

“How Can Dementia Turn a Mature Christian So Ugly?”

I am worried by the behaviour of Christians I know who suffer from dementia. I have frequently seen them displaying racism, sexually suggestive behaviour, and generally rude and difficult behaviour unthinkable to their pre-dementia selves. How does this tie up with the idea of a Christian being transformed within? I am bothered by the thought that sanctification is only skin deep, as it were—a learned veneer.

That’s an excellent question!

I too have seen incredibly godly, mature Christians heartbreakingly transformed by Alzheimer’s and dementia into ugly caricatures of their former selves. I believe the answer lies in the nature of the two kinds of “flesh” the Bible talks about. Our “new creation” is housed in a body of physical flesh that has been impacted by the fall and marred by sin. The fall makes our brains subject to decay and disease which leads to the tragic behavior you describe. The other flesh—not our physical bodies, but that part of us which operates in our own strength, apart from God (see Romans 7:18, 8:8, 13:14; Galatians 3:3, 5:17)—is never transformed, which is why we have to crucify it and die to self. The transformation of sanctification happens to our souls and in our spirits, but our flesh is unredeemable and still occupies a place in our physical bodies. Racism, sexually suggestive behavior, and rude and difficult behavior are all fruits of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21). Praise God, the flesh will fall away when we die or are taken up to heaven!

Hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

“Is My Husband’s Cybersex Grounds For Divorce?”

My husband has been having cyber sex. Sometimes there was a camera on the other end. Is this biblical grounds for divorce?

Dear _____,

I am so sorry. What a horrible betrayal you are feeling!

I don’t know God’s definitive answer on this, but I do think that cyber sex and webcams are high-tech ways of extending the sins of lust and fantasy, which are mental and emotional sins . . . but I don’t believe they cross the line of adultery. Actual sex between two people has an effect of creating soul-ties to each other that compromises the marriage covenant.

I think the bigger issue is one of hard-heartedness. If you have asked your husband not to engage in cyber sex and to get rid of the camera, and he refuses because he wants what he wants even if it means hurting you, then that’s the real issue. What kind of marriage is it if one person makes self-centered choices that insure the other will be hurt?

May I respectfully suggest you read Drs. John Townsend and Henry Cloud’s excellent book *Boundaries in Marriage* for some wisdom on what to do next. For example, I have a friend whose husband refuses to stop going to a website where he can play games and chat with other women, and he has fallen into at least emotional affairs with a couple of them. She has said, “As long as you won’t get rid of Pogo, you can do your own laundry.” This way, his stubbornness and selfishness are costing him something.

Hope you find this helpful. Again, I am so sorry. My heart

hurts for you.

Sue Bohlin

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“Please Help Me – I’m Lost”

Please help me, I’m lost. I’m in my 50s now and the question of life after death is on my mind a lot. I’ve been brought up a Methodist but stopped going to church when I was big enough to make my own decisions. . . . Being young, I lived for the moment and never gave God much thought. But now that I’m older I want to know more.

Like what does it matter if one man lives or dies? It’s not going to make any difference as the world turns. We’re not supposed to care about earthly things but in this country that is supposed to be “one nation under God” we probably control half the money in the world and yet millions are dying from starvation. Why? I’m sorry just have so many questions and don’t know who to go to for answers. Please help me find peace for myself!

Dear _____,

I am delighted that you wrote to us! My husband Ray and I are both in our fifties as well so we very much understand why you’d be asking these extremely important decisions now. Way to go!! <smile>

Allow me to point you to an essay on our website by Jimmy Williams called “The Most Important Decision of Your Life” here: www.probe.org/the-most-important-decision-of-your-life/.

Also, please allow me to address your question of “what it matters if one man lives or dies, since it won’t make any difference as the world turns.” Very few people make a noticeable difference to the world at large, but EVERYONE makes a difference to the people closest to us. The world is different because of each of our lives. The question is, what kind of difference does each of us make? One for good, or for evil?

Also, your observation is very true from a worldly perspective, but from God’s perspective it makes a tremendous amount of difference because He made you for Himself, and He made you for a purpose. It matters because God wants you to know how much He loves you and how deeply He wants you to accept His invitation to find your life in Him. Ultimately, a billion years from now, when the world as we know it isn’t here anymore, only things from God’s perspective will matter.

Jimmy’s essay will help you grasp life from God’s perspective. Let me know what you think after you read it, OK? But first let me pray for you.

Dear God, I lift up _____ to You and I thank You for the big smile on Your face as You see him turning over these important thoughts and decisions in his mind. Thank You for opening _____’s eyes to his need to see the big picture of life and to ask the eternally significant questions he’s asking. Lord, it’s only Your grace and goodness that allow him to know he is lost and needing peace. He would be blind to those truths if it weren’t for You calling to him and allowing him to hear You calling. So help _____ understand his need for You and the promise that is his life, since You made him for a purpose, You made him so You could love him, and You made him so he could love You back, enjoy You forever, and make a difference because He’s Your beloved creation. I pray You would help him cross over the line to become Your beloved son.

I bless you today, _____!

Warmly,
Sue Bohlin

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“How Do I Deal with the Guilt and Anxiety of Killing in War?”

How do I deal with the guilt and anxiety of war? I helped kill and witnessed death first hand. I flew combat missions in Afghanistan and was shot at and shot up. I placed soldiers on the ground, many of whom were killed. I agreed to this path. I suffer from a great case of PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, formerly termed “Shell Shock”] which has destroyed my life. I am seen by the VA weekly. I live with great depression and am scared a lot of the time. My belief in God is shaken and I am left with questions.

Dear friend,

None of us at Probe have any combat experience, so I turned to a dear friend who has, [Warren Gallion](#), and asked him how he would answer you. Below is his letter.

My husband Ray read your question at our staff devotions. People sat there stunned, not knowing how in the world to answer. Then Ray read Warren’s letter. I wept; someone else murmured, “What a masterpiece. . . .” It was a powerful example of the truth in 2 Cor. 1:4, which assures us that God comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort

those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

All of us at Probe want you to know we thank you, bless you, and honor you for serving our country and fighting the good fight against evil in Afghanistan.

Warmly,

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries Webservant

Dear _____,

As Christians we have been taught from a very early age that "Thou shalt not kill" and to "Love your enemy." In 1969 I found myself trying to reconcile how I could be the best Vietnam Infantry soldier I could be and still "Love all the people in the world."

It was very helpful for me to learn that God has different rules for governments than he does for individuals. The Bible tells us we live in a World where there will always be war and rumors of war. It is the responsibility of governments not individuals to resolve war. The government is authorized with God's blessing to wage war, declare a death penalty or even say it is OK to kill an unborn child. God in his own time will judge the country concerning whether we are making the right decisions in each of these areas.

As a soldier your job is to follow orders. Although you may have to make many decisions, even deadly decisions within the scope of your mission, you need to realize that your commanders and the country that sent you on the mission will be judged if your mission was ungodly. If you did your mission to the best of your ability you should not feel guilty for being a part of the mission.

As an individual it would be wrong to consider murder or

killing as a solution to any problem. Even in war it is possible for an individual to step outside their mission and decide on their own to do something ungodly. However, it sounds like the Afghanistan experiences you described were all within the scope of your mission.

If you are dealing with guilt you need to ask yourself, "Were the actions that I feel guilty about within the scope of my mission?" If the answer is No, I acted outside the scope of my mission, and you are already a Christian then you need to confess those sins to God and ask for forgiveness and then do a little Bible study on the words forgiveness and grace. God can and does forgive with amazing grace.

If the answer is Yes, I acted in the scope of my mission, you need to turn loose of the personal guilt and allow God to use your experiences to mature you and to minister to others. God sometimes allows you to experience bad things so he can prove to you he is in control and he has a reason for keeping you around.

War is a very hard thing to experience. As Christians we sometimes think we shouldn't have to deal with hard things. Let me share a verse with you that helps me. "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." (James 1: 2-4)

September 11, 2001 was a tragic day in our country's history. Having experienced war first hand myself, it is not an experience I would wish on anyone. However, I was in agreement with our governments decision to send men and women like yourself to fight. Although I did not know your name, I prayed for you while you were there. Allow me to pray for you now.

Dear God, I lift up our brother _____ to you today. Just as your Son willingly placed His life between me and the eternal death my sins deserved, we honor men like _____ that willingly placed his own life between us and the dangers our world faces. Help _____ grasp that You are a great God and You do not fear any of his questions. Lord, we ask that You take away any guilt, fear, depression and anxiety that _____ may feel from the trials he has experienced and turn it into the perseverance You promised, and help _____ to feel mature and complete so he is not lacking anything. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

_____, I want to personally thank you for your service. You mentioned you were a pilot and you placed men on the ground. In Vietnam it was helicopter pilots that placed us on the ground. When things got really hot it was normally some crazy pilot that had to do something really stupid to save our hide. I try to never miss an opportunity to Thank a Pilot.

Thank you,

Sgt Warren Gallion 4th Infantry Vietnam 1969

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“Do Animals Have Souls?”

My name is C_____ and I am 13 years old in the 8th grade. A classmate told me she was a Christian but she didn't believe some of what the Bible says. I asked her for an example and

she told me that the Bible said that animals don't have souls and how she believed that they did have souls. I would be very appreciative if you would help me on my quest to find out what the Bible says about that.

Dear C____,

We have an answer to email about animals and souls and going to heaven: www.probe.org/do-our-pets-go-to-heaven/.

I would ask your friend where in the Bible it says animals don't have souls. Lots of people have heard things they repeat as true but they don't really know. When you ask [powerful questions like](#), "How do you know that?" and "Where do you get your information?" the answer is really, "Well, I heard. . ." or "They say that. . ." Which doesn't go very far in being persuasive, does it? <smile> In reality, the Bible doesn't anywhere say, "Animals don't have souls." It's a much bigger issue than that, and it comes down to the fact that animals are not made in the image of God, like people are. (Note that angels are not made in the image of God either. Not being made in the image of God doesn't mean something doesn't have great value.) And it also matters how you define "soul." If you mean "personality," then of course some animals have souls. If I ask our Irish Setter Pele, "Pele, do you have a soul?" with a smile on my face and energy in my voice, he'll respond by breathing fast, wagging his tail, and smiling his doggy smile.

If you mean, "the spiritual place inside you where God can dwell," then no they don't. If I ask our dog, "Pele, who made you? Do you know who God is? Did you know Jesus is Lord?" he'll just keep on wagging his tail. . . or sleeping. . . or looking at me blankly—because those questions have no meaning to him. He is not a moral creature like we are. He cannot respond to the truth of the gospel because he has no understanding and no choice. He does, however, glorify God by his "dogginess." He brings glory to God by just being the dog God made him to be. He has a place in God's creation, and a

very important place in our hearts. . . but he cannot become a part of the Kingdom of Heaven or the family of God like we are. Any more than he can choose to become a fish.

Hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

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“Why Didn’t God Just Throw Satan into Hell When He Rebelled?”

Why did God allow Satan to deceive mankind for a certain time period? Why did He not just throw Satan into hell first after he rebelled?

You’re right, we don’t know many things in the mind of God, but some wise people have pointed out that God has Satan on a leash (see the opening of the book of Job), and He is able to use him as an instrument in His plans to produce a beautiful, strong, mature, SEASONED Bride for the Lamb. Spiritual warfare, and the discipline of prayer, are the ways God prepares us to be the Bride of Christ, and the very real warfare (yet pre-decided outcome) is what purifies us, strengthens us, deepens us, matures us.

If you’ve ever known spoiled-brat types who have never known hardship or suffering, for whom life was made easy and who never had to experience the consequences of their choices because other people paid them, then you see how ugly untested, unchallenged people can be. God wants better for us

and better for His Son. He uses Satan to achieve that goal.

I hope this helps. . . even if its just a little!

Sue Bohlin

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“t’s Not Fair to Punish People with Hell for Believing What They Were Taught to Believe”

If all people are following the teachings of what have been taught to believe, how can any be punished? By punishment, I mean that some religions (Christianity) claim that if you don’t believe what they believe, you will go to hell.

Good question!

Two aspects to my answer: first, this question is coming from a man-based perspective, as if all religions were equally valid and only about what people are taught. (In other words, leaving God out of the equation.)

Philosopher J.P. Moreland gives this illustration: let’s say I am with a group of people and I ask them to describe my mother. They all say, “I don’t know your mother,” and I say, “Go ahead and give it your best guess.” One says, “52 and blue eyes and brown hair.” Another says, “58 and slender, with silver hair.” A third says “55, hazel eyes and blonde

highlights.” The problem is, they are all shots in the dark. They are nothing more than guesses. I’m the only one who knows what my mother looks like.

All religions are like that, with the exception of one. They are all shots in the dark, sheer guesses about the nature and character of God. Except for Christianity, since Jesus says He came from heaven to tell us what God is like because God is His Father. It wasn’t a guess for Jesus to tell us about God, it was a reporting of fact. Which is why Christianity is bold enough to say, “This is what God is like, and all other truth claims about God are mere guesses.”

The second part of my answer is that in Romans 1, God says that He has revealed enough about Himself in creation that men are without excuse:

...because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. (Romans 1:19-20)

Christianity is about our broken relationship with God being reconciled and restored through Jesus Christ, and only through Jesus Christ. God has spoken to us about His relationship with us, through His written communication (the Bible) and through His Son leaving heaven to come to earth and show us. Its true that if we try to get to God any way except through the one way He has provided—the death and resurrection of His Son—the relationship will remain broken. Which means an eternity separated from God. . . which is hell.

How is it people can be punished for not believing (actually, the Bible’s language is about trusting) in Jesus? Because regardless of what religion people are taught, God has still spoken through His creation: of the earth, of the cosmos, of

the moral nature of human beings. And He holds everyone accountable for responding to the evidence He planted in His creation, even if it is contradicted by the teachings of the various world religions.

It's like a teacher telling her class that there will be a test on Friday, but rumors sweep throughout the class: that the test has been cancelled, or the test will be postponed to the next week, or that tests have been done away with altogether. Regardless of what rumors students may have heard, they are still responsible for what the teacher told them.

Hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

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“Is It OK to Smoke the Herb of Genesis 1:29?”

“And God said, behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth...” (Gen. 1:29) Does this mean that this herb is OK for Christians? And I am talking about the herb that you smoke.

Dear friend,

Consider the context of your question within the whole verse:

Then God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; *it shall be food for you. . .*” (Gen 1:29)

God gives Adam and Eve seed-yielding plants and fruit trees for *food*. The herbs are for eating, not smoking.

Consider this also: the eternal principle behind the biblical command not to be drunk (Eph 5:18) is that we are not to become intoxicated with anything that would deprive us of self-control and the ability to be filled with (controlled by) the Spirit. Getting high is wrong for the same reason getting drunk is wrong.

Secondly, marijuana is illegal. Smoking weed is also wrong because the government—which is God’s instrument (Rom. 13)—has laws against it.

Additionally, consider this: smoking *anything* harms your lungs. We are commanded to be good stewards of all that God has put in our hands (Gen. 1:28), which includes our bodies. And we are furthermore instructed to glorify God in our body, which is not our own: “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.” (1 Cor 6:19-20) 1 Cor 10:31 says, “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. If getting drunk is a sin, how does one get high to the glory of God?”

So no. Any kind of herb that you would smoke is not OK.

Sue Bohlin

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“You Are Sending the Wrong Message to People About Dealing with Flawed Parents”

Ms. Bohlin,

Your answer to e-mail [“How Do You Honor Deeply Flawed Parents?”](#) sends the wrong messages to readers. Despite dysfunctionality in the family one cannot be superficial to the very people that raised you. You seem to be saying “be nice” but don’t really mean it:

“To give them honor means showing (not necessarily feeling) respect, letting them know you are listening and considering what they say. (And it does not necessarily mean following through!)”

In short, you are implying deception in hiding one’s true feelings. How can people be compassionate to the world if they are lying to themselves about their true feelings toward their parents? That is truly deceptive.

“And please remember that forgiveness is given, but trust is earned, so it’s entirely possible that you can release the woundings you sustained from them without ever, ever trusting them with your heart, because they don’t deserve your trust.”

This statement is ungodly. This only allows for the heart to be confused and the heart will always be divided. Families will break up and more and more Americans will distance themselves from the family unit. Perhaps you need to carefully read the scriptures again. You are encouraging a false self and pretending to care for people even if one doesn’t mean it.

A human being must resolve the conflict and openly discuss what the issues are. Communication is essential in discussing problems.

Sorry, your helpful advice will only mislead people. You should suggest spiritual counseling for families. Unresolved issues lead to further breakup of the family unit. Parents are disconnected with their children and grandchildren. Please see that you correct your article with productive help.

Perhaps you haven't observed the horrendous woundings that deeply flawed parents can inflict on their children. Consider my friend Ann, whose father began raping her at age two and then invited his friends to have their way with her as well, all through her childhood. I suggest that being superficial with her father is the only way she can deal with a man who refuses to acknowledge and repent of his unspeakable sins against her.

I would suggest that being civil and cordial instead of erupting into a screaming tirade of anger and pain IS showing honor. Hiding one's true feelings can be a mark of maturity and wisdom. If you are feeling very grumpy and critical of someone that doesn't deserve it, hiding your feelings behind a choice to be civil is indeed loving and kind.

I don't think either of these cases are about lying to oneself about your feelings. It is choosing a higher road of self-control rather than giving into expressions of fleshly or tortured feelings.

I believe that God has given us great grace in His principle of Romans 12:18: "As far as it is possible, as much as it depends on you, live at peace with all men." Some people make it impossible to live at peace with them because of their hard, unrepentant hearts, so one needs to protect oneself with emotional distance. You cannot resolve issues in a family unless everyone is willing. The person who asked the original

question was talking about dealing with people unwilling to be humble and transparent enough to resolve the consequences of their flawed nature and behavior.

I hope this helps you understand my position better. I must stand by my statements.

Sue Bohlin

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“How Do You Honor Deeply Flawed Parents?”

I am very interested in reading about how to resolve “Honorable father and mother” with the fact that these people may have had huge and damaging flaws. Where can I read about that?

You might Google the phrase “honoring your parents” for some insight. Below are some links I hope you find helpful.

But first, let me say that one aspect of honoring flawed parents is to understand that the best (or even only) way you might be able to honor them is from a distance, emotionally and physically. You can give yourself permission to do that.

To give them honor means showing (not necessarily *feeling*) respect, letting them know you are listening and considering what they say. (And it does not necessarily mean following through!) To give them honor means being civil and kind in your dealings with them. It does not mean trusting them. It does not mean placing yourself in harm's way. It means forgiving them, so that you are not carrying and paying for the emotional baggage of their treatment of you. And please

remember that forgiveness is given, but trust is earned, so it's entirely possible that you can release the woundings you sustained from them without ever, ever trusting them with your heart, because they don't deserve your trust.

Honoring flawed parents means you have healthy boundaries so that you know where you end and they begin. It means you learn how to protect yourself so that they can't steamroll over you; it also means you have realistic expectations about what they can and cannot give you or do for/to you. (You may need some help adjusting your expectations.) For instance, in our family there is a family member who has never, ever said the words "thank you." I mean, not even if you pass the salt, or do something they specifically asked! (I think this qualifies as "flawed," don't you?) It is unrealistic to expect that to change. It is an exercise in futility to expect anything different than a lifelong pattern of non-communication. Honoring this person means letting go of the futile hope to ever hear something as simple as "thank you," much less the more profound "I'm proud of you" or even "I love you"! Honoring this person means letting go of unrealistic expectations so we don't set ourselves up for continued disappointment and heartache. (An excellent book is *Boundaries* by Drs. John Townsend and Henry Cloud.)

Finally, let me share with you the insight of Dallas Willard in *The Divine Conspiracy*:

To honor our parents means to be thankful for for their existence and to respect their actual role as givers of life in the sequence of human existence. Of course in order to honor them in this way we need to be thankful for our own existence too. But we also will usually need to have pity on them. For, even if they are good people, it is almost always true that they have been quite wrong in many respects, and possibly still are.

Commonly those who have experienced great antagonism with

their parents are only able to be thankful for their existence and honor them, as they deeply need to, after the parents have grown old. Then it is possible to pity them, to have mercy on them. And that opens the door to honoring them. With a certain sadness, perhaps, but also with joy and peace at least. One of the greatest gifts of The Kingdom Among Us is the healing of the parent-child relation, "turning the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers" (Mal. 4:6).

Hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

Honor My Mother And Father? How Should I Treat My Abusive Parents?

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/questions/parentingandfamily/honormymotherandfather.html>

What Does It Mean to Honor Your Parents? (in this case, when a parent has dementia)

http://www.newhopenow.com/ask/honor_parents.html

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See Also:

["You Are Sending the Wrong Message to People About Dealing with Flawed Parents"](#)