

“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 “Honor thy 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”](#)

“What Do You Think About Headcoverings for Christian Women?”

Sue,

I am intrigued by this article “Should a Christian Woman Wear a Headcovering?” by Daniel Botkin (enclosed by mail and also available online [here](#)) about headcoverings, and it makes sense to me, but I would really like your input as a woman.

I read the headcoverings article with a huge smile across my heart. Its an excellent article! . . . And I couldn't agree more.

Before I go further, though, let me first state that Probe does not have an official position on this issue; my answer is about me and my response to this issue. For six years or so I struggled with the plain command of scripture [*1 Cor 11:10 Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.*] and finally gave in. I just could not get around the phrase “because of the angels,” which has absolutely nothing to do with cultural- and time-bound practices. So, about a year ago, I started wearing hats to church. Recently, I purchased a couple of scarves which I also use as a headcovering in worship and for public prayer.

It's been interesting the strong response I've received from men, who absolutely love to see a woman in a hat, even though they usually don't know it's not a fashion statement for me. They just know something strikes them as very, very right about it. What startled me was the effect on ME: I have so enjoyed feeling so feminine! I have also enjoyed experiencing the peace that is the fruit of obedience.

I started out wearing lace doilies or some other kind of

headgear when I was in Catholic grade school. In the 60s and 70s, there was a wholesale dropping of the headcovering in almost all Western churches (with the rise of feminist thought, and I think they are related). I never even thought about how quickly 1900 years of church history were overturned in a mere decade until I couldn't come up with a single good reason to disobey scripture.

So there you have it! Thanks for sharing the great article with me!

Sue Bohlin

Hi Sue!!

Your response was such a blessing and encouragement to my wife and me! Thank you so much for taking the time to read it and respond. Because of your response actually, my wife went out and bought a couple of scarves today! ☺ Well thank you for your faithfulness and may the Lord continue to guide you in His word and in His love.

See Also:

- [“Do the Bible’s Statements on Head Coverings Apply Today?”](#)
- [Sue Bohlin’s Blog Post: “Why I’m the Lady in the Hat”](#)

“Why Can’t God and Satan Settle Their Differences?”

Why do not all the religions of the world pray to God asking him and the Devil to get together and settle their

differences? It is widely held that God answers prayers.

This type of praying would surely head the list of really important things to pray for. I believe it is written at one time God and the Devil were very good friends existing in Heaven together. I also believe it is written while they were living together they had a big argument. The devil lost, and was tossed out. Would not the World be a better place if they improve their relationship?

I am thinking of all the people killed during the Crusades, the 30 years war, the Holocaust, the Civil War, the list is endless. I am also thinking about future babies, who will be born in the future, with their souls, not subject to future damnation. At least their chances would be better.

I believe God has written "blessed are the peacemakers." Would it be too much to ask for this? I have seen no answer to this question, your answer would be appreciated.

Interesting question!

I don't think it would do any good to pray that God and Satan get together to settle their differences for several reasons:

1. God is 100% good; Satan is 100% evil. Good and evil cannot peacefully co-exist, because good will eventually destroy evil.

2. We need to read the Bible as our only resource on what is true in the spirit realm because God gave us this information (as revelation). From what we can gather of what the Bible says about angels and demons, these powerful spirit beings do not have the capacity to repent as we humans do. They don't even understand what it is like to be forgiven and accepted back into friendship with God. Thus, to ask for Satan and the demons to change is like praying that black become white or negative become positive. It won't happen.

3. God already knows what the future holds, and He has told us a certain amount of that information. He has declared that at the end of time, He will throw Satan and the demons into a lake of fire for all eternity. What God has declared and has recorded in scripture will not change because God already knows what He will do.

God cannot improve his relationship with Satan because Satan cannot and will not become other than what he is. And just as the nature of sunlight is to destroy mold, and the nature of boiling water is to destroy harmful bacteria, the nature of God's holiness is to destroy rebellion and sin. They cannot be reconciled.

Hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin

“Why Won't My Sister Accept My Live-In Boyfriend?”

Please help me answer this question?

I am a single parent (40 yrs old) of three children 16, 14, and 9. I have decided to live with my current boyfriend. I have taken all the pros and cons into consideration. So far it is going well. The only draw back so far has been my sister, her husband and 2 children. My sister and I are very close and spend a lot of time together. But since I have started dating again, 2 years with this one person (the only person I have dated by the way), I am not allowed to bring my boyfriend to her house. We are not allowed to do things with her children at all. I can understand that they would not want their

children to spend the night or us to spend the night over there. I do not however understand why we can not spend time together as a family as we have in the past. Going to Six Flags, etc.... We do not hug or kiss, we may on occasion hold hands. I understand this is a moral issue, living together.

Can you please explain why I can't spend time with my niece and nephew?

P.S. My family is Catholic. When I married the first time I married into a different church. My family is Catholic. I was married for 19 years. Been divorced for about 2 1/2 years and have been dating my current boyfriend for much of that time.

Dear _____,

I'm sort of wondering why you're asking US instead of your sister. . .??!

My guess is that your sister is extremely uncomfortable with your choice of an immoral lifestyle and she is concerned that doing things together as if you were married might communicate to her children that immorality is okay. Many people are not confident that their kids can handle (or that they can teach) both the belief that "we love our family member" and "that family member is doing wrong things that we deeply disagree with."

I noticed you used the term "moral issue," but my guess is that your sister is thinking of it as an IMmoral issue. Which, to be blunt, it is. Living together outside of marriage is sin. You said you took all the pros and cons into consideration, but apparently you didn't, since you could not possibly foresee how other people would react to your choice.

I hear the hurt in your "voice," and I am sure that it weighs very heavily on you. Unfortunately, that's one of the consequences of making choices that do not align with God's intentions and commands for us. Sin causes pain and always

ends up affecting more people than just ourselves. Your sister may be concerned about the effect of your lifestyle choice on your children as well, since you are teaching them that living with someone you're not married to and not committed to is a good thing. As a mother, your sister may be concerned about the impact your children's attitude and perspective may have on HER children as a result of what you're modeling to your own kids.

By the way, I don't think this issue has anything to do with denominations. It's a people issue and it's a moral issue. You could substitute any mix of religious traditions and have the same heartbreak over this situation.

If you were looking for comfort, I'm sure this isn't what you were hoping for, but it DOES align with what the Word of God says. He grieves over your choice just as He grieves over the pain you are experiencing because of it.

I hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“My Kids Are Into Goth, Punk and Emo Sub-Cultures”

My two teenage daughters are interested in the goth, punk and emo sub-cultures. I'm not sure how to deal with this. Could you give me some good Christian parenting advice?

I asked a couple of Christian counselors for advice about your question.

The first came back with this response:

The best overall reference I've seen for teens is the book Age of Opportunity by Paul David Tripp because it makes it clear the target for change is their HEART, not just behavior – otherwise we just create cooperative rebels (work the system to make life easier for “me”) or religious Pharisees. There is an audio series by the same name, available from Resources for Changing Lives, 1-800-318-2186 – web site www.ccef.org.

The second, who is a child psychologist, made these suggestions:

1. First of all, DON'T come down heavy with the hammer, telling them they are not allowed to pursue these interests. It will only backfire.
2. These lifestyles and values are meeting a need in your daughters. There is no shame in having needs; God gives us needs for others to meet, and for Himself to meet. Your job is to find out what need goth/punk/emo is meeting, and then subtly provide other, healthier ways for them to get those needs met.
3. Don't communicate that you're going to change your children and they're going to have to stop this behavior. It won't work; we don't have the power to change other people. We do, however, have the power to gain understanding about WHY they behave as they do, and then adjust our response to it.
4. Seek to understand your daughters' thinking and feeling about this. Many kids feel alienated from their parents, believing that their parents don't really care about how they think and feel (which is, unfortunately, all too true in many families). So make a plan to meet for 5-10 minutes each night, for a week, to LISTEN. Ask, “Please help me understand why goth/punk/emo is important to you. Tell me one thing that you

like about it.” Draw them out with unjudgmental questions; the goal is to understand, not to change them. Each night, try to get another part of the big picture.

5. After a couple of weeks, when you have learned something about what these cultures are doing for your daughters, see if you can find other ways to get those needs met at times that interfere with activities that mean more involvement with their questionable friends. Many times, it’s an esteem issue. Looking like the other people in that sub-culture makes them feel accepted and gives them a sense of belonging. . . . legitimate, God-given needs that are better met in the family and with friends whose values are consistent with the family’s and with God’s.

6. Pray, pray, pray. Pray for wisdom to be loving without being controlling. Pray that you will see what YOU need to do to make sure your daughters’ emotional needs are being met. The hard thing is that adolescence is a time when, developmentally, it is normal and right for their attention to turn to friends and want to fit in with their friends more than their families. This is important for growth into independent adults. But the choice of one’s friends can make or break a young person. Which is why it’s essential for parents to know what’s going on, with whom, and hit our knees on our children’s behalf.

This is a big issue and not an easy one. I pray God’s blessing on you as you seek to be wise in the face of unhealthy cultural pressures.

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