument or proof to that effect—not just an assertion that it is so. After all, we can think of many examples to the contrary. So why should we believe that all positives have a negative?

Finally, according to Occam’s razor [Editor’s note: “The simplest explanation is often correct”], we must not multiply causes (or entities) beyond necessity. The God of the Bible provides all the explanation we need regarding the origin of the universe, the fine-tuning of the universe, the existence of objective moral values, etc. To posit, in addition to God, an eternal “Satan”, is not only unbiblical, it is also completely unnecessary.

At any rate, these are a few of the thoughts that occur to me after reading your letter. I hope this is helpful in talking with your friend.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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“Does One Have to Believe in the Trinity to be Saved?”

Do you have to believe in the Trinity to be saved? I have a friend who is a Oneness Pentecostal who does believe Jesus is God who died for sins and rose from the grave. However, he does not believe in a Triune God. They believe God showed Himself as the Father, then the Son, and now the Holy Spirit.

You ask a very good question. Although the doctrine of the Trinity is a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith, I do not personally think that a person needs to have an orthodox understanding of this doctrine in order to be saved. Indeed, when you think about it, many of the people in Christian churches today have an inadequate and unorthodox understanding of this doctrine (but this doesn't necessarily mean that they aren't saved).

The Bible is very clear that we are saved by the grace of God through faith in the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Certainly, in order to trust Jesus properly, one must have some genuine knowledge of who He is and why He is capable of saving those who trust Him. But the Bible never teaches that it is necessary to have a correct understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity in order to be saved. All that is required is trusting in Jesus, the One who is truly God and truly man, and who died for our sins and rose from the dead in order to reconcile us to God.

So the bottom line is this: although your friend has an unorthodox view of the Trinity, I personally believe that he or she can still be saved through genuine faith in Christ. Of course, if one were to deny the deity of Christ, that would be another issue! But in the case of your friend, what he or she essentially holds is a modalistic doctrine of the Trinity. And this doctrine, while unorthodox, does not deny the deity of

the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; it rather denies that there are three coequal and coeternal persons who are God. This is significant, to be sure. But I don't think it's the kind of false belief that will prevent someone who genuinely trusts in Jesus from being saved.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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“How Many Bethlehem Children Were Killed by Herod?”

I was reading your [Christmas Quiz](#) and I wondered if you had researched the number of children killed by Herod? Matthew doesn't mention the gender. Would these be Joseph and Mary's nephews and/or nieces, or distant relations? How long were Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem? Would they have known some of these children? Did Jesus ever go back to Bethlehem to minister?

We do not know the number of infant boys killed as a result of Herod's order. Scholars estimate that it was probably no more than a dozen (because Bethlehem's population was small and the order only concerned infant boys age two and under). Note that Matthew 2:16 does specifically mention “boys” or “males.”

We simply are not given enough information to know much about these children. We don't know if any of them were related to Joseph and Mary or not. Although they may have known many of these other children and their families, we are not provided with all the details about this event that we might like. In

fact, as far as I know, Matthew is the only author who records this event. His account is all the information we possess. It seems possible (maybe even probable) that the family was in Bethlehem for quite some time before fleeing to Egypt (Matt. 2:13). According to Matthew, the family was in a “house” when the wise men arrived (2:11) and Jesus is called a “child” (Gr. *paidion*), instead of “baby” (Gr. *brephos*, Luke 2:12. In addition, Herod inquires about the precise time at which the magi saw the star (Matt. 2:7), and this becomes the basis for Herod’s killing all the male children two years old and under (2:16). Hence, the family may have been there nearly two years by the time they fled to Egypt. Of course, we really just don’t know all the details about the timing of these events. But I’m somewhat inclined to think they may have been in Bethlehem long enough to get to know many of their neighbors—particularly those who had children roughly the same age as Jesus.

Concerning your final question, we are just never told whether or not Jesus returned to Bethlehem. The Bible is simply silent about this, so far as I can tell.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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“What’s the Difference Between Reiki and the

Biblical Practice of Laying On of Hands?"

I'm researching [Reiki](#) and found a website that purports to be "Christian Reiki." The woman who does this says she only connects with the Holy Spirit inside of her for the energy she uses. She commits each session to God and communicates with the Holy Spirit by means of prayer during the session. She further states that the Reiki symbols she uses to deliver that energy actually have no meaning but that they act as focus points for transmission of energy. I would tend to be a little leery about this but want to know, how does this differ from the Christian "laying on of hands"?

Yes; I think this does differ from the Christian "laying on of hands" (1 Tim. 5:22).

Christians lay hands on a brother or sister in Christ as an act of identification. They identify with another believer who is part of the body of Christ. When we then pray for that individual's healing, there is no attempt to channel "energy" of some sort to bring the person healing. Rather, we simply make a request that God would heal the person if it is His will to do so. Sometimes He is willing; sometimes not. But this is a choice for God; we are simply making a request, subject to His will.

There just isn't any biblical warrant for "Christian" Reiki, so far as I can see. We are never commanded (or even encouraged) to channel spiritual "energy" for the healing of others. Indeed, I think the biblical authors would regard such a practice as highly suspect. We are simply encouraged to pray for their healing. And this is something we can do (and that the church has always done) without any assistance from the practice of Reiki.

In this respect I don't see what "Christian Reiki" adds to the equation (that isn't accomplished simply through prayer to God). If the Reiki practitioner thinks that Reiki gives them power or authority over the Holy Spirit, then such a belief is totally absurd and unbiblical. God is sovereign and is not in any way subject to the will and manipulation of men. So it seems to me that Reiki is a questionable practice for Christians, that adds nothing to simple prayer, and that is possibly grounded in some very unbiblical beliefs about God and healing, etc.

At any rate, that's my view of the matter.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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"Does the Bible Talk About Reincarnation?"

Does the Bible ever talk about reincarnation?

The short answer is "No; the Bible nowhere speaks of reincarnation." Unfortunately, however, some people have claimed to find evidence for this belief in the Bible. For example, John the Baptist is often claimed to be the reincarnation of Elijah.

This is a popular "New Age" sort of interpretation. Of course, no respected biblical scholar would accept this interpretation as true.

And it certainly wasn't the view of Jesus, His disciples, John the Baptist, or the Gospel writers. Luke 1:17 tells us that John came in the "spirit and power" of Elijah, which is far different than asserting that John was the reincarnation of Elijah. In addition, it's important to remember that Moses and Elijah appeared to Jesus, Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration. But as Geisler and Rhodes observe, "Since John [the Baptist] had already lived and died by then, and since Elijah still had the same name and self-consciousness, Elijah had obviously not been reincarnated as John the Baptist." Third, we must remember that Elijah never died (2 Kings 2:11); therefore, he doesn't fit the reincarnation model.

An important verse to bear in mind in these discussions is Hebrews 9:27. This verse teaches us that we die once, and then face God's judgment. The consequences of that judgment, according to the Bible, are eternal—not temporal (Matt. 25:46; 2 Thess. 1:9; Rev. 20:10-15).

If you would like more information about this subject, please see the following two resources on Probe's website:

1. The Mystery of Reincarnation –
www.probe.org/the-mystery-of-reincarnation/
2. "Was Reincarnation Ever in the Bible?" –
www.probe.org/was-reincarnation-ever-in-the-bible/

Shalom in Christ,
Michael Gleghorn

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“Islamic History Says Abraham Spoke Arabic”

Islamic history shows that prophet Abraham (peace be upon him) spoke Arabic. What would you say to that sir? Not or possible? Or not sure?

I would be surprised if Islamic history seriously says such a thing. I would carefully check your sources and make sure the source you are relying on is a reputable, scholarly source.

At any rate, I do not think it possible that Abraham spoke Arabic. Arabic appears to go back only about as far as the 4th century A.D. or so. See, for example:

1) <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Arabic?o=100074>

2) <http://www.arabic-language.org/arabic/history.asp>.

Since Abraham lived about 2000 B.C., this would be about 2,400 years before the earliest known examples of written Arabic. I don't think it likely that a 2,400 year gap can be bridged in this case. And, of course, biblically speaking, there is no evidence at all for such an assertion.

Shalom in Christ,
Michael Gleghorn

“Arabic: a Semitic language that developed out of the language of the Arabians of the time of Muhammad, now spoken in countries of the Middle East and North Africa.”

The above is from one of the links you posted. This is false—Arabic was used before prophet Muhammad.

Yes; I would agree that the language dates to before the time of Muhammad. But as I said, the evidence seems to point to the 4th century A.D. (before Muhammad, but long after Abraham, who

lived around 2000 B.C.).

Shalom in Christ,
Michael Gleghorn

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“Are the Gifts and Calling of God ‘Irrevocable,’ or ‘Without Repentance’? Which One is Right?”

The KJV translation says in Romans 11:29, “ . . . for the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance.” But the other translations say, “ . . . for the gifts and calling are irrevocable.” Which is the correct one?

The Greek term used in Romans 11:29 is *ametameletos*. It is essentially the negation of the term *metamellomai* which, according to the Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament can mean: (1) feel remorse, become concerned about afterward, regret (Matt. 27:3); (2) change one’s mind, think differently afterward (Heb. 7:21). Thus, if we negate these meanings, the term in Romans 11:29 can really be translated either way, although for contemporary readers it is probably best to translate as “irrevocable” or “incapable of being changed,” for this more clearly communicates the idea to most people today. The phrase, “without repentance,” tends to be a little more archaic, which one would expect for the KJV, as it was originally published in 1611.

Hope this helps.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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“What Can You Tell Me About the Infancy Gospel of James?”

Can you give me some information on the writings of the Protoevangelium of James [also known as the “Infancy Gospel of James”]? I know that has to do with proving the hows and whys that Mary was a perpetual virgin. Can you give me some historical background of it and how we as Protestants refute that heretical teaching?

Thanks for your letter. You can find some helpful scholarly information on this gospel here: www.earlychristianwritings.com/infancyjames.html The introductory article offers some useful background information. To simply highlight a couple of important points:

1. Our earliest manuscript of this gospel dates to the third century. However, the text itself probably dates to the middle of the second century. This fact, combined with the fact that the historical James (the brother of Jesus) was put to death by Ananias in 62 A.D., clearly make it a pseudonymous work (i.e. it was not actually written by James, the brother of Jesus).

2. In addition, the work is clearly dependent on the infancy narratives found in Matthew and Luke.

3. Since it was not written by James, the brother of Jesus, and since it clearly contains mythological embellishments and historical inaccuracies, the early Fathers of the church were wise not to include the book in the New Testament canon.

4. Finally, for more information on the criteria of canonicity, please see the section entitled "The Formation of the New Testament Canon" in my article on "Redeeming the Da Vinci Code" here: www.probe.org/redeeming-the-da-vinci-code/. Actually, the entire article has much information that is relevant as background material to your question.

Concerning the doctrine of Mary's perpetual virginity: although Roman Catholics believe that Mary remained a virgin throughout her entire life, this doctrine seems biblically problematic. In Matthew 1:24-25 we learn that Joseph took Mary as his wife, but "had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus." The verse seems to clearly imply that Joseph and Mary did have normal sexual relations after the birth of Jesus. And this is confirmed by references to Jesus' brothers and sisters in Matthew 13:55-56.

But could these have been children of Joseph from a previous marriage, as some Roman Catholic teachers have suggested? This does not seem to be a very plausible explanation; indeed, it has a very serious difficulty. As one commentator has observed: "Joseph could not have had children by a previous marriage, as some suppose, for then Jesus would not have been heir to the Davidic throne as the oldest son of Joseph." Hence, the most plausible interpretation of the biblical evidence is that Mary remained a virgin until the birth of Jesus, but afterward conceived and bore other children via normal sexual relations with her husband, Joseph.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

“Can’t God Use Reiki to Heal?”

Hi Michael,

I am a Christian and I love Jesus with all my heart and believe in His healing power provided for us at the cross. I believe the provision is there, in the spiritual realm and it is up to us to connect with it and receive healing through prayer and taking authority in Jesus’ name. I believe He works through us and doesn’t refuse any prayer for healing, but does need us to connect with the healing and bring it into the physical realm.

Many Christians go to the doctors, take medication, have operations and none of these practices are frowned upon as “not being dependent on God for healing,” but many do not glorify Jesus in their healing, they usually give the glory to the doctor or hospital who treated them.

I pray for healing and the power to receive and have had healing on many occasions and if I haven’t immediately received, I do not for one minute think God hasn’t healed me, I know it’s my connection or the connection of whoever is praying for my healing that is not quite right.

Yesterday I went for a massage. The therapist asked me about any problem areas. I told her I had had problems with my back on and off for many years, but believed God had healed me. She began the massage, then she suddenly said, “I found the problem spot,”—which she had, she was right on it—“My hand has gone really hot, I’m doing reiki on it.” She didn’t ask me, she just did it. I didn’t mind, didn’t know much about it. The next morning I woke up and for the first time in years got out

of bed without any pain or stiffness and my back has been great all day, despite lifting and carrying as is the nature of my job. I know it has been healed and I thanked God for the healing and texted the lady to tell her my back was healed. I don't for one minute think she healed me, no more than Benny Hinn heals anyone, he is just a channel like the massage lady was. I gave the glory to God and always will.

I wanted to know more about reiki; that's why I looked on the internet for information and read your article with interest. I must say I am confused and must look into this further, I only want to do the right thing and I will of course speak with my pastor and other Christians, but my main point is that it seems instead of using man-made drugs and procedures for healing, we used natural energy that I believe was created by God for our use.

I'm glad to hear that your back is feeling better! At the same time, I must honestly say that some of the views expressed in your letter strike me as biblically and theologically unsound. Allow me to explain.

I think your first paragraph is a fairly good example. I personally don't believe that what you're describing here is actually biblical Christianity. After all, where does the Bible teach that God needs us "to connect with the healing and bring it into the physical realm"? What does this even mean? I've read such things in books by Wiccans (I'm being totally serious here), but I don't believe that this is a Christian notion. After all, is God not sovereign and omnipotent? Can He not heal anyone He wants—and at any time He wants?

And if God does not refuse a request for healing, then what do you say to all the truly godly Christian people who (along with their churches and families) have urgently pleaded with God for healing—and not received it? Please think very carefully about this, because you could unintentionally end up causing a great deal of spiritual and emotional pain by

insisting that such people do not have enough faith to be healed. Let me offer a bit of biblical support for this contention.

Many evangelical biblical scholars believe that Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was some kind of physical malady. But the Lord refused to heal him of it (2 Cor. 12:7-10). Now did Paul really not have enough faith to be healed? Was it not actually God's will that he NOT be healed? Similarly, in Galatians 4:13-14 he mentions preaching the gospel to the Galatians while he was ill, an illness which was a trial to them. But if Paul could have been instantly healed, then why did he put the Galatians (and himself) through such an unnecessary trial? Finally, Elisha was a very great prophet of the Lord. And yet, in 2 Kings 13:14 we read that he was suffering from the illness from which he died (2 Kings 13:20). But such a state of affairs seems totally unnecessary (indeed, virtually impossible for a great prophet like Elisha) on the view which you have presented. It thus seems to me that we need to adopt a more nuanced, biblical view of prayer. To see what I mean, please carefully read my article on petitionary prayer here: www.probe.org/problems-and-promises-of-petitionary-prayer/.

In addition, please carefully re-read the last section of my article on Reiki entitled, "Does All Healing Come from God?" at www.probe.org/reiki/.

Of course, I certainly agree that modern Western medicine is not perfect. But its reliance on quality control, reproducible results, the scientific method, extensive training, education, and licensing, etc., clearly distinguish it from much of energy medicine. In addition, since those who practice it are not typically calling upon spirit guides and other questionable entities, it is much less likely to entangle those making use of it with possible demonic involvement.

At any rate, I'm sincerely glad that you're feeling better—and I hope that that continues to be the case. But I would caution

you against getting any more deeply involved in Reiki energy medicine.

This is maybe not what you were hoping to hear, but I must give you my honest opinion before the Lord.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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“How Do I Talk To My Brother About Taoism?”

Greetings Mr. Gleghorn.

I recently read your article “[Philosophical Taoism: A Christian Appraisal.](#)”

Recently my older brother confessed to me, “I am not the most religious person in the world, but I do believe in God, a universal consciousness from which all things were created. And I do consider myself to be a spiritual person, though more in alignment with nature and the universe that falls outside the confines of organized religion. I have studied the eastern traditions of Taoism and Buddhism, and while they are separate and distinct from Christianity, the precepts found in the commandments and in western religion, including the concept of forgiveness, are all found there.”

I want to help him very much but I don’t want to preach to him. But I believe that God has placed this burden on my heart to help bring my brother into a right relationship with him or

at least to use me for some part of this purpose. I would like to know if you could help me with any thoughts or resources that might help me to witness to him or to help him to see that he is on the wrong path for salvation. I do not believe that he is saved at this point in time.

Thanks for your letter. I think you are wise to avoid *preaching* to your brother. As I'm sure you know, however, it is extremely important that you be *praying* for him. Also, it would probably be good for you to familiarize yourself with a few important religious texts which your brother might be reading. Here I'm thinking of, for example, the Tao Te Ching (the classic text of Taoism). Finally, I would highly recommend reading the chapter on Taoism (and whatever other chapters may be relevant) in Dean Halverson's book, The Compact Guide to World Religions. You can find it here: www.amazon.com/Compact-Guide-World-Religions-Halverson/dp/1556617046/.

Finally, be patient. It may take time (e.g. many years) for your brother to come to Christ. Keep praying for him, keep engaging him in conversation, and keep pointing him back to Jesus. Although Taoism does speak of the greatness of forgiveness, it really doesn't have any genuine means of providing it. The Tao is generally understood to be impersonal—not personal—and hence, incapable of extending forgiveness (which, after all, only a personal being can do). Furthermore, Taoism has no atonement for sin. Only Christianity offers a personal God, who loves us, and who sent His Son to be an atonement for our sins. This is often overlooked. But it is the only hope for man—and the only real “good news” there is (at least in an ultimate sense).

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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