Freudian Slip

His “True Enemy”

In 1937, shortly before World War II, a Jewish doctor had a colleague who urged him to flee Austria for fear of Nazi oppression. The doctor replied that his “true enemy” was not the Nazis but “religion,” the Christian church. What inspired such hatred of Christianity in this scientist?{1}

His father Jakob read the Talmud and celebrated Jewish festivals. The young boy developed a fond affection for his Hebrew Bible teacher and later said that the Bible story had “an enduring effect” on his life. A beloved nanny took him to church as a child. He came home telling even his Jewish parents about “God Almighty”. But eventually the nanny was accused of theft and dismissed. He later blamed her for many of his difficulties, and launched his private practice on Easter Sunday as (some suggest) an “act of defiance.”

Anti-Semitism hounded the lad at school. Around age twelve, he was horrified to learn of his father’s youthful acquiescence to Gentile bigotry. “Jew! Get off the pavement!” a so-called “Christian” had shouted to the young Jakob after knocking his cap into the mud. The son learned to his chagrin that his dad had complied.

In secondary school, he abandoned Judaism for secular science and humanism. At the University of Vienna, he studied the atheist philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach and carried his atheism into his career as a psychiatrist. Religion for him was simply a “wish fulfillment,” a fairy tale invented by humans to satisfy their needy souls.

This psychiatrist was Sigmund Freud. He became perhaps the most influential psychiatrist of history, affecting medicine, literature, language, religion and culture. Obsessed with what

he called the “painful riddle of death,” he once said he thought of it daily throughout life. His favorite grandson’s death brought great grief: “Everything has lost its meaning to me…” he wrote. “I can find no joy in life.” He called himself a “godless Jew.” In 1939, he slipped into eternity, a willful overdose of morphine assuaging his cancer’s pain.

What factors might have influenced Freud’s reaction to Christianity? Have you ever been discouraged about life or angry with God because of a major disappointment or the way a Christian has treated you? In the next section, we’ll consider Freud’s encounter with bigotry.

Anti-Semitism

Have you ever observed a Christian acting in un-Christlike ways? How did you feel? Disappointed? Embarrassed? Disgusted? Maybe you can identify with Sigmund Freud.

When Freud was about ten or twelve, his father Jakob told him that during his own youth, a “Christian” had knocked Jakob’s cap into the mud and shouted “Jew! Get off the pavement!” Jakob had simply picked up his cap. Little Sigmund found his father’s acquiescence to Gentile bigotry unheroic. Hannibal, the Semitic general who fought ancient Rome, became Sigmund’s hero. Hannibal’s conflict with Rome came to symbolize for Freud the Jewish-Roman Catholic conflict.{2}

In his twenties, Freud wrote of an ugly anti-Semitic incident on a train. When Freud opened a window for some fresh air, other passengers shouted for him to shut it. (The open window was on the windy side of the car.) He said he was willing to shut it provided another window opposite was opened. In the ensuing negotiations, someone shouted, “He’s a dirty Jew!” At that point, his first opponent announced to Freud, “We Christians consider other people, you’d better think less of your precious self.”

Freud asked one opponent to keep his vapid criticisms to himself and another to step forward and take his medicine. "I was quite prepared to kill him," Freud wrote, "but he did not step up…{3}

Sigmund's son Martin Freud recalled an incident from his own youth that deeply impressed Martin. During a summer holiday, the Freuds encountered some bigots: about ten men who carried sticks and umbrellas, shouted "anti-Semitic abuse," and apparently attempted to block Sigmund's way along a road. Ordering Martin to stay back, Sigmund "without the slightest hesitation … keeping to the middle of the road, marched towards the hostile crowd." Martin continues that his "…father, swinging his stick, charged the hostile crowd, which gave way before him and promptly dispersed, allowing him free passage. This was the last we saw of these unpleasant strangers." Perhaps Sigmund wanted his sons to see their father boldly confronting bigotry rather than cowering before it, as he felt his own father had done.{4}

Jews in Freud's Austria suffered great abuse from so-called Christians. No wonder he was turned off toward the Christian faith. How might disappointment and loss have contributed to Freud's anti-Christian stance?

Suffering's Distress

Have you ever been abandoned, lost a loved one, or endured illness and wondered, "Where is God?" Perhaps you can relate to Freud.

Earlier, I spoke about Freud's Catholic nanny whom he loved dearly, who was accused of theft and was dismissed. As an adult, Freud blamed this nanny for many of his own psychological problems.{5} The sudden departure—for alleged theft—of a trusted Christian caregiver could have left the child with abandonment fears{6} and the adult Freud with disdain for the nanny's faith. Freud wrote, "We naturally feel

hurt that a just God and a kindly providence do not protect us better from such influences [fate] during the most defenseless period of our lives."{7}

Freud's daughter, Sophie, died suddenly after a short illness. Writing to console her widower, Freud wrote: "…it was a senseless, brutal stroke of fate that took our Sophie from us . . . we are . . . mere playthings for the higher powers.{8}

A beloved grandson died at age four, leaving Freud depressed and grief stricken. "Fundamentally everything has lost its meaning for me," he admitted shortly before the child died.{9}

Freud's many health problems included a sixteen-year bout with cancer of the jaw. In 1939, as the cancer brought death closer, he wrote, "my world is . . . a small island of pain floating on an ocean of indifference."{10} Eventually a gangrenous hole in his cheek emitted a putrid odor that repulsed his beloved dog but attracted the flies.{11}

Like many, Freud could not reconcile human suffering with a benevolent God. In a 1933 lecture, he asserted:

> *It seems not to be the case that there's a power in the universe which watches over the well-being of individuals with parental care and brings all their affairs to a happy ending. On the contrary, . . . Obscure, unfeeling, unloving powers determine our fate.{12}*

Freud's suffering left him feeling deeply wounded. Could that be one reason he concluded that a benevolent God does not exist? Do you know people whose pain has made them mad at God, or has convinced them He doesn't exist? Intellectual doubt often has biographical roots.

Spiritual Confusion

Hypocritical Christians angered Sigmund Freud. The deaths of

his loved ones and his own cancer brought him great distress. His loss and suffering seemed incompatible with the idea of a loving God. So what did he think the main message of the Christian faith was?

In the book, *The Future of An Illusion*, his major diatribe against religion, Freud outlined his understanding of Christianity. He felt it spoke of humans having a "higher purpose"; a higher intelligence ordering life "for the best"; death not as "extinction" but the start of "a new kind of existence"; and a "supreme court of justice" that would reward good and punish evil.{13}

Freud's summary omits something significant: an emphasis on human restoration of relationship to God by receiving His free gift of forgiveness through Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross for human guilt.

Discussions of the biblical message often omit or obscure this important concept. I used to feel I had to earn God's love by my own efforts. Then I learned that from a biblical perspective, no one can achieve the perfection necessary to gain eternal life.{14} Freud's view of Christianity at this point seemed to be missing grace, Jesus, and the cross.

Two years after he wrote *The Future of An Illusion*, he seemed to have a clearer picture of Christian forgiveness. He wrote that earlier he had "failed to appreciate" the Christian concept of redemption through Christ's sacrificial death in which he took "upon himself a guilt that is common to everyone."{15}

Freud also attacked the intellectual validity of Christian faith.{16} He objected to arguments that one should not question the validity of religion and that we should believe simply because our ancestors did. I don't blame him. Those arguments don't satisfy me either. But he also felt the biblical writings were untrustworthy. He shows no awareness of

the wealth of evidence supporting, for example, the reliability of the New Testament documents or Jesus' resurrection.{17} His apparent lack of familiarity with historical evidence and method may have been a function of his era, background, academic pursuits or profession.

Perhaps confusion about spiritual matters colored Freud's view of the faith. Do you know anyone who is confused about Jesus' message or the evidence for its validity?

Freud's Christian Friend

Freud often despised Christianity, but he was quite fond of one Christian. He actually delayed publication of his major criticism of religion for fear of offending this friend. Finally, he warned his friend of its release.{18} Oskar Pfister, the Swiss pastor who had won Freud's heart, responded, "I have always believed that every man should state his honest opinion aloud and plainly. You have always been tolerant towards me, and am I to be intolerant of your atheism?"{19} Freud responded warmly and welcomed Pfister's published critique. Their correspondence is a marvelous example of scholars who differ doing so with grace and dignity, disagreeing with ideas but preserving their friendship. Their interchange could well inform many of today's political, cultural and religious debates.

Freud's longest correspondence was with Pfister. It lasted 30 years.{20} Freud's daughter and protégé, Anna, left a glimpse into the pastor's character. During her childhood, Pfister seemed "like a visitor from another planet" in the "totally non-religious Freud household." His "human warmth and enthusiasm" contrasted with the impatience of the visiting psychologists who saw the family mealtime as "an unwelcome interruption" in their important discussions. Pfister "enchanted" the Freud children, entering into their lives and becoming "a most welcome guest."{21}

Freud respected Pfister's work. He wrote, "[Y]ou are in the fortunate position of being able to lead . . . [people] to God."{22}

Freud called Pfister "a remarkable man a true servant of God, . . . [who] feels the need to do spiritual good to everyone he meets. You did good in this way even to me."{23}

"Dear Man of God," began Freud after a return home. "A letter from you is one of the best possible things that could be waiting for one on one's return."{24}

Pfister was a positive influence for Christ. But in the end, so far as we know, Freud decided against personal faith.

People reject Christ for many reasons. Hypocritical Christians turn some off. Others feel disillusioned, bitter, or skeptical from personal loss or pain. Some are confused about who Jesus is and how to know Him personally. Understanding these barriers to belief can help skeptics and seekers discern the roots of their dilemmas and prompt them to take a second look. Examples like Pfister's can show that following the Man from Nazareth might be worthwhile after all.

Notes

1. Much of this article is adapted from Russell Sims Wright, *Belief Barriers and Faith Factors: Biographical Roots of Sigmund Freud's Reaction to the Christian Faith and Their Relevance for Christian Ministry*, unpublished M.Th. dissertation, University of Oxford (Westminster College), May 2001.

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James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton, 1961 edition of the 1928 work), pp. 23-24.

14. Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 1-5.

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18. Heinrich Meng and Ernst L. Freud, eds., Eric Mosbacher trans., *Psycho-Analysis and Faith: The Letters of Sigmund Freud and Oskar Pfister* (London: Hogarth Press/Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1963), pp. 109-110.

19. Ibid., p. 110.

20. Nicholi, loc. cit.

21. Meng and E. Freud, op. cit., p. 11.

22. Ibid., p. 16.

23. Ibid., p. 24.

24. Ibid., p. 29.

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One Minute After Death (radio transcript)

The Other Side of Life

Do you believe in life after death?{1}

Picture the operating room of a large hospital. A man is dying. As the doctors frantically try to save him, here is what he perceives and thinks:

> *"I am dying. I hear the doctor pronounce me dead. As I lie on the operating table, a loud, harsh buzzing reverberates in my head. At the same time, I sense myself moving very rapidly through a long, dark tunnel. Suddenly, I find myself outside of my own physical body. Like a spectator, I watch the doctor's desperate attempts to revive my corpse.*
>
> *"Soon I encounter a 'being' of light, a loving, warm spirit who shows me an instant replay of my life and helps me evaluate my past deeds.*
>
> *"Eventually, I learn I must return to my body. I resist, for my afterlife experience has been quite pleasant. Somehow, though, I am reunited with my physical body and live."{2}*

This composite account of a near-death experience or "NDE" is adapted from the best selling book, *Life After Life*, by Dr. Raymond Moody, who brought these experiences to wide public awareness. Often the episodes involve out-of-body experiences or "OBEs."

While writing a book on this subject, I interviewed people with some fascinating stories. A Kansas woman developed complications after major surgery. She sensed herself rising out of her body, soaring through space, and hearing heavenly

voices before returning to her body. An Arizona man in a coma for five months after a motorcycle accident said he saw his deceased father, who spoke to him.

Actress Sharon Stone has described her own close call with death. She was hospitalized with bleeding from an artery at her skull's base. "I feel that I did die," she relates. She tells of "a giant vortex of white light" and says "I kind of poof sort of took off… into this glorious bright…white light. I started to see and be met by some of my friends. people who were very dear to me. It was very, very fast, and suddenly I was back. I was in my body and I was in the room." Stone says the experience affected her "profoundly" and that she "will never be the same."{3}

What do these near-death experiences mean? How should we interpret them? This article offers a biblical perspective.

Interpreting Near-Death Experiences

What are some possible explanations for the NDEs? Hundreds of people claim that they have died and lived to tell about it. Are their near-death and out-of-body experiences genuine previews of the afterlife? Hallucinations caused by traumatic events? Or something else?

Some patients have been pronounced clinically dead and later are resuscitated. Others have had close calls with death, but were never really thought dead (such as survivors of automobile accidents). Still others did die permanently but described what they saw before they expired.

Determination of the point of death is a hotly debated issue. In the past, doctors relied merely on the ceasing of the heartbeat and respiration. More recently they have used the EEG or brainwave test. Whatever one considers the point of death, most would agree that these folks have come much closer to it than the majority of people living today.

A number of possible explanations for the OBEs have been offered. Different ones may apply in different situations.

The physiological explanations suggest that a "physical" condition may have caused some of the out-of-body experiences. For instance, cerebral anoxia (a shortage of oxygen in the brain) occurs when the heart stops. The brain can survive for a short while (usually only a few minutes) without receiving oxygen from the blood. Anoxia can produce abnormal mental states.{4} Patients who recover from heart failure and report OBEs may be merely reporting details of an "altered state of consciousness," some say.{5}

Electronic brain stimulation can produce out-of-body sensations. Researchers at the Universities of Geneva and Lausanne in Switzerland placed electrodes in the brain of a woman suffering from epilepsy. As they stimulated her brain's right angular gyrus, she reported sensing she was floating about six feet above her body.{6}

The pharmacological explanations say that drugs or anesthetics may induce some of the near-death experiences. Some primitive societies use drugs to induce OBEs in their religious ceremonies.{7} LSD and marijuana sometimes generate similar sensations.{8} Even many medically accepted drugs have produced mental states akin to those reported by the dying. Ketamine is an anesthetic that is administered intravenously{9} and produces hallucinatory reactions.{10}

Psychological and Spiritual Explanations

How should we interpret near-death experiences? What do they mean? So far this we have examined physiological and pharmacological explanations, that is, causes involving the body or drugs. Consider two other categories: psychological and spiritual explanations. The psychological explanations suggest that the individual's mind may generate the unusual

mental experience. Sigmund Freud, writing about the difficulty of coping with the thought of death, said it would be more comfortable in our minds to picture ourselves as detached observers.{11} Some modern psychiatrists theorize that the OBE is merely a defense mechanism against the anxiety of death. That is, since the thought of one's own death is so frightening, the patient's mind invents the OBE to make it seem as if only the body is dying while the soul or spirit lives on.

Other psychologists wonder if the patient may be confusing his or her *interpretation* of the experience with what actually happened.{12} The conscious mind needs an explanation for an unusual vision; therefore, it interprets the event in familiar terms. Thus, say these psychologists, resuscitated patients report conversations with deceased relatives or religious figures common to their culture.

The spiritual explanations view many of the OBEs as real manifestations of the spiritual.

Many have noted that earlier reports of NDEs seemed to contradict some traditional Christian beliefs about the afterlife. All of the patients Christian and non-Christian reported feelings of bliss and ecstasy with no mention of unpleasantness, hell, or judgment.

However, further research uncovered negative experiences. For instance, Raymond Moody wrote of one woman who was supposedly "dead" for 15 minutes and said she saw spirits who appeared "bewildered." "They seemed to shuffle," she reported, "as someone would on a chain gang not knowing where they were going. they all had the most woebegone expressions. It was quite depressing."{13}

Dr. Moody observed, "Nothing I have encountered precludes the possibility of a hell."{14}

Some have felt that OBEs are inconsistent with the biblical

concept of a final judgment at the world's end. No one reports standing before God and being judged for eternity. Dr. Moody responds that "the end of the world has not yet taken place," so there is no inconsistency. "There may well be a final judgment," he says. "Near-death experiences in no way imply the contrary."{15}

So, is there a life after death?

Is There Life After Death?

The spring of my sophomore year in college, the student living in the room next to me was struck and killed by lightning. For some time after Mike's death, our fraternity was in a state of shock. My friends were asking questions like, "Is there a life after death?" and "How can we experience it?"

Is it possible to know whether there is an afterlife? What method would you use to find out?

Some suggest using the *experimental method* of science and applying it to the near-death experiences. However, these events normally are not controlled, clinical situations. They're medical emergencies. Even if scientists could establish controls, we have no mind-reading machines to verify mental/spiritual experiences. And think about recruiting subjects. Would you volunteer to undergo clinical death for research purposes?

Some suggest relying on personal *experience* to answer the question. But the experiential method has its drawbacks, too. NDEs can provide useful information, but the mind can trick us. Dreams, fantasies, hallucinations, drug trips, drunkenness, states of shock all can evoke mental images that seem real but aren't.

What if we could find a *spiritual authority*, someone with trustworthy credentials, to tell us the truth about afterlife

issues?

Following Mike's death, I encouraged my friends to consider Jesus of Nazareth as a trustworthy spiritual authority. As somewhat of a skeptic myself, I'd found the resurrection of Christ to be one of the best-attested facts of history.{16} If Jesus died and came back from the dead, He could accurately tell us what death and the afterlife are like. The fact that He successfully predicted His own resurrection{17} helps us believe that He will tell us the truth about the afterlife.

Jesus and His early followers indicated that the afterlife would be personal, that human personalities would continue to exist.{18} Eternal life would be relational, involving warm, personal relationships with God and with each other.{19} Eternal life would be enjoyable, defying our description and exceeding our imagination. "No mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him," wrote one early believer.{20} And eternal life would be eternal. It would never end. "God has given us eternal life," wrote one of Jesus' closest friends, "and this life is in His Son."{21}

The sad thing is that some people don't want to take advantage of eternal life.

How to Be Sure You'll Live Forever

Maurice Rawlings, M.D., a cardiologist, tells of a patient who had a cardiac arrest in Dr. Rawlings' office. During the attempted resuscitation, the patient screamed, "I am in hell!" "Don't stop!" he begged in terror. "Each time you quit I go back to hell!"{22}

The biblical hell, or Hades, is the current home of those who do not accept God's forgiveness. The final abode of those who refuse forgiveness is called the "lake of fire."{23}

Not a pleasant subject. But remember, God loves you and wants

you to spend eternity with Him.{24} He sent Jesus, His Son, to die and pay the penalty for our sins (attitudes and actions that fall short of God's perfection). We simply need to receive His free gift of forgiveness we can never earn it to be guaranteed eternal life. "Whoever hears my word," Jesus says, "and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."{25}

How should we interpret the near-death experiences? Here's my perspective as one who believes the evidence supports Jesus' and biblical reliability.{26} If a given NDE contradicts biblical statements or principles, I do not accept it as being completely from God. If the experience does not contradict biblical statements or principles, then it *could* be from God. (Body, drug or mind could also influence it.)

A given NDE could be completely spiritual and yet not be from God. Jesus spoke of an evil spiritual being, Satan. We are told that Satan "disguises himself as an angel of light,"{27} but Jesus called him "a liar and the father of lies."{28} I'm not accusing all near-death experiencers of being in league with the devil. Just a friendly word of caution that some may be being deceived.

Once a nightclub near Cincinnati was packed to the brim. Suddenly, a busboy stepped onto the stage, interrupted the program and announced that the building was on fire. Perhaps because they saw no smoke, many of the guests remained seated. Maybe they thought it was a joke, a part of the program, and felt comfortable with that explanation. When they finally saw the smoke, it was too late. More than 150 people died as the nightclub burned.{29}

Are you believing what you want to believe, or what the evidence shows is true? Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies."{30} I encourage you to place your faith in Jesus if you haven't yet. Then you, too, will live, even if you die.

Notes

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14. Ibid., 36.
15. Ibid., 36, 37.
16. See, for instance, Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers), 1999.
17. See, for example, Jesus' resurrection predictions in Luke 9:22 and 18:31-33; their fulfillment in Luke 24.
18. See for example Luke 23:42-43; Matthew 8:11; 2 Samuel 12:23; Matthew 17:1-8.
19. John 14:2-3; Philippians 1:23; John 17:3.
20. 1 Corinthians 2:9 NIV. See also Revelation 21:4; Hebrews 12:2.
21. 1 John 5:11 NASB.
22. Maurice Rawlings, M.D., *Beyond Death's Door* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978), 19-20.
23. Revelation 20:11-15.
24. John 3:16.
25. John 5:24 NIV.
26. See, for example, McDowell, op. cit.
27. 2 Corinthians 11:14 NASB.
28. John 8:44 NASB.
29. "They Didn't Believe It," *The New York Times,* May 30, 1977, p. 16; Hal Bruno, "The Fire Next Time," *Newsweek,* June 13, 1977, pp. 24, 27.
30. John 11:25 NASB.

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Six Months in Paris that Changed the World

Decisions have consequences. Our own lives and world history confirm that. The 1919 post-World War 1 Paris Peace Conference made decisions that echo in today's headlines. Fascinating stories about Iraq, Israel, Palestine and China prompt us to consider the impact of our own daily choices.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

Carving Up the World

Think about the really important decisions you have made in your life: choices concerning your education, vocation, spouse, or friends; your spiritual beliefs and commitments. Are you happy with the outcomes? Have you made any bad choices in life that still haunt you?

Choices have consequences and how we make decisions can be critical. In this article, we'll look back more than eighty years ago at a fascinating gathering of world leaders who made significant decisions that touch our lives today.

In 1919, leaders from around the globe gathered in Paris to decide how to divide up the earth after the end of World War 1. Presidents and prime ministers debated, argued, dined, and attended the theater together as they created new nations and carved up old ones. Margaret MacMillan, an Oxford Ph.D. and University of Toronto history professor, tells their captivating story in her critically acclaimed bestseller,

Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World.{1} *The Sunday Times* of London says, "Most of the problems treated in this book are still with us today indeed, some of the most horrific things that have been taking place in Europe and the Middle East in the past decade stem directly from decisions made in Paris in 1919."{2}

The cast of characters in this drama was diverse. The Big Three were leaders of the principal Allied nations: U.S. president Woodrow Wilson and the prime ministers of France and England, Georges Clemenceau and David Lloyd George. Joining them was a vast array of "statesmen, diplomats, bankers, soldiers, professors, economists and lawyers . . . from all corners of the world." Media reporters, businesspersons and spokespersons for a multitude of causes showed up.{3}

Lawrence of Arabia was there, the mysterious English scholar and soldier wrapped in Arab robes and promoting the Arab cause.{4} Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Winston Churchill, not yet leaders of their governments, played supporting roles. A young Asian man who worked in the kitchen at the Paris Ritz asked the peacemakers to grant independence from France for his tiny nation. Ho Chi Minh — and Vietnam — got no reply.{5}

This article highlights three of the many decisions from the 1919 Paris Peace Conference that still influence headlines today. They concern Iraq, Israel, and China. Fasten your seatbelt for a ride into the past and then "Back to the Future." First, consider the birth of Iraq.

Creating Iraq

During the first six months of 1919, U.S. president Woodrow Wilson along with French and British prime ministers Clemenceau and Lloyd George considered exhausting appeals for land and power from people around the globe. At times, they found themselves crawling across a large map spread out on the floor to investigate and determine boundaries.{6} The

challenges were immense. Clemenceau told a colleague, “It is much easier to make war than peace.”{7}

Eminent British historian Arnold Toynbee, who advised the British delegation in Paris, told of delivering some papers to his prime minister one day. To Toynbee’s delight, Lloyd George forgot Toynbee was present and began to think out loud. “Mesopotamia,” mused Lloyd George, “. . . yes . . . oil . . . irrigation . . . we must have Mesopotamia.”{8}

“Mesopotamia” referred to three Middle Eastern provinces that had been part of the collapsed Ottoman empire: Mosul in the north, Basra in the south, and Baghdad in the middle. (Is this beginning to sound familiar?) Oil was a major concern. For a while back then, no one was sure if Mesopotamia had much oil. Clues emerged when the ground around Baghdad seeped pools of black sludge.{9}

Mesopotamia’s British governor argued that the British, largely for strategic security reasons, should control Mosul, Basra, and Baghdad as a single administrative unit. But the three provinces had little in common. MacMillan notes, “In 1919 there was no Iraqi people; history, religion, geography pulled the people apart, not together.”{10} Kurds and Persians chafed under Arabs. Shia Muslims resented Sunni Muslims.{11} (*Now* is this sounding familiar?)

Eventually geopolitical realities prompted a deal. In 1920, the Brits claimed a mandate for Mesopotamia and the French one for Syria. Rebellion broke out in Mesopotamia. Rebels cut train lines, attacked towns and murdered British officers. In 1921, England agreed to a king for Mesopotamia. Iraq was born. In 1932, it became independent.{12} Today . . . well, read your morning paper. Decisions have consequences.

Creating A Jewish Homeland

Another major decision made at the Paris Peace Conference

affected the Jewish world and, eventually, the entire Middle East.

In February 1919, a British chemist appeared before the peacemakers to argue that Jews of the world needed a safe place to live. Jews were trying to leave Russia and Austria by the millions. Where could they go? Chaim Weizmann and his Zionist colleagues thought they had the perfect answer: Palestine.{13}

Zionism had a powerful ally in British foreign secretary, Arthur Balfour. Balfour was a wealthy politician with a strange habit of staying in bed all morning. "If you wanted nothing done," reflected Winston Churchill, Balfour "was undoubtedly the best man for the task."{14} Son of a deeply religious mother, he was fascinated with the Jews and Weizmann's vision.{15}

Prime Minister Lloyd George was another fan. Raised with the Bible, he claimed to have learned more Jewish history than English history. During the war, Weizmann, the Jewish chemist, provided without charge his process for making acetone, which the British desperately needed for making explosives. In return, Lloyd George offered Weizmann support for Zionism. Lloyd George later hailed that offer as the origin of the declaration supporting a Jewish homeland. The French posed an alternate theory: Lloyd George's mistress was married to a well-known Jewish businessman.{16}

In October 1917, the British issued the famous Balfour Declaration, pledging to help establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine. In 1919, Weizmann and other Zionist leaders made their pitch to the Paris peacemakers. But there was a problem. The Brits had made conflicting promises. During the war, they had supported a Jewish homeland in Palestine. They had also encouraged the Arabs to revolt against Ottoman rule, promising them independence over land that included Palestine.{17}

President Wilson, the son of a Presbyterian minister, was sympathetic to Zionism. “To think,” he told a prominent American rabbi, “that I the son of the manse should be able to help restore the Holy Land to its people.”{18} But the peacemakers postponed a decision. In 1920, at a separate conference, the British got the Palestinian mandate (a form of trusteeship) to carry out the Balfour Declaration. Palestinian Arabs were already rioting against the Jews.{19} And today? Well, check your radio news.

Decisions have consequences. Next, how Paris 1919 influenced the great Asian dragon.

China Betrayed

U.S. president Woodrow Wilson once described a negotiating technique he used on an associate. “When you have hooked him,” explained Wilson, “first you draw in a little, then give liberty to the line, then draw him back, finally wear him out, break him down, and land him.”{20}

A Chinese-Japanese conflict would challenge Wilson’s negotiating skills.{21} The Chinese had joined the Allies and hoped for fair treatment in Paris. Many Chinese admired Western democracy and Wilson’s idealistic vision.

Shantung was a strategic peninsula below Beijing. Confucius, the great philosopher, was born there. His ideas permeated Chinese society. Shantung had thirty million people, cheap labor, plentiful minerals and a natural harbor. Shantung silk is still fashionable today. In the late 1890s, Germany seized Shantung. In 1914, Japan took it from the Germans.{22}

In Paris, Japan wanted Shantung. Japan sported a collection of secret agreements that remind one of a *Survivor* TV series. China placed hope in Wilson’s famous Fourteen Points, which rejected secret treaties and included self-determination.{23}

The Chinese ambassador to Washington called Shantung “a Holy

Land for the Chinese" and said that under foreign control it would be a "dagger pointed at the heart of China."{24} Wilson seemed sympathetic at first, but the decision on Shantung had to wait until late April as the Allies finalized the German treaty. By then, an avalanche of decisions was overwhelming the peacemakers. When the Japanese forced their hand, Wilson, Clemenceau and Lloyd George conceded Shantung to Japan in exchange for Japan's concession on another significant treaty matter.{25}

Chinese blamed Wilson for betraying them. On May 4, thousands of demonstrators rallied in Tiananmen Square. The dean of humanities from Beijing University distributed leaflets. May 4 marked the rejection of the West by many Chinese intellectuals. New Russian communism looked attractive to some. In 1921, radicals founded the Chinese Communist Party. That dean of humanities who had distributed leaflets became its first chairman, Mao Tse-tung. His party won power in 1949{26} and today . . . have you listened to the news recently?

Iraq, Israel, Palestine, China . . . Paris 1919 influenced them all. What does all this mean for us?

Decisions, Consequences, and You

As they departed Paris in 1919 after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, Woodrow Wilson told his wife, "It is finished, and, as no one is satisfied, it makes me hope we have made a just peace; but it is all in the lap of the gods."{27}

As the journalists and delegations left Paris, the hotels that had become headquarters for the conventioneers reopened for regular business. Prostitutes groused that business dipped.{28}

The big three peacemakers did not last much longer in power. Lloyd George was forced to resign as prime minister in 1922.

Clemenceau ran for president in late 1919, but withdrew in anger when he discovered he would face opposition. Wilson faced great resistance in the U.S. Senate which never ratified the Treaty of Versailles. In October 1919, a massive stroke left him bedridden and debilitated. In December, he learned he had won the Nobel Peace Prize.{29}

Iraq, a nation patched together in Paris and its aftermath, still boils with religious, ethnic, and cultural dissent. Israelis and Palestinians still clash. China still distrusts the West. Certainly many decisions in intervening years have affected these hotspots, but seeds of conflict were sown in Paris.

What is a biblical perspective on Paris 1919? I don't claim to know which peacemakers may or may not have been following God in their particular choices, but consider three lessons that are both simple and profound:

First: *God's sovereignty ultimately trumps human activity.* God "raises up nations, and he destroys them."{30} He also "causes all things to work together for good to those who love" Him.{31} History's end has not yet transpired. Once it has, we shall see His divine hand more clearly.

Second: *Decisions have consequences.* "You will always reap what you sow!" Paul exclaimed.{32} This applies to nations and individuals. We all face decisions about what foods to eat, careers to pursue and life partners to select, about whether to become friends with God and to follow Him. Our choices influence this life and the next. Our decisions can affect others and produce unforeseen consequences. So . . .

Third: *We should seek to make wise decisions.* Solomon, a very wise king, wrote, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will direct your paths."{33}

Decisions have consequences. Are you facing any decisions that

you need to place in God’s hands?

Notes

1. Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2001). Most of the historical material in this article is drawn from MacMillan’s research.
2. Ibid., back cover.
3. Ibid., xxvii.
4. Ibid., 388-395 ff.
5. Ibid., 59.
6. Ibid., 255, 275.
7. A. Ribot, *Journal d’Alexandre Ribot et correspondances indites, 1914-1922* (Paris, 1936), 255; in Ibid., xxx.
8. A. Toynbee, *Acquaintances* (London, 1967), 211-12; in MacMillan, op. cit., 381.
9. MacMillan, op. cit., 395-96.
10. Ibid., 397.
11. Ibid., 400.
12. Ibid., 400-409.
13. Ibid., 410.
14. Ibid., 413.
15. Ibid., 413-415.
16. Ibid., 415-16.
17. Ibid., 416-21.
18. Ibid., 422.
19. Ibid., 4; 98; 103; 420; 423-427.
20. Ibid., 194.
21. Ibid., 322-344.
22. Ibid., 325-27.
23. Ibid., 328-29; 336; 338; 322; 495-96.
24. Ibid., 334.
25. Ibid., 330-38.
26. Ibid., 338-341.
27. T. Schachtman, Edith and Woodrow (New York, 1981), 189; in MacMillan, op. cit., 487.
28. MacMillan, op. cit., 485.

29. Ibid., 487-92.
30. Job 12:23 NLT.
31. Romans 8:28 NASB.
32. Galatians 6:7 NLT.
33. Proverbs 3:5-6 NLT.

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JFK and Groupthink: Lessons in Decision Making

JFK's Legacy and Groupthink

Have you ever been part of a group that was making an important decision and you felt uncomfortable with the direction things were headed? Maybe it was a business or academic committee, a social group, a church board, a government agency. Did you speak up? Or did you keep your concerns to yourself? And what was the outcome of the group's decision? Do you ever wish you had voiced your reservations more strongly?

Perhaps you can identify with John F. Kennedy.

Forty years after his tragic death, President Kennedy continues to fascinate the public. A new JFK biography{1} hit the bestseller lists. Analysts dissect his political and oratorical skills, his character and legacy. His relatives – America's royalty in some eyes – are frequent newsmakers.

The youthful president has engendered both inspiration and disappointment. Major initiatives that he sponsored or influenced touch society today: the space program, the Peace

Corp, and economic sanctions against Cuba, to name a few.

A fascinating facet of Kennedy's legacy involves the decision-making procedures he used among his closest advisors. Some brought great successes. Others were serious failures. This article looks at two specific examples: the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, an attempt to invade Cuba and overthrow Fidel Castro that became a fiasco, and the 1962 Cuban missile crisis that saw the world come perilously close to nuclear war.

Yale social psychologist Irving Janis studied these episodes carefully and concluded that too often decision makers are blinded by their own needs for self-esteem they get from being an accepted member of a socially important insiders group. Fears of shattering the warm feelings of perceived unanimity – of rocking the boat – kept some of Kennedy's advisors from objecting to the Bay of Pigs plan before it was too late. After that huge blunder, JFK revamped his decision-making process to encourage dissent and critical evaluation among his team. In the Cuban missile crisis, virtually the same policymakers produced superior results.{2}

"Groupthink" was the term Janis used for the phenomenon of flawed group dynamics that can let bad ideas go unchallenged and can sometimes yield disastrous outcomes. This article will consider how groupthink might have affected JFK and a major television enterprise, and how it can affect you.

The Bay of Pigs Invasion

"How could I have been so stupid?"{3} President John F. Kennedy asked that after the Bay of Pigs fiasco. He called it a "colossal mistake."{4} It left him feeling depressed, guilty, bitter, and in tears.{5} One historian later called the Bay of Pigs, "one of those rare events in history – a perfect failure."{6}

What happened? In 1961, CIA and military leaders wanted to use

Cuban exiles to overthrow Fidel Castro. After lengthy consideration among his top advisors, Kennedy approved a covert invasion. Advance press reports alerted Castro to the threat. Over 1,400 invaders at the *Bahía de Cochinos* (Bay of Pigs) were vastly outnumbered. Lacking air support, necessary ammunition and an escape route, nearly 1,200 surrendered. Others died.

Declassified CIA documents help illuminate the invasion's flaws. Top CIA leaders blamed Kennedy for not authorizing vital air strikes. Other CIA analysts fault the wishful thinking that the invasion would stimulate an uprising among Cuba's populace and military. Planners assumed the invaders could simply fade into the mountains for guerilla operations. Trouble was, eighty miles of swampland separated the bay from the mountains. The list goes on.{7}

Irving Janis felt that Kennedy's top advisors were unwilling to challenge bad ideas because it might disturb perceived or desired group concurrence. Presidential advisor Arthur Schlesinger, for instance, presented serious objections to the invasion in a memorandum to the president, but suppressed his doubts at the team meetings. Attorney General Robert Kennedy privately admonished Schlesinger to support the president's decision to invade. At one crucial meeting, JFK called on each member for his vote for or against the invasion. Each member, that is, except Schlesinger – whom he knew to have serious concerns. Many members assumed other members agreed with the invasion plan.{8}

Schlesinger later lamented, "In the months after the Bay of Pigs I bitterly reproached myself for having kept so silent during those crucial discussions in the cabinet room." He continued, "I can only explain my failure to do more than raise a few timid questions by reporting that one's impulse to blow the whistle on this nonsense was simply undone by the circumstances of the discussion."{9}

Have you ever kept silent when you felt you should speak up? President Kennedy later revised his group decision-making process to encourage dissent and debate. The change helped avert a nuclear catastrophe, as we will see.

The Cuban Missile Crisis

Ever face tough decisions? How would you feel if your wrong decision might mean nuclear war? Consider a time when the world teetered on the brink of disaster.{10}

Stung by the Bay of Pigs debacle, President Kennedy determined to ask hard questions during future crises.{11} A good opportunity came eighteen months later.

In October 1962, aerial photographs showed Soviet missile sites in Cuba.{12} The missile program, if allowed to continue, could reach most of the United States with nuclear warheads.{13} Kennedy's first inclination was an air strike to take out the missiles.{14} His top advisors debated alternatives from bombing and invasion to blockade and negotiation.{15}

On October 22, Kennedy set forth an ultimatum in a televised address: A U.S. naval "quarantine" would block further offensive weapons from reaching Cuba. Russia must promptly dismantle and withdraw all offensive weapons. Use of the missiles would bring attacks against the Soviet Union.{16}

The U.S. Navy blockaded Cuba. Soviets readied their forces. The Pentagon directed the Strategic Air Command to begin a nuclear alert. On October 24, the world held its breath as six Soviet ships approached the blockade. Then, all six ships either stopped or reversed course.{17} Secretary of State Dean Rusk told a colleague, "We're eyeball to eyeball, and I think the other fellow just blinked."{18}

A maze of negotiations ensued. At the United Nations, U.S. ambassador Adlai Stevenson publicly pressed his Soviet

counterpart to confirm or deny Soviet missiles' existence in Cuba. Saying he was prepared to wait for an answer "until hell freezes over," Stevenson then displayed reconnaissance photos to the Security Council.{19} Eventually, Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev removed the missiles.{20}

Kennedy's decision-making process – though imperfect – had evolved significantly. He challenged military leaders who pressured him to bomb and invade. He heard the CIA's case for air strikes and Stevenson's counsel for negotiation. Advocates for different views developed their arguments in committees then met back together.{21} Robert Kennedy later wrote, "The fact that we were able to talk, debate, argue, disagree, and then debate some more was essential in choosing our ultimate course."{22} Many groupthink mistakes of the Bay of Pigs, in which bad ideas went unchallenged, had been avoided.{23}

Groupthink has serious ramifications for government, business, academia, neighborhood, family, and the ministry. One area it has affected is Christian television.

Groupthink and the Seductive Televangelist

Once upon a time, a prominent Christian televangelist, despondent about his rocky marriage, had sexual intercourse with a church secretary.

This televangelist and his wife regularly appeared on international TV, providing physical and spiritual care to hurting people. Television brought in millions of dollars. Their headquarters and conference center displayed a wholesome, positive atmosphere. Yet the operation was quite lavish and included an opulent five-star hotel, white limousine, corporate jet, and bloated salaries.

The distraught secretary contacted ministry headquarters, wanting justice. The ministry paid her hush money, laundered

through their builder. Several insiders were aware of the sex scandal and cover up, but turned a blind eye. Many of these top leaders also enjoyed privilege, esteem, comfort, and wealth from the successful ministry.

Eventually, fearing media exposure, the televangelist confessed his sexual episode to the local newspaper and stepped down. The ensuing turmoil became an international soap opera complete with sexual intrigue, power struggles, and legal morass. The televangelist and his VP served prison terms. The builder's wife divorced him because of his involvement with the televangelist's wife, who divorced the televangelist, married the builder and tried to start another TV ministry.

After prison, the televangelist wrote a book admitting wrong{24}, joined an inner city ministry, and remarried. The church secretary had plastic surgery and posed nude for *Playboy*. The local newspaper won a Pulitzer Prize.

You may recognize this as the story of PTL and Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker.{25} Reporter Charles Shepard's book about PTL, *Forgiven*{26}, stands as a timely warning to ministry leaders and boards of the temptations of fame and power.

The PTL scandal exhibited several possible symptoms of groupthink{27}, such as belief in the group's inherent morality, rationalizations, stereotyping adversaries, and pressures to conform. Desires for approval, pride, greed, and a false sense of well-being stemming from being an accepted member of a wealthy, influential inner circle apparently stifled dissent. Leaders seemed to overlook problems for "the good of the ministry." Richard Dortch, Bakker's second in command, later admitted, "We were wrong. I should have refused the kind of salary I took. . . . We were so caught up in God's work that we forgot about God. It took the tragedy, the kick in the teeth, to bring us to our senses."{28}

Groupthink can affect leaders of all stripes. What lessons might JFK and PTL have for you?

Groupthink and You

As we have seen, Kennedy's presidency provides some potent examples of this psychological theory about flawed group decision-making. When the group culture overvalues internal agreement, members can become unrealistic.{29}

Symptoms of groupthink include:

- *Illusions of invulnerability: "No one can defeat us."*
- *Belief in the group's inherent morality: "We can do no wrong."*
- *Rationalizing away serious problems: "Danger signs? What danger signs?"*
- *Stereotyping the opposition: "Those guys are too dumb or too weak to worry about."*
- *Illusions of unanimity: "Members who keep silent probably agree with the ones who speak out."*
- *Pressuring dissenters: "Look, are you a team player or not?"*

JFK's Bay of Pigs advisors accepted the CIA's flawed plan almost without criticism. Leaders underestimated Castro's military and political capability and overestimated their own. Jim Bakker and his PTL Christian ministry leaders rationalized away sexual and financial impropriety, to their peril.

Of course, not every group succumbs to groupthink. Nor does groupthink explain every bad group decision (decision makers could be inept, greedy or just plain evil, for example).

What about you? What can you do to avoid the groupthink trap? May I offer some suggestions, from a biblical perspective?

First: *Determine to stand for what is right, regardless of the*

cost. Jesus of Nazareth, one who stood by his convictions of right, admonished followers to "let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father."{30}

Second: *Determine to speak up when the situation warrants it.* One of Jesus' close friends said of certain people too fearful to speak up amidst opposition that "they loved the approval of…[humans] rather than the approval of God."{31} How sad.

Third: *Seek to structure groups to avoid blind conformity and encourage healthy debate.* JFK once said, "When at some future date the high court of history sits in judgment on each of us, it will ask: Were we truly men of courage – with the courage to stand up to one's enemies – and the courage to stand up, when necessary, to one's associates?"{32} Paul, a first-century follower of Jesus, encouraged group members to "admonish one another."{33}

We all have a chance to leave a legacy. John Kennedy left his, which was mixed. PTL left a legacy, also mixed. What legacy will you leave?

Notes

1. Robert Dallek, *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2003).

2. Irving L. Janis, "Groupthink," *Psychology Today* 5:6, November 1971, 43-44, 46, 74-76. See also Irving L. Janis, *Victims of Groupthink* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972).

3. Dallek, op. cit., p. 367.

4. Ibid., 375.

5. Ibid., 366.

6. Ibid., 363.

7. For a summary of the invasion and various assessments of its many flaws, see Ibid., 356-372; and Michael Warner, "Lessons Unlearned: The CIA's Internal Probe of the Bay of Pigs Affair," Studies in Intelligence: A collection of articles on the theoretical, doctrinal, operational and historical aspects of intelligence, 42:2, Winter 1998-1999, www.cia.gov/csi/studies/winter98-99/art08.html.

8. Janis 1971, op. cit., especially 46, 74.

9. Ibid., 74.

10. Most of the historical material for this section is taken from Dallek, op. cit., 535-574. Another useful summary of the Cuban missile crisis by a former *New York Times* reporter who covered it from Washington, D.C. – and became a participant, of sorts – is Max Frankel, "Learning from the Missile Crisis," *Smithsonian Magazine,* October 2002, www.smithsonianmag.si.edu/smithsonian/issues02/oct02/missile_crisis_full_1.html. For a collection of declassified documents from the crisis, see Laurence Chang and Peter Kornbluh, eds., *The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: A National Security Archive Documents Reader,* 2nd edition (New York: The New Press, 1998); the Introduction is reproduced at www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/declass.htm.

11. Dallek, op. cit., 368, 372.

12. Ibid., 544.

13. Ibid., 559.

14. Ibid., 547.

15. Ibid., 547-58.

16. Ibid., 558-59.

17. Ibid., 561-562.

18. Ibid., 562.

19. Ibid., 564-565.

20. Ibid., 562-572.

21. Ibid., 550-56.

22. Robert Kennedy, *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1969), 111; in Chang and Kornbluh, op. cit., Introduction, www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/declass.htm.

23. Janis 1971, op. cit., 76.

24. Jim Bakker, *I Was Wrong: The Untold Story of the Shocking Journey from PTL Power to Prison and Beyond (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996).*

*25. See, for instance, Keith A. Roberts, Religion in Sociological Perspective, 3rd ed. (Belmont, Californ*ia: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1995), 376-78. The PTL saga has reached textbook-case status.

26. Charles E. Shepard, *Forgiven: The Rise and Fall of Jim Bakker and the PTL Ministry* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1991).

27. Janis 1971, op. cit., 44, 46, 74-75.

28. "Interview: 'I Made Mistakes'," *Christianity Today*, March 18, 1988, 46-47.

29. Janis 1971, op. cit.

30. Matthew 5:16 NLT.

31. John 12:43 NASB.

32. Dallek, op. cit., 535.

33. Colossians 3:16 NIV.

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Christianity and Racism – Was Jesus a Racist?

Rusty Wright takes a hard look at this question: does Christianity promote racism? He looks at the lives and teachings of Jesus and Paul to see if they taught equality of all races or promoted racism. He finds that it is not the teachings of Christianity that promote racism. A biblical worldview will create a love for all people and a desire to help them develop personal faith.

Does Christianity Promote Racism?

Thirty years after the heyday of the Civil Rights movement, racial issues in the US remain sensitive. Racial quotas in the workplace and academia continue to be controversial. Prominent corporations are accused of racist practices. Certain supremacy groups promote the Bible, God and the white race. Race and politics interact in ways that carry both national and international significance.

A few years back, the Southern Baptist Convention made headlines for renouncing racism, condemning slavery and apologizing for the church's intolerant past. That laudable contrition raised a deeper question: Why would Christianity ever be associated with racial oppression in the first place? How did the faith whose founder told people to "love one

another" ever become linked with human bondage and social apartheid?

African-American theologian James Cone notes that "In the old slavery days, the Church preached that slavery was a divine decree, and it used the Bible as the basis of its authority."{1}

"Not only did Christianity fail to offer the … [Black] hope of freedom in the world, but the manner in which Christianity was communicated to him tended to degrade him. The … [Black] was taught that his enslavement was due to the fact that he had been cursed by God. … Parts of the Bible were carefully selected to prove that God had intended that the…[Black] should be the servant of the white man…."{2}

As a white baby boomer growing up in the South, I experienced segregated schools, restrooms, drinking fountains and beaches. My parents taught and modeled equality, so the injustice I saw saddened me deeply. I was appalled that the Ku Klux Klan used the Bible and the cross in its rituals.

During college, a friend brought an African-American student to a church I attended in North Carolina. The next Sunday, the pastor announced that because of "last week's racial incident" (the attendance of a Black), church leaders had voted to maintain their longstanding policy of racial segregation. Thereafter, any Blacks attending would be handed a note explaining the policy and asking that they not return. I was outraged and left the church. (Postscript: A few years ago I learned that that white church had folded and that an African-American church came to use the same facility. Maybe God has a sense of humor.)

Does Christianity promote racism? Is it mainly a faith for whites? This article will examine these two burning questions.

Was Jesus Racist?

Does the Christian faith promote racism? Is it mainly for whites? Certain extremists think so. Some slavery-era ministers wrote books justifying slavery. George D. Armstrong wrote in *The Christian Doctrine of Slavery*, "It may be… that Christian slavery is God's solution of the problem [relation of labor and capital] about which the wisest statesmen of Europe confess themselves at fault."{3}

Consider another book, *Slavery Ordained of God*. In it, Fred A. Ross wrote, "Slavery is ordained of God, … to continue for the good of the slave, the good of the master, the good of the whole American family, until another and better destiny may be unfolded."{4}

Those words seem quite different from the biblical injunction to "love your neighbor as yourself," a statement with equally poignant historical roots.

In first-century Palestine, the Jews and Samaritans were locked in a blood feud. Divided by geography, religion and race, the two groups spewed venom. Each had its own turf. Jews considered the Samaritans to be racial "half-breeds." The two groups disputed which followed the Bible better and on whose land proper worship should occur.

The Samaritans were often inhospitable to{5} and hostile toward the Jews. Many Jewish pilgrims deliberately lengthened their journeys to bypass Samaria. Jews publicly cursed Samaritans in their synagogues, would not allow Samaritan testimony in Jewish courts, and generally considered Samaritans excluded from eternal life.{6}

Once a Jewish lawyer asked Jesus of Nazareth, "Who is my neighbor?"{7} Jesus, who as Jew surprised people by mixing freely with Samaritans, told him a now famous story. Robbers attacked a Jewish traveler, beating him and leaving him half-

dead. Two Jewish religious leaders ignored the injured man as they passed by. But a Samaritan felt compassion for the Jewish victim – his cultural enemy – and bandaged his wounds, transported him to an inn and provided for his care. Jesus' point? This "Good Samaritan" was an example of how we should relate to those with whom we differ.

The founder of the Christian faith was no racist. He told people to get along. What about a chief expositor of the Christian faith? And why is eleven o-clock Sunday morning often the most segregated hour of the week? Let's turn now to these important questions.

Was A Chief Expositor of the Faith A Racist?

Does Christianity promote racism? As we have seen, Jesus of Nazareth was no racist. Living in a culturally and racially diverse society that was in many ways analogous to ours, He promoted harmony by His example and His words. What about Paul, one of the chief expositors of faith in Christ?

Paul often had to counsel members of the communities he advised about diversity issues. Some in the groups with which he consulted were Jews, some were non-Jews or "Gentiles." Some were slaves and some were free. Some were men and some were women. The mix was potentially explosive.

From prison, Paul wrote to a friend whose slave had run away, had met Paul, and had come to faith. Paul appealed to his friend on the basis of their relationship to welcome the slave back not as a slave but as a brother. He offered to repay any loss from his own pocket. The letter survives in the New Testament as the book of "Philemon" and is a touching example of a dedicated believer seeking to internally motivate a slaveholder to change his attitudes and behavior.{8}

Paul felt that the faith he had once persecuted could unify

people. He wrote to one group of believers that because of their common spiritual commitment, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one….”{9} Paul, a Jew by birth, wrote to some non-Jewish believers that “Christ himself has made peace between us Jews and you Gentiles by making us all one people. He has broken down the wall of hostility that used to separate us.”{10}

Paul exhorted another group of believers to live in harmony. He wrote, “Since God chose you to be the holy people whom he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. You must make allowance for each other’s faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. And the most important piece of clothing you must wear is love. Love is what binds us all together in perfect harmony.”{11}

Paul promoted harmony, not discord. If the founder of the faith and its chief expositor were not racists, why is eleven o’clock Sunday morning often the most segregated hour of the week?

True Followers?

Why is Christianity often associated with racism? The short answer is that some that claim to be followers of Jesus are not really following Him. They may have the label “Christian,” but perhaps they never have established a personal friendship with Christ. They may be like I was for many years: a church member, seemingly devoted, but who had never accepted Christ’s pardon based on His death and resurrection for me. Or they may have genuine faith, but haven’t allowed God into the driver’s seat of their life. I’ve been there, too.

I shall always remember Norton and Bo. Norton was a leader of the Georgia Black Student Movement in the 1970s. Bo was a racially prejudiced white Christian. Once during an Atlanta

civil rights demonstration, Bo and some of his cronies beat Norton up. The animosity ran deep.

Norton later discovered that Christianity was not a religion of oppressive rules, but a relationship with God. As his faith sprouted and grew, his anger mellowed while his desire for social justice deepened. Meanwhile, Bo rejected his hypocrisy and began to follow his faith with God in control. Three years after the beating, the two unexpectedly met again at a Christian conference. Initial tension melted into friendship as they forgave each other, reconciled and treated each other like brothers.

Of course not all disobedient Christians are racists. Nor is everyone not aligned with Jesus a racist. But faith in Christ can give enemies motivation to reconcile, to replace hatred with love.

Historical examples abound of true faith opposing racism. John Newton, an 18th-century British slave trader, came to faith, renounced his old ways, became a pastor, and wrote the famous hymn, “Amazing Grace.” Newton encouraged his Christian friend, William Wilberforce, who faced scorn and ridicule in leading a long but successful battle in Parliament to abolish the slave trade.

Does Christianity promote racism? No, true Christianity seeks to eliminate racism by changing people’s hearts.

After I had spoken on this theme in a sociology class at North Carolina State University, a young African-American woman told me, “All my life I’ve been taught that white Christians were responsible for the oppression of my people. Now I realize those oppressors were not really following Christ.”

Is Christianity just for whites? Norton, the Black activist, certainly did not think so. Let’s look further at the faith that crosses racial divides.

The Heart of the Matter

Is Christianity just for whites? Jesus and Paul said anyone who believed would be plugged into God forever. Africa has millions who follow Jesus. Koreans send missionaries to the US. And don't we need them!

In Cape Town, South Africa, Saint James Church has been a beacon of diversity and social concern with its white, Black, Asian and biracial members. One Sunday evening, radical Black terrorists sprayed the multiracial congregation with automatic gunfire and grenades. Eleven died and 53 were wounded, some horribly maimed. The world press was astounded by the members' reaction.

Lorenzo Smith, who is biracial, saw his wife, Myrtle, die from shrapnel that pierced her heart as he tried to shield her. Yet he forgave the killers. "I prayed for those that committed the crime," he told me, "so they, too, can come to meet [the Lord]."

The president of the West African nation of Benin came to the US a few years back with a message for African American leaders: His compatriots were sorry for their ancestors' complicity in the slave trade. An often-overlooked component of slavery's historical stain is that Black Africans sold other Black Africans into slavery. When rival tribes made war, the victors took prisoners and made them indentured servants, often selling them to white slave merchants.

Benin's President Kerekou, who in recent years had made his own commitment to Christ, invited political and church leaders to his nation so his tribal leaders could seek reconciliation with African Americans.

Brian Johnson, an African-American organizer, said the realization that Blacks sold other Blacks into slavery has been difficult for many African Americans to handle. "This

made it difficult to hold the White man responsible," he explained as we spoke. "This creates some problems in our own psyche. We have to deal with another angle to this…. It's not merely a Black-White thing."

The problem is in human hearts, Johnson believes. "All have sinned," he claims, quoting the New Testament.{12} "All of us need to confess our wrong and appeal to [God] for forgiveness."

Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy lamented that "Everybody thinks of changing humanity, but nobody thinks of changing himself."{13} True Christianity is not just for whites, and it does not promote racism but seeks to eliminate it. Changing corrupt institutions is very important. An ultimate solution to racism involves changing individual hearts.

Notes

1. James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), p. 74.

2. E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie* (New York: Collier Books, 1965), p.115. Quoted in ibid. Bracketed words are mine.

3. Quoted in Frazier, loc. cit.; quoted in Cone loc. cit. Neither emphasis nor bracketed words are mine. Emphasis is likely Frazier's or Armstrong's. Bracketed words could be either Frazier's or Cone's.

4. Quoted in Frazier, loc. cit.; quoted in Cone loc. cit.

5. Luke 9:52-53.

6. Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1957, 1961, 1966), pp. 958-960. See also John 4:1-45.

7. Luke 10:29 ff.

8. Philemon 1-25.

9. Galatians 3:28 NIV.

10. Ephesians 2:14 NLT.

11. Colossians 3: 12-14 NLT.

12. Romans 3:23 NIV.

13. *World* Christian magazine (February 1989), p. U8.

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Romantic Hyperbole: A Humorous Look at Honesty in Love

It seemed like a good idea at the time.

It would be a great way to express my enduring affection for my wife. I would find seven romantic birthday cards and give one to Meg each day for a week, starting on her birthday. It would continue a sweet tradition begun before we married.

Each card would have a simple picture that would tenderly convey our feelings for one another. Inside would be an endearing slogan or affirmation to which I would add a personal expression of my love for her.

I didn’t foresee that Day Three would bring an ethical dilemma.

I carefully selected the cards and arranged them in an appropriate sequence. Day One showed a cute puppy with a pink rose. Inside: “You’re the one I love.”

Day Two featured a picture of a little boy and girl in a meadow with their arms over each other's shoulders. The slogan: "Happy Birthday to my favorite playmate."

Day Three depicted a beautiful tropical sunset: bluish pink sky, vast ocean, silhouetted palm trees. You could almost feel the balmy breeze. Inside: "Paradise is anywhere with you", to which I added personal mention of places holding special memories for us: an island vacation spot, a North Carolina hotel, our home.

I completed the remaining cards, dated the envelopes, and planned to bestow one card each morning of her birth week. Then reality happened.

You see, I had agreed to go camping with her for Days One and Two. Camping is something Meg thrives on—outdoor living, clean air, hiking, camp fires. It's in her blood. Camping is something I did in Boy Scouts—dust, mosquitoes, noisy campers, smelly latrines. It ranks just below root canals on my list of favorites.

We camped at a state park only fifteen minutes from our home. On her birthday morning, she liked the fluffy puppy. Day Two, the cute kids made her smile. So far, so good.

Meanwhile, I was tolerating camping, doing my best to keep my attitude positive. The food was OK; the bugs were scarce. After two days, I was ready to go home as planned. Meg wanted to stay an extra day. We each got our wish.

Once home and alone, I pulled out Meg's card for "Day Three," the one with the tropical sunset and the "paradise is anywhere with you" slogan.

Should I give her the card? I had chosen to leave the campground. "But," I reasoned with myself, "the slogan was true lots of the time."

I settled on a compromise, a post-it note on the envelope explaining, “You may find that this card contains just a bit of romantic hyperbole.”

Might giving it a clever-sounding label defuse my hypocrisy?

The echoes of her laughter still reverberate through our home. I got off easy.

“Speak the truth to each other,” wrote a Jewish sage. “Speak. . . . the truth in love,” advocated a first-century biblical writer. Wise advice for just about any relationship.

“Romantic hyperbole” has become a humorous gauge of truthfulness in our relationship, a test for honesty. Neither of us enjoys every location on earth. She feels some sporting events are a waste of time. I can get bored at shopping malls. But as long as we are honest with each other about our feelings, the bond seems to grow stronger.

That’s no hyperbole.

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Elvis Has Left the Building

Elvis Lives!

Elvis lives. At least he does in the hearts of his fans. And they are everywhere.

Twenty-five years after his death, our culture is still fascinated with the raven-haired, swivel-hipped entertainer. His songs fill the airwaves. His face graces postage stamps and velvet paintings in the U.S. and abroad. Thousands of the

faithful annually trek to Graceland, his Memphis home, to pay homage to the king of rock and roll.

August 16, 2002, marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of Elvis Presley's death. Memphis will be rocking during "Elvis Week." Pilgrims can enjoy concerts and eat their favorite Elvis food (probably heavy on the grease and sugar).

Meanwhile, impersonators abound. For instance, the "Flying Elvi" jump from 13,000 feet. (You read correctly. That's the "Flying *Elvi*." Scholars and real Elvis fans know that "Elvi" is the plural of "Elvis." We've got culture here at Probe.)

Featured in a hit movie, these Las Vegas daredevils combine skydiving with Elvis nostalgia. They are even available for Las Vegas weddings: "Why settle for just one Elvis look-alike," asks the ad, "when you can have the entire ten-Elvi team in attendance on your special day?"

Internet sites tout Elvis fan clubs and even Elvis baby food. Wine connoisseurs have sighted "Always Elvis Wine." Former NFL coach Jerry Glanville often left two tickets for Elvis at the will-call window on game days.

Even academics are into Elvis. The University of Mississippi has held International Conferences on Elvis Presley. Scholarly seminars included, "Civil Rights: Martin Luther King, Jr., and Elvis;" "Elvis: The Twinless Twins' Search for Spiritual Meaning" (Elvis' twin brother died at birth); and "Elvis 'n' Jesus."

America. What a country!

What is all this about, really? Why the obsession with a long-dead rock and roll star? In this article we will examine some reasons for Elvis mania. You might think that Elvis fans are crazy! But I suspect that you share some of the desires and hopes for life that seem to drive many of his fans. Their devotion borders on the spiritual. There is even a "First

*Presley*terian Church."

What might all this fascination with Elvis tell us about ourselves? Let us look at some clues in the next section.

Inside the Mind of an Elvis Fan

An event manager from Washington, DC, got hooked on Elvis at a 1973 concert. She has a batch of Elvis memorabilia ranging from Elvis lamps – complete with swinging hips – to a Franklin Mint medal.

Her prized possession is a photocopy of Elvis' final EKG (electrocardiogram), obtained from a nurse who worked in the Memphis hospital where doctors desperately tried to revive his corpse in 1977. The photocopy may be quite valuable. Elvis fans can be weird, she admits.

The child of alcoholics, this self-confessed enabler has fantasies that if only she had encountered Elvis, maybe she could have rescued him from the drugs and despair that brought his demise.

She is sorry that Elvis had no one in his life that would hold him accountable for his actions. Instead, groupies, politicians, and doctors bowed before him, granting him adoration, access, and prescription medicine. Fame can be a powerful aphrodisiac and willing women were plentiful.

What fascinates her with Elvis after all these years? Could it be romance? Rescue needs or hopes? She is single. Adult children of alcoholics often find themselves rescuing people, just like they tried to help their addicted parents.

Might any chords in your soul resonate with this fan, or with the life and death of this poor southern boy turned rock superstar, whose posthumous career length now has surpassed his live one? Most of us want to be loved. Some might envy Elvis' looks, voice, popularity, or fortune. Some, maybe many,

are driven to obtain self-esteem by pleasing people.

Many feel that humans need to believe in something greater than themselves. Some have described this need as a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every person. Could worshippers of Elvis – or of sports stars, rock stars, movie stars, or athletic heroes – be seeking to fill such a vacuum?

What do you make of the Elvis phenomenon? Is it a national joke, or could it hold important insights into human nature? Let us examine a variety of reactions.

What's the Elvis Craze All About?

Why does Elvis still fascinate people? What is the enduring Elvis craze about, really? My own informal, nonscientific survey yielded fascinating analyses from many levels of society.

"It's a national joke," claimed a San Diego housepainter.

A Miami office manager said, "Our cat is named Elvis Presley. He's fat with a black coat, white collar, and eyes that glaze over – Elvis in his later years." Her husband quipped, "The other day, we had an Elvis sighting – in a tree."

A Sacramento van driver attributes today's craze to "all the lonely people who sit around and watch TV." "Besides," the driver says, "Elvis' grave wasn't marked right, and there's evidence he's not really buried there. I read it in the tabloids."

A California mayor feels people need to link up with something, to create a sense of belonging. "They could be seeking memories of better times," she reasons. "Some people wish he was still alive. My husband is an Elvis fan," she says. "He knows Elvis is dead, but he likes the music."

A southern California doctor wonders if fans may be bonding

with a romanticized part of their youth. He adds, “People who don’t have God make a god out of all sorts of things.”

Indeed they do. Deep reverence and even worship characterize many pilgrims to Graceland. Some hold candlelight ceremonies, offer flowers, and display icons.

One scholar at the University of Mississippi’s International Conference on Elvis noted, “without looking at spirituality, you can’t explain the Elvis phenomena. . . . There’s a tremendous force that brings people back to Graceland.”{1}

Spiritual matters, of course, can be very controversial. More and more psychologists and psychiatrists emphasize the need to develop the total person – physically, emotionally and spiritually – in order to achieve a healthy life. Spiritual questions surface in many areas of society, from talk shows to hospitals.

Oprah Winfrey leads the pack of talk show hosts delving into the spiritual dimension. Respectable medical schools like Duke, Harvard, and Columbia study faith’s impact on health.

Perhaps there is a spiritual void that Elvis worshipers and many others seek to fill with the objects of their devotion. Could that explain the Elvis phenomenon? Next we will consider the spiritual implications of Elvis worship.

Are You Lonesome Tonight?

Tell me now, really: Are You Lonesome Tonight? (Don’t worry; I won’t quote the whole song . . . at least not in this article!) Read what these Elvis fans have to say.

“I can get so depressed,” admitted a Texas woman. “Anytime I’ve got anything bothering me, I can get in my car and turn the stereo on and listen to Elvis and just go into a world of my own. . . . It’s like he’s right there singing directly to me. . . . It’s like he’s always there to solve everything.”{2}

“I sit and talk to him,” claimed a New Jersey follower. “I feel he hears what I say to him and he gives me the will to go on when things are really bad. . . . Somehow you talk to Elvis. . . . I know if anybody ever saw me, they would probably tell me that I was crazy, but I do . . . I love him, I talk to him and I know he understands and I feel so much better after. I think I always will.”{3}

End of quote, I should emphasize. That was me quoting somebody else, folks, in case you began reading in mid-sentence.

Some fringers actually believe Elvis is still alive. My informal survey encountered no actual Elvis spotters, though a few claimed they had seen the Energizer Bunny.

Is the Elvis craze simply a zany fad? Or does it indicate something deeper about human longings? Some seek happiness through success, wealth, or relationships. Probably everyone has at least one “Elvis” in his or her life: a person, idea, team, goal, or possession that inspires the devotion and quest for fulfillment.

But human-based searches for ultimate happiness can be risky. For most of us, there will always be someone richer, more intelligent or articulate, better looking or more popular than we. Our teams will lose; our heroes will have flaws. Even if you reach the top . . .what then? Latest statistics show the death rate is still 100%. Is there something more?

You may not realize that Elvis’ only Grammy Award for a single came for his 1974 recording of “How Great Thou Art,” a famous hymn. The lyrics, which likely reflected his own spiritual roots, point to hope beyond human accomplishment. Next, we will look at how the message of this song might help meet the longings common to Elvis fans and to us all.

Someone Greater than Elvis

Merchants continue to cash in on Elvis' popularity. You can buy "Barbie Loves Elvis" doll sets and Elvis mouse pads. Tupelo, Mississippi (Elvis' birthplace) boasts an Elvis McDonalds.

The Elvis craze sometimes borders on worship, with fans seeking spiritual fulfillment in their departed king.

Many people, though, not just Elvis fans, feel a spiritual emptiness, a need to connect with something greater to replace inner loneliness with friendship, fear with love, and desperation with hope.

I will not enter the debate about Elvis' personal spiritual convictions. But again consider the message of his only Grammy- winning single, the famous hymn "How Great Thou Art." The lyrics speak in "awesome wonder" of the universe as a majestic display of God's power.

The biblical God alluded to in this song is described elsewhere as a friend of those in need. "The Lord is my shepherd," wrote an Israeli king. "I have everything I need. He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams. He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths."{4}

If we allow Him into our lives, this God promises to be our friend, both when things are going well and when we are painfully lonely.

"How Great Thou Art" tells that this loving God sent His Son to die, to carry the burden of humanity's injustices, selfishness, and wrongs.

God's love is endless, and He offers us hope. When we tell Him our problems, unlike Elvis, He can do something about them. Not only can we rely on Him for our needs today, but the

biblical documents promise eternal freedom from death, sorrow, crying, and pain.{5} Jesus Himself promised, "I assure you, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned . . . but they have already passed from death into life.{6}

Friendships, love, and hope – from one who cannot fail us. Sounds great. But is it true?

Jesus backed up His claims by rising from the dead. As somewhat of a skeptic, I examined evidences for the resurrection of Jesus and found it to be one of the best-attested facts in history.{7}

Elvis Presley is dead. Some therapists encourage their clients to get in touch with their "Inner Elvis." As the world commemorates the twenty-fifth anniversary of his passing, perhaps it would be more fruitful to look beyond our "Inner Elvis" to Someone greater.

Adapted from an article that first appeared in *Pursuit* magazine, Vol. VI, No. 1, 1997.

Notes

1. Gregory Rumberg, "I Know Your Elvis," *Contemporary Christian Music,* February 1997, 31.

2. Ralph Burns, "How Great Thou Art: Photographs from Graceland," California Museum of Photography, University of California Riverside Web site: http://www.cmp.ucr.edu/elvis/burns_intro.html, 1996.

3. Ibid.

4. Psalm 23:1-3, NLT.

5. Revelation 21: 1,4.

6. John 5:24, NLT.

7. See, for instance, Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict,* Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999.

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Evidence of Jesus' Existence?

Rusty Wright responds to the 2002 news about the ossuary (bone box) with the very intriguing and unusual inscription "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus."

Rarely these days does Israel make headlines for something other than conflict. But a recent (Fall 2002) announcement about an ancient artifact there attracted wide attention.

Biblical Archaeology Review revealed that a stone ossuary (bone receptacle) has an inscription reading "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus." If authentic, this would be the earliest archaeological find that corroborates biblical references to Jesus.

Andre Lemaire, a French expert on ancient writings from the Sorbonne, suspected the ossuary's significance when he saw it in the owner's private collection.

Time magazine claims that if the ossuary is authentic and the

inscription refers to the biblical James, “this would be the most important discovery in the history of New Testament archaeology.”

The New Testament in several places refers to James, Jesus’ brother. In Matthew 13:53-55, citizens of Jesus’ hometown Nazareth mention “His brother…James….” Paul, an early expositor of the faith, refers to “James, the Lord’s brother” (Galatians 1:19), a leader of Jerusalem’s Christians.

Is the ossuary a first-century antiquity or a later forgery? The Geological Survey of Israel subjected it to rigorous tests. It is made of Jerusalem-area limestone quarried from the first or second century A.D. Its patina (sheen) bears evidence of centuries in a cave and shows no evidence of modern chemicals or disruption. Survey scientists conclude it’s not a later forgery.

Paleography, the science of ancient writings, supports the early date. Johns Hopkins paleographer P. Kyle McCarter says the “script is consistent with a date in the middle of the first century A.D.” Josephus, a first century Jewish historian, put James’ death in 62 A.D.

Does the inscription refer to the biblical James, Joseph and Jesus? Lemaire’s statistical analysis argues that in mid-first-century Jerusalem “there were probably about 20 people who could be called ‘James son of Joseph brother of Jesus.'”

Only one other known ancient Jewish ossuary inscription mentions a brother. Was this Jesus, James’ brother, mentioned because he was well known? Lemaire sees a 90 percent chance that the ossuary’s James is the biblical brother of Jesus.

The case has critics. We know nothing of the ossuary’s original location; evidence might have been compromised. At least one scholar disagrees with Lemaire’s paleographic dating of the box. Some question his statistical basis for eliminating other possible Jameses in Jerusalem and feel that

Lemaire overstates his case. But at least one feels he understates it.

Christianity, Judaism and Islam claim historical foundations. Historical and archaeological confirmation – or contradiction – of their writings affects their credibility.

Christian faith does not stand or fall on the authenticity of this ossuary. But if genuine, the ossuary supports the conclusion of the late, renowned Jewish archaeologist Nelson Glueck, who asserted "the almost incredibly accurate historical memory of the Bible, and particularly so when it is fortified by archaeological fact."

Duke University Judaic Studies professor Eric Meyers, while advising caution on the James ossuary, feels "there is a strong possibility that the artifact is what Lemaire says it is: the oldest extra-biblical archaeological evidence of Jesus."

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Anxious for Nothing (radio transcript)

What Makes You Anxious?

What makes you feel anxious? What do you worry about? Finances? Conflict at work or with your neighbors? Making today's appointment on time? Perhaps your family or your health.

Anxiety seems everywhere these days. September 11th brought

fears of flying and of the mail. Homeland security alerts have raised tensions.

A necessary war with an uncertain future can make stomachs churn. An unpredictable economy can affect bank balances, business plans, education, and retirement.

One bright sign: In the wake of the terrorist attacks, pizza sales were up. Have you ever used pizza as comfort food?

“Death is the only joy, and the only release.” “Contrary to popular belief, there is no hope.” These anonymous statements from a university newspaper and classroom blackboard exhibit what psychologists call “existential anxiety,” concern over frustration with a meaningless existence.

When I was a junior at Duke University, I wrote a paper for an abnormal psychology class investigating a biblical therapy for anxiety. I had come to faith as a freshman and found it brought me peace of mind. While studying psychology, I was fascinated to see that complex psychological disorders often stem from simple problems like anxiety, problems for which faith offers practical solutions.

I sent a copy of my paper to the author of our textbook, a prominent UCLA psychologist. A month later, he replied that he liked the paper and asked permission to quote from it in the revision to his text.

I picked my jaw up off the floor and said “By all means!” Actually, the first thing I did was send a copy of his letter to my parents in Miami so they would know their son had not gone off the deep end with my involvement in a campus Christian group. (They were beginning to wonder.)

This professor’s response to the paper indicated that the principles it contains – which certainly were not original with me – had both academic and personal relevance.

Anxiety has many causes, including emotional struggles, relationship deficiencies, aimlessness, poor diet or exercise, and chemical or hormonal imbalance. In this short essay, we will consider

three possible causes: guilt, fear, and lack of friendship. And we will consider a solution to each cause that very well could make a difference in your life.

Have you felt guilty recently? Let us look at guilt, a significant cause of anxiety.

Guilty or Not Guilty?

Guilt can make you feel anxious.

What makes you feel guilty? Losing your temper? Shading the truth? Maybe taking office supplies from your employer? Cheating on your income tax return? Cheating on your spouse?

Some psychologists say that feelings of guilt come from unresolved past conflicts or from following outdated moral codes. Solutions in these views involve recognizing our past problems or relaxing our moral codes.

Of course, past problems can affect us. And many people follow overly rigid behavior codes. But should we also consider that sometimes – maybe often – people feel guilty because they are guilty?

Admitting you are wrong can be hard. Perhaps you've heard of the writer who asked his domineering editor if he had ever been wrong. "Yes," replied the editor. "I was wrong once. It was when I thought I was wrong but I wasn't."

O. H. Mowrer, a psychologist at the University of Illinois, pointed out a common dilemma for people trying to face their own shortcomings:

> *Here, too, we encounter difficulty, because human beings do*

> *not change radically until first they acknowledge their sins, but it is hard for one to make such an acknowledgement unless he has "already changed." In other words, the full realization of deep worthlessness is a severe ego "insult," and one must have a new source of strength to endure it.{1}*

A biblical perspective offers a new source or strength. The biblical God loves humans and wants our happiness. We all blow it at times, by harmful actions or unhealthy attitudes, and miss His standards. One follower of Jesus outlined what he saw as God's solution: "God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ."{2}

If I had a traffic fine that I could not pay, you could offer to pay it for me. Similarly, Christ paid the penalty due our sins through His death on the cross. He offers us new life when we personally trust Him to forgive us. One early believer wrote, "God has purchased our freedom with his blood and has forgiven all our sins."{3} When we feel guilty, we can admit our sin to God and He will forgive us.{4}

Take it from a guilty person: being forgiven is wonderful. And the complete forgiveness – freedom from guilt – that Jesus offers is free.

Fear is another cause of anxiety; let us look at that next.

What's Your Greatest Fear?

What do you fear most? Confrontation? Maybe financial loss or abandonment? Your stomach, neck and shoulders tense up; your heart races; your mouth becomes like cotton and your breath gets short. Anxiety strikes.

Fear of death is perhaps humans' greatest fear. In college, the student living next door to me was struck and killed by lightening. Shock gripped our fraternity house. "What does it

mean if life can be snuffed out in an instant?" my friends asked.

If you cannot answer the question "What will happen when you die?" you may become anxious.

Fear of circumstances – from the trivial to the traumatic – can bring anxiety. Once at a bookseller's convention my wife and I had spent an exhausting day on our feet promoting a new book. Late that night, after a reception crowd had thinned to mostly authors and our publisher, we stood in a circle engaged in conversation. I left her side momentarily to attend to a matter.

Upon returning to the circle, I walked up behind my wife and began gently to massage her shoulders. She seemed to enjoy that, so I started to put my arms around her waist to give her a little hug. At that point, I looked up at the other side of the circle and saw . . . my wife. I had my hands on the wrong woman!

In that instant, I knew the true meaning of fear. Fear of circumstances. Even fear of death.

Is there a solution to fear? Jesus of Nazareth said He could replace fear with peace: "I am leaving you with a gift," He told His followers, "peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give isn't like the peace the world gives. So don't be troubled or afraid."{5}

For fear of death, He offers eternal life. He told a worried friend, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me . . . are given eternal life . . . and will never perish."{6}

Faith can help allay circumstantial fear. Believing that I am in God's hands has helped keep me calm.

Or maybe I should say calmer. My life is not fear-free. I have

even become anxious about speaking on anxiety! I can be fearful over an important project, a deadline or a strained relationship. Having God as a friend has not eliminated fear, but when fear comes I know whose hand to hold.

Speaking of friendship, lack of it can also make you anxious. We will look at that next.

A Little Help from Your Friends

William Glasser, a psychiatrist, says we all experience two basic needs: the need to love and to be loved and the need to feel a sense of worth to ourselves and to others. To satisfy these needs he recommends developing a close friendship with another person who will accept us but also confront us if we act irresponsibly.{7}

We all need close friends.

1996 was a terrible year for me. My wife of 20 years, whom I loved dearly and continue to respect, divorced me. Some trusted coworkers turned against me. I had a cancer scare. (It turned out to be kidney stones, but it still was no fun.)

Divorce hurts. Imagine the pain of the worst spat you have ever had with a friend or spouse, multiplied by a trillion. I felt like an emotional Roto Rooter was reaming me out. I cried buckets.

In the midst of my pain, several wonderful friends held my hand. They would invite me to eat or to attend a sporting event. They listened. They called to see how I was doing. They prayed for me. They sat with me in divorce court. I learned through them what true friendship can mean. They helped me to survive this tragedy and to land on my feet. I am eternally grateful.

Good friends are very important. But human friendship, necessary as it is, is still fallible. People can let us down

and make mistakes in judgment. Wouldn't the ultimate in therapy consist in becoming involved with our creator? The biblical documents say that God is "faithful and righteous."{8} He never lets us down and He always has the best advice. He loves us, so much that He would send His son to die for us.

Paul, a prolific ancient writer and speaker, wrote of the depths of God's love:

> *I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from his love. Death can't, and life can't. . . . Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can't keep God's love away. Whether we are high above the sky or in the deepest ocean, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord."{9}*

Wouldn't it be great to have a friend like that?

Faith in God can help treat causes of anxiety like guilt, fear, and friendship-deficiency. But could faith be just a psychological trick?

Is Christianity Just a Psychological Trick?

In this article, I have claimed that God can treat several causes of anxiety such as guilt, fear and lack of friendship. You might wonder, "So what? The Christian faith could just be a psychological trick."

Sigmund Freud taught that Christian faith was merely an illusion driven by wish fulfillment, a fairy tale invented by needy humans to satisfy their emotional needs for security.

Is Jesus' belief system an illusion? Consider three issues.

First, consider the object of the Christian's faith. As somewhat of a skeptic, I was surprised to learn that the evidence for Jesus' deity, His resurrection, and the prophecies He fulfilled make a strong case for the validity of His claims.{10} The fact that Christian faith can be described in psychological terms does not negate its validity. Examine the object of any faith. If the object is valid, we would expect the faith to have practical benefits.

Second, human personality alone cannot explain all faith-related behavior. Our personalities have intellect, emotion, and will. Many psychologists believe the will cannot completely control the emotions.{11} Nor is it likely that the intellect could completely control our emotions. Yet many followers of Jesus have suffered humiliation, beatings, torture, cruelty, and death but still have loved their enemies and forgiven their persecutors. Something beyond human personality seems at work here.

Third, the Book in which Jesus' solutions to anxiety are recorded has unusual credentials. Written over a period of 1,500 years, in three languages and by 40 different authors (most of whom never met), the biblical documents are thematically coherent, internally consistent and historically accurate.{12} Completed more than 1,900 years ago, the Bible continues to provide workable therapy for millions. A book with these credentials bears a closer look.

This article on anxiety started with a college paper that the author of our textbook found intriguing. This professor told me he lacked personal peace and wanted to know God personally. I showed him a simple four-point outline and he invited Jesus to forgive him and to be his friend. An internationally acclaimed scholar linked up with, if you will, the greatest psychologist.

Anxiety plagues millions of us. God offers genuine peace. Is that worth considering?

Notes

1. O. H. Mowrer, “Sin, the Lesser of Two Evils,” quoted in Henry R. Brandt, *The Struggle for Peace*, (Wheaton IL: Scripture Press Publications, 1965).
2. 2 Corinthians 5:21, NLT.
3. Colossians 1:14, NLT.
4. 1 John 1:9.
5. John 14:27, NLT.
6. John 11:25-26, NLT.
7. William Glasser, MD, *Reality Therapy*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).
8. 1 John 1:9.
9. Romans 8:38-39, NLT.
10. See, for instance, Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999).
11. S.I. McMillen, MD, *None of These Diseases,* (Old Tappen NJ: Fleming H. Revell Publishers, 1968), 77.
12. McDowell, *New Evidence*.

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Stressed Out? You Might Need Sleep

Feeling irritable lately? You might need more sleep.

Snapping at your kids or spouse, stewing in checkout lines, shouting at road hogs . . . cultural negativity abounds. A recent National Sleep Foundation (NSF) poll suggests links between sleep deficiencies and negative attitudes and

behavior.

Over one-third of respondents said they are sleepy during daytime at least a few days monthly. Those who slept under six hours on weeknights reported tiredness, stress and sadness more than eight-hour sleepers did. In general, sleepy people reported more dissatisfaction and anger while better sleepers said they were “full of energy,” “relaxed” and “happy.”

The NSF detects what may be a possible trend toward declining sleep and claims that as many as 47 million sleepy adults may be at risk for injury, health problems, even overeating. NSF Executive Director Richard L. Gelula notes that, “Some of the problems we face as a society—from road rage to obesity – may be linked to lack of sleep or poor sleep.”

I’ll bet that’s why just recently, two inconsiderate drivers blew their horns at me in sticky traffic situations. At least I thought they were inconsiderate. In retrospect, I probably could have been more careful. Their angry horns brought feelings of surprise, shock, tension and a bit of anger. Perhaps we all needed more sleep.

Fatigue can hamper coping and make life seem gloomy. But emotional stress can also hamper sleep. The NSF found this especially true after September 11. The aftermath of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington saw reported sleep problems rise. Respondents claimed stress or anxiety as chief causes, citing fear, depression and nightmares as well.

Sleeplessness influences stress, and anxiety influences sleeplessness. How to break the vicious circle?

Admitting your sleep needs can be a start. NSF spokesman and University of Minnesota neurology professor Mark Mahowald, MD, told WebMD that some see sleep deprivation as a “badge of honor.” “We never brag about how much sleep we get,” he notes. “We only brag when we get too little sleep.”

NSF president James Walsh recommends scheduling “worry time” during the day to consider troublesome issues and plan to resolve them. Then when worries shout for your attention at bedtime, knowing you already have an action plan can bring comfort.

Developing inner stability can enhance personal peace. One ancient Jewish king thought he had it all. Wealth, power and pleasures were his to enjoy. But in the end it all brought him pain. As he reflected on his life, he concluded that strengthening spiritual roots was essential to contentment.

“The reverence of the Lord leads to life,” he wrote, “So that one may sleep satisfied.” He felt that faith even had implications for work:

“Unless the Lord builds a house, the work of the builders is useless. Unless the Lord protects a city, guarding it with sentries will do no good. It is useless for you to work so hard from early morning until late at night, anxiously working for food to eat; for God gives rest to his loved ones.”

Workaholics take heed: Get more sleep. Your family and coworkers may thank you. You might become happier, safer, saner, even thinner. And consider that—just maybe—knowing and following the One who makes life possible might help bring you pleasant dreams.

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